



Systemic Persecution of Religious Minorities in Pakistan

Blasphemy laws, Forced conversions, Violence, and Digital Hate in a Climate of Rising Extremism



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Our research, strategic partnerships, and community engagement programs are guided by the vision of a more inclusive and resilient society against all forms of hate and extremism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The state of religious freedom in Pakistan is increasingly more dire. Individuals from religious minority groups face pervasive discrimination and sustained persecution for their beliefs. They are frequently accused of allegations of blasphemy on the basis of the country's infamous blasphemy laws, which are now often enforced in tandem with the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA)¹ that empowers the state to exert comprehensive control over social media. Pakistani citizens belonging to the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Shia, Ahmadi, and Kalash religious communities face systemic discrimination and endure harassment, entrapment in fabricated blasphemy allegations, mob violence, lynchings, targeted killings, forced conversions, arbitrary detention, and destruction of property, including their places of worship and cemeteries. Extremism, the swift dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, especially across digital platforms, and the weaponization of social media against² religious minorities play a significant role in exacerbating religious intolerance in a landscape already hostile to religious freedom.

This report from the Center for the Study of Organized Hate (CSOH) examines the state of religious freedom in Pakistan in 2024 and the first half of 2025, highlighting the rise in violence against religious minorities and the patterns of such violence during this period. The report provides an in-depth analysis of key issues, concerns, and challenges related to religious freedom and freedom of belief. The report also presents recommendations, primarily for the government of Pakistan, but also for the international community and technology stakeholders, to uphold religious freedom and strengthen mechanisms of accountability.

Accusations of blasphemy remain a central concern in the Pakistani context. According to the country's blasphemy laws³, individuals considered guilty of desecrating the Quran, insulting Islam, or the Prophet Muhammad face imprisonment, hefty fines, and even the death penalty. Blasphemy is an offense considered beyond redemption both legally and socially. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in its most recent report⁴ noted the growth of a "blasphemy business" racket, wherein individuals are trapped in fabricated blasphemy cases, often online, and extorted for money. The perpetrators are part of networks, which often include government officials, that trap people into situations where they can be falsely accused of blasphemy. This growing phenomenon is a major concern for religious minorities in Pakistan, whose lives are already marked by a condition of precariousness.

Although no death sentences have thus far been meted out for blasphemy, allegations of the transgression frequently trigger riots that incite mob violence and often result in fatalities. In February 2024, a woman in Lahore, whose kurta featured the word "hilwa" meaning beautiful in Arabic, barely escaped a mob in the market after a man accused her of wearing Quranic scripture. In May 2024, a mob in Punjab Province attacked a 72-year-old Christian man⁵ after accusing him of desecrating pages of the Quran. He later died at a hospital after succumbing to his injuries. A month later, in June 2024, a mob in Madyan, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province, broke into a police station and lynched⁶ a tourist visiting from Punjab Province who was being held there on the basis of allegations that he had desecrated the Quran.

Allegations of blasphemy and ensuing mob violence have consistently affected minority communities to a grave effect, resulting in widespread fear and attacks. During 2023⁷ and 2024⁸, the Pakistani Christian community, particularly in Punjab Province, saw an upsurge in violence related to blasphemy allegations. Mobs burnt churches, destroyed property, and murdered individuals, devastating the lives of Christian communities.

Concerns regarding religious freedom, however, extend beyond allegations of blasphemy. Forced conversions to Islam also remain a pressing issue, particularly affecting girls and women from religious minority communities. The Center for the Study of Organized Hate has also noted another concerning trend of men from religious minorities in Pakistan being compelled to convert to Islam, risking death if they resist.

Ahmadiyya Muslims in Pakistan face significant challenges in practicing their faith, as they risk being targeted by blasphemy laws. Members of the Ahmadiyya community are designated as heretics by the Pakistani government, which has also prohibited them from identifying as Muslims, referring to their places of worship as mosques, participating in Islamic rites such as qurbani or animal sacrifice, or using Islamic symbols.

Tehreek-e-Labaik (TLP), a far-right Islamic political party whose primary political plank is enforcing Pakistan's blasphemy laws, relentlessly targets religious minorities, particularly the Ahmadiyya community. The community continues to face violence, including targeted killings, entrapment in blasphemy cases, discrimination, and the desecration of their houses of worship and cemeteries. During 2024, the Ahmadi community endured six targeted faith-based

killings, while 2025 has already seen three such killings. In April 2025, an Ahmadi man was lynched⁹ by a mob of TLP supporters who had gathered outside of an Ahmadiyya place of worship in Karachi and were chanting hateful and violent slogans in the lead-up to his murder.

While the Pakistani government has fallen short in upholding human rights, particularly the right to freedom of religious belief, there have been a few small victories within the justice system.

In March 2024, the Anti-Terrorism court in Faisalabad acquitted two Christian brothers, Rocky Masih and Raja Masih¹⁰, of blasphemy charges that were registered against them in 2023. This accusation against the brothers had triggered the 2024 mob attack in Jaranwala, during which over 21 churches and several homes belonging to the Christian community were set on fire. The court ruled that both brothers had been framed by two other individuals who had a personal grudge against Rocky and Raja. In March 2024, Notan Lal, a Hindu principal of a school who was wrongly accused of blasphemy by a student, was acquitted of a 25-year sentence¹¹ that he had received in February 2022. In February 2025, a civil court in Pakistan annulled the marriage of a Christian woman who was forced to convert to Islam as a child by her abductor. The court declared her marriage invalid and reaffirmed her Christian identity.

Notwithstanding some such rulings, religious minorities in Pakistan endure widespread discrimination and violence. They face persistent challenges in seeking equality and safety in a society in which they are routinely marginalized.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Center for the Study of Organized Hate (CSOH) compiled this report using findings gathered between January 2024 and July 2025, focusing on incidents related to violations of freedom of religion and the experiences of religious minorities across Pakistan, including the provinces of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), Pakistan administered Kashmir, as well as the administrative territory of Gilgit-Baltistan.

This analysis is based on a robust methodology that involved comprehensive research and the triangulation of various data sources. We used six sources of data germane to the subject of research: detailed in-depth open-ended qualitative interviews, open-source data, official documentation, newspapers, social media, and visual evidence (other than on social media).

A total of 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals representing victims of discrimination, human rights advocates, journalists, and community leaders from Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Shia, Ismaili Muslims, Ahmadiyya, and Kalash communities.

Interviewees were informed about the purpose of the research, and informed consent was obtained for participation in interviews. Some interviewees opted for anonymity due to safety concerns.

In addition to interviews, the research team gathered data from a variety of additional sources and employed a range of methods:

- **Open-source data analysis:** Reviewed over 30 publicly available reports, including those from human rights organizations and government agencies.
- **Official documentation:** Utilized at least 40 official documents, including First Action Reports, legislation, government reports, and policy papers relevant to religious freedom.
- **Newspaper analysis:** Analyzed over 150 newspaper articles from local, state, and international outlets that documented instances of violence and discrimination against religious minorities.
- **Social media content:** Reviewed more than 300 unique samples of content posted on social media, including X, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and panel discussions from various platforms, focusing on narratives related to religious discrimination, aggression, and extremism.
- **Visual evidence (other than on social media):** Collected at least 30 examples of multimedia, including photographs and videos, provided by victims or their representatives to substantiate claims of violence, destruction, and discrimination.

This multifaceted approach, combining analysis of first-hand accounts, official documentation, and media discourse, was rigorously verified by the CSOH research team to ensure the authenticity and reliability of sources and findings. Each source has been timestamped, where applicable, to maintain transparency and traceability. The processes followed allow for a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that religious minorities face in Pakistan.

2.1 BACKGROUND ON RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHICS

Pakistan defines itself as an Islamic Republic, currently helmed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari. According to the 2023 Census Data¹² from Pakistan's Bureau of Statistics, the country has an estimated population of 241.49 million. Of this population, approximately 96.5 percent is Muslim, with about 85–90 percent of Muslims identifying as Sunni and 10–15 percent as Shia. The remaining 3.5 percent¹³ of the populace follows other religions, including Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Bahaism, and Kalasha. The constitution¹⁴ of Pakistan designates Islam as the state religion, while incorporating provisions aimed at protecting religious freedom for those with differing beliefs. Chapter One of Pakistan's constitution reads: "Every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion; and every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions." However, these provisions do not extend towards individuals belonging to the Ahmadiyya community who identify as Muslim, as they were declared as non-Muslims by the state in an amendment to the constitution in 1974¹⁵.

This report examines the most common forms of aggression faced by religious minorities in Pakistan. It includes egregious acts such as forced marriages and conversions to Islam, mob violence, lynchings, and targeted killings, as well as the destruction of property, including places of worship. Additionally, the report discusses the weaponization of blasphemy laws against those with beliefs different from the majority and the promotion of extremism online. These issues highlight the urgent need to address systemic injustices that threaten the safety and dignity of religious minorities in Pakistan.

3. FORCED CONVERSIONS

Women and girls from religious minority communities, including the Hindu, Sikh, Kalash, and Christian faiths, are particularly vulnerable to the threat of abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage to their abductors in Pakistan. In April 2024, the United Nations¹⁶ expressed alarm over the lack of protection for young women and girls belonging to minority communities, stating that “The Pakistani authorities must enact and rigorously enforce laws to ensure that marriages are contracted only with the free and full consent of the intended spouses, and that the minimum age for marriage is raised to 18, including for girls.”

In June 2025, Pakistan’s President Asif Ali Zardari approved the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill¹⁷, which prohibits marriage for individuals under the age of 18, despite pushback from far-right Islamic groups. This is a significant and positive development, albeit one limited to the capital territory of Islamabad. It also has the potential to inspire other provinces such as Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Punjab to adopt similar legislation, considering that Sindh Province has already implemented its own act restraining child marriage.

According to data from the Center for Social Justice¹⁸ (CSJ), 83 registered cases involving the abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage of religious minority women and minor girls were reported in 2024.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) reports that while both Christian and Hindu women are most vulnerable to forced conversions, Hindu minority women and girls in Sindh Province have been the most strongly impacted by forced conversions.¹⁹ Despite Sindh Province having adopted the Sindh Child Marriages Restraint Act²⁰ of 2013, which prohibits the marriage of anyone under 18 years of age and imposes penalties on facilitators, including religious clerics or guardians, perpetrators often circumvent this law by bringing their victims to Punjab Province to avoid legal consequences. Although Punjab Province also reports a considerably large number of forced conversion cases, there is no legislation in place to prohibit child marriage. Moreover, the cultural and linguistic similarities between Punjab Province and Sindh Province make it easier for perpetrators in Sindh Province to forcefully convert and marry their victims after bringing them to Punjab.

In Pakistan, women from religious minority communities have lower literacy rates than the national average for women. They also have lower literacy rates than their male counterparts. These disparities are influenced by factors such as poverty and limited access to quality education, particularly in rural areas like interior Sindh. In addition to being homemakers, many Christian and Hindu women are employed in low-paying jobs, domestic labor, agricultural labor, and brick kiln labor, with some even bonded in servitude. As members of religious minority groups with limited socioeconomic privilege, these women and girls

experience increased vulnerability because they are less likely²¹ to be able to successfully defend their rights legally, making them prime targets for abduction, forced conversion, and coerced marriage by individuals from the majority Muslim community. Additionally, cultural stigma often prevents them from publicly disclosing cases of abduction or forced conversion. There is also the fear and risk of repercussions for victims, their families, and their communities. CSJ stated that the true figure for forced conversions is likely to be much higher, as many cases are not reported due to fear of backlash from the abductors or extremist groups. Family members of victims of forced conversion often face intimidation by the abductors. Victims are routinely pressured into claiming that they acted out of their own free will or love. Judges dealing with abduction cases yield to pressure from extremist far-right groups that routinely object to restrictions on the minimum age of marriage and the legal procedures for faith conversion. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, in its most recent report,²² highlights the point that the fear of abduction and forced conversion has instilled a deep sense of fear within minority communities, leading to hesitation on their part in promoting women's education and consequently impacting women's freedom of movement. Many women remain unsafe even in the confines of their homes.

In March 2024, 10-year-old Christian girl Laiba Masih²³ was abducted from her home, forcibly converted to Islam, and then forced to marry her 35-year-old abductor, Muhammad Irfan. Laiba's father, Sohail Masih, reported the incident to the Faisalabad police in Punjab Province. The investigation officer submitted a report before the court claiming that no offense of child marriage was found in the case. The marriage certificate falsely recorded Laiba's age as 17 years, in contradiction to her actual age of 10 years, as documented by Pakistan's National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA). Despite this evidence, the court instructed that Laiba be handed over to a local Dar ul Aman, a government run women's shelter in Faisalabad, instead of to her parents.

In December 2024, a 15-year-old Hindu girl, Kajol Meghwar, was abducted from her home by a Muslim man at gunpoint in Mirpurkhas District in Sindh Province. Kajol was taken to Umerkot District, where she was reportedly tortured, raped, forcefully converted to Islam, and married to her abductor.²⁴ To evade consequences for their actions and conceal her Hindu identity, Kajol's abductors changed her name to Javeriya and falsely had her age recorded as nineteen. The Sindh Human Rights Commission issued a suo motu notice to the Superintendent of Police in Mirpurkhas district to investigate the underage marriage and forced conversion of Kajol in January 2025. Yet Kajol remains at the mercy of her abductors while her parents struggle to bring her home.

The tactic employed by both Laiba and Kajol's abductors, of falsely recording ages and altering names of victims, is frequently used to confuse investigating authorities in an attempt to subvert the legal system. The process of seeking justice in cases of forced conversions is immensely frustrating for victims, their families, and their advocates. Nevertheless, human rights advocates and many families from religious minorities persist in their quest for justice

for those who have been abducted and forcefully converted. In rare instances, victims of forced conversion successfully obtain justice. In February 2025, a civil court in Punjab, Pakistan, annulled the marriage of 25-year-old Shahida Bibi, a Christian woman who was forced to convert to Islam as a child by her abductor. The court declared her marriage to Shehzad Akhtar Khan invalid and restored her Christian identity upon her request. According to reports and statements²⁵ by her lawyer, “the ruling also directed the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to issue a new identity card for Bibi, reinstating her religious status as Christian and deleting her marital status.” By way of context, it bears noting that the Pakistani government requires people to state their religious affiliation on national identity card applications.

Men from religious minority communities are also susceptible to the threat of forced conversion as they are often offered social and economic incentives to convert to Islam, such as debt forgiveness, land donations, employment opportunities, and societal acceptance. More recently, there have also been cases of men from religious minority groups being threatened with death if they resist conversion to Islam. In March 2025, Nadeem Naath, a 56-year-old Hindu sanitation worker, was shot dead in Peshawar after refusing to convert to Islam.²⁶ The brother of the victim, Sagar, stated that the perpetrator, Muhammad Mushtaq, had been harassing his brother to convert to Islam for some time before killing him. It is important to acknowledge that the Pakistani government specifically reserves menial cleaning jobs for non-Muslims, primarily Hindus and Christians. According to reports,²⁷ Christians comprise only 1.6 percent of Pakistan's population. But they account for about 80 percent of all sweepers, while the remainder of these jobs are taken up by Hindus.

Also, in March 2025, Waqas Masih, a 22-year-old Christian laborer²⁸ in Punjab Province, was assaulted by his shift supervisor, Zohaib Iftikhar, after refusing to convert to Islam. Zohaib allegedly called Waqas into his office, swore at him using religiously derogatory terms, then slashed his throat with a cardboard cutter after he refused to accept Islam as his faith. Fortunately, Waqas survived the attack. The perpetrator accused Waqas of committing blasphemy by tearing pages from an Islamic textbook. The victim's father, Riyasat Masih, claimed²⁹ that Waqas had been facing religious discrimination and coercion at his workplace for over a month before the attack. He was reportedly the only Christian employee at the paper factory.

In June 2025³⁰, four children from the Hindu community in Sanghar, Sindh Province, were abducted and were reportedly subject to forced conversion. The three sisters– 16-year-old Jiya, 19-year-old Disha, 22-year-old Diya– as well as 13-year-old Hunain Kumar, their male cousin, went missing and later on the same day released video messages stating they had accepted Islam of their own free will “without coercion.” The parents filed a First Information Report (FIR), and a press conference held by the Hindu Panchayat, urging immediate government action, prompted the Sindh police to act quickly in freeing the children and returning them to their parents. The children had allegedly been lured by their local computer

teacher, Farhan Khaskheli. The National Commission on the Rights of the Child (NCRC), an independent body established by the government of Pakistan for the protection of children's rights in the country, strongly condemned the incident on X (formerly Twitter).³¹ The NCRC stated, "This is not just a violation of fundamental rights as outlined under the Constitution, it is a violation of humanity. The abduction and forced conversion of minor children is a gross infringement on their right to safety, dignity, and religious freedom. No child in Pakistan should live in fear. Every child deserves a childhood free from violence, coercion, and injustice."

4. MOB VIOLENCE AND LYNCHINGS

In Pakistan, religious intolerance promoted by far-right groups and unfounded accusations of blasphemy have been a driving force in inciting mob violence against alleged culprits who are often lynched as a consequence. Blasphemy allegations are especially invoked to target and intimidate religious minorities or Muslims with beliefs different from those held by the Sunni majority. Angry mobs have even violently stormed police stations to capture and physically assault individuals accused of blasphemy. Some of the vigilantes³² engaging in such violent acts are driven by financial incentives, while others view their actions as reflective of a mission to defend Islam. In some instances, blasphemy allegations are used as a pretext for personal vendetta,³³ including of a political³⁴ nature.

Over the past decade, there have been dozens of incidents of mob violence related to blasphemy in Pakistan, often resulting in gruesome lynchings of the accused. The most high-profile among these incidents are the 2017 lynching of Mashal Khan,³⁵ a student at Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan, the 2021 lynching of Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana,³⁶ a Christian Sri Lankan citizen working in Sialkot, the 2023 lynching of Muhammad Waris at a police station in Nankana Sahib,³⁷ and the 2025 lynching of Laeeq Ahmad Cheema, an Ahmadi man in Karachi.³⁸

The absence of a strong rule of law and a history of impunity for those who engage in mob violence contribute to a culture where these actions have been normalized. There have been some cases where courts have held individuals accountable for mob lynchings, resulting in prison terms and death sentences, as seen in the Mashal Khan³⁹ and Priyantha Kumara Diyawadana⁴⁰ cases. However, there are also instances, such as in the case of the mob that vandalized and set fire to a Hindu temple in 2021, where the perpetrators have been pardoned.⁴¹ This reflects a troubling trend of impunity for those who engage in mob violence, with such individuals often celebrated as heroes rather than being recognized as criminals, while those falsely accused of blasphemy suffer. A report⁴² by Human Rights Watch, *Exploiting Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws for Blackmail and Profit*, stated, "In cases of vigilante attacks, police seldom take action to protect those targeted, and those who do may themselves face threats of violence. As a result, perpetrators of mob violence who enjoy the patronage and protection of politicians or religious leaders avoid arrest or are acquitted."

Throughout 2024 and during the early part of 2025, Pakistan witnessed incidents of mob violence and lynchings, all of them related to accusations of blasphemy. In February 2024, a woman wearing a kurta with writing in Arabic, specifically the term "hilwa" or beautiful, barely escaped a mob of around 300 men⁴³ at a restaurant in Lahore. The woman was baselessly accused of wearing Quranic scripture on her clothing. The mob surrounded the woman, threatening to kill her for denigrating Islam and the Quran. A female police officer intervened⁴⁴ and brought the woman to the police station, where religious scholars were brought in to confirm that the text on her clothing was indeed Arabic calligraphy and not

verses from the Quran. A section of Pakistani society, as well as the Pakistani authorities, placed the burden of responsibility on her for apparently hurting the sentiments of Muslims, while those involved in mistakenly accusing her of offending the Quran were not held accountable for endangering her life. The woman apologized for the incident and her choice of attire, despite the false nature of the accusation. The female police officer who handled the incident was justly praised⁴⁵ for saving the woman's life.

In May 2024, a mob in Sarghoda in central Punjab brutally attacked Lazir Masih, a 72-year-old Christian man,⁴⁶ after accusing him of desecrating pages of the Quran. He later died at a hospital after succumbing to his injuries. A mob of hundreds ransacked Masih's house,⁴⁷ burned down his shoe shop, and injured other Christians living in the same settlement as Masih before police intervened. Masih's relatives⁴⁸ rejected the blasphemy allegations as baseless. The Sargodha⁴⁹ incident left the Christian community feeling extremely vulnerable again, as after the 2023 Jaranwala⁵⁰ attacks that had resulted in the destruction of churches and homes belonging to the Christian community.

In June 2024, a mob in Madyan in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province broke into a police station and lynched⁵¹ Mohammad Ismail, a tourist visiting from Punjab Province who was held there over allegations by locals that he had desecrated the Quran. Officials said that Ismail was being questioned by police when the mob attacked the police station, clashed with officers, snatched Ismail, brutally beat him, and set his body on fire. This incident was one more of a growing number of instances of vigilante mobs attacking police stations on the basis of rumors of blasphemy while law enforcement authorities stood by as ineffectual and helpless observers. The pattern underscores the lack of ability of authorities responsible for law and order to handle incidents of mob violence related to blasphemy and their intermittent complicity in such violence.

In April 2025, Laeeq Ahmad Cheema, a 46-year-old Ahmadi man, was lynched⁵² by hundreds of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) supporters gathered outside an Ahmadiyya place of worship in Karachi. The mob chanted hateful and incendiary slogans that incited the violence, which led to Cheema's death. Members of the Ahmadiyya community reported that Cheema had been approximately 150 meters away from the site of worship, where the mob had gathered before they identified him and brutally beat him to death with bricks and sticks. Media reports⁵³ indicate that TLP supporters reportedly assaulted Cheema after he was found recording the mob a short distance away from the Ahadiyya site of worship. The Karachi police have arrested a Union Council Chairman elected on a TLP ticket, along with 14 other individuals, for being involved in Cheema's lynching.



TLP mob chanted anti-Ahmadi slogans in Karachi shortly before lynching Ahmadi man Laeeq Ahmad Cheema

In May 2025, two elderly Ahmadi men arrested for conducting Friday prayers in Karachi were violently dragged from a courtroom and assaulted by a mob of TLP members.⁵⁴ In Pakistan, Ahmadis are legally forbidden from calling themselves Muslims and from offering prayers at mosques or even referring to their places of worship as mosques. The men were initially arrested for offering Friday prayers at their place of worship. At their court hearing, both men were beaten by a mob of TLP supporters in the courtroom. One of the men later died from injuries while in judicial custody, where he had been denied proper medical attention following his arrest.

Unfortunately, elected officials, politicians, religious leaders, judges, lawyers, and police officers are often complicit in inciting violence, turn a blind eye to such incidents, or are unwilling to prosecute cases of mob violence related to blasphemy due to fear or political pressure. Growing intolerance for freedom of belief in Pakistan has led to a rise in individuals and organizations that exploit⁵⁵ the situation to expand their influence and following. Some experts note that while local governments or officials may not provide direct funding to vigilante groups, there is clear evidence of substantial informal support,⁵⁶ often in the form of charitable contributions or donations.

5. DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY

Historically, the Christian community of Pakistan has been most strongly impacted by the destruction of property caused by mob attacks. During the Shanti Nagar massacre⁵⁷ in 1997, a mob of 30,000 people attacked a predominantly Christian town during the month of Ramadan. The violence was incited by a rumor alleging that a member of the Christian community had desecrated the Quran. The attack resulted in the destruction of over 700 homes, along with several churches and schools. This was followed several years later by a spate of incidents, including the 2005 Sangla Hills attack, the 2006 Karachi attacks, the 2006 Lahore attacks, the 2009 Gojra riots that resulted in the death of eight Christians including a child, the 2011 Gujranwala attacks, the 2012 Mardan Church attack, the 2013 attacks on Joseph Colony in Badami Bagh Lahore, and the 2014 Kot Radha Kishan mob attack in Punjab. More recently, the Christian community was targeted in the 2023 Jaranwala attacks and the 2024 Sargodha attacks,⁵⁸ which involved the looting, vandalism, and destruction of homes and businesses, as well as the desecration of churches and copies of the Bible.

In addition, the community has also faced terrorist attacks, specifically the 2013 explosions at All Saints' Church in Peshawar⁵⁹ and the 2016 Easter Park bombing⁶⁰ in Lahore. Though no fatalities were reported, the 2023 Jaranwala attacks represented arguably the most egregious assault on Christians in Pakistan in recent times, leaving the community deeply shaken again. The attacks were triggered by blasphemy allegations against two Christian brothers, Rocky Masih and Raja Masih. The brothers were accused of distorting Islamic scripture and using it on a calendar on a gas meter outside of their home in Jaranwala, Punjab. HRCP reported,⁶¹ "At least 1,200 Muslim men were part of the mob, which partially or fully damaged at least 80 Christian households, 24 churches, and dozens of smaller chapels. 34 Loud speakers at the Mehtab Mosque, near the Christian settlements in Jaranwala, were used to incite rioting." CSJ further reported⁶² "that the mob was mobilized through the loudspeakers of local mosques and demanded that the two accused be handed over so that they could lynch them, despite police assurances that the pair would be dealt with according to the law."

The Jaranwala attacks were recorded and disseminated on social media platforms, where they were further exploited to spread hate and disinformation, inciting violence and glorifying acts of revenge in the name of Islam. Although the brothers were acquitted⁶³ of blasphemy charges that were registered against them by the Anti-Terrorism Court in Faisalabad, action has yet to be taken by the government against the mob responsible for the violence and destruction of property. As a result, the Christian community has been left even more vulnerable, while vigilantes continue to act without fear of consequence.

The Hindu community in Pakistan has also faced devastating losses in recent years, with attacks targeting their homes, businesses, schools, and the destruction of temples. In 2019, allegations⁶⁴ of blasphemy levelled by a Muslim student against Notan Lal, a Hindu teacher in Ghotki District of Sindh Province, led to an outbreak of sectarian violence. Shops owned by

the Hindu community were looted, the school run by Lal and his wife was ransacked, and a Hindu temple was attacked.

A year later, in 2020, a historic Hindu temple in Karak District of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province was set ablaze by a mob led by an Islamic cleric protesting the expansion of the temple.⁶⁵ Locals at the scene recorded videos that were shared on social media, showing the mob smashing the temple structure with stones and hammers, while the building was engulfed in flames. The Pakistani Supreme Court strongly condemned⁶⁶ the act and ordered that the Krishna Dwara Mandir be rebuilt. Authorities removed 12 police officers⁶⁷ from service and penalized dozens of others for not preventing the mob from setting the temple ablaze. However, these actions did not deter future mob attacks on the Hindu community and their houses of worship. In the same year,⁶⁸ protesters damaged new construction work for the government-approved Shri Krishna Mandir in Islamabad. In 2021,⁶⁹ a mob of Muslims attacked the Ganesh Hindu temple in Bhog, Punjab, after a local court granted a Hindu boy bail in a blasphemy case.

The Ahmadiyya community faces the worst discrimination and the most intense persecution. In 2024 alone, 20 Ahmadiyya houses of worship were demolished and 319 graves desecrated. So far in 2025, 17 houses of worship and 365 graves have been desecrated.

In March 2025, the gravestones of 76 Ahmadiyya community members in Kotli, Azad Kashmir were desecrated⁷⁰ by unidentified individuals. Members of the Ahmadiyya community confirmed that a similar incident had occurred earlier that month in Mirpur, Azad Kashmir, during which 31 Ahmadi graves were desecrated. Cemeteries belonging to the community are frequently targeted, as religious extremists claim that Ahmadi gravestones display verses from the Quran.



Ahmadiyya cemetery desecrated in Dugree Ghumna, Sialkot, Punjab province

The Ahmadiyya community says that such acts of vandalism frequently occur with the complicity or direct involvement of authorities.⁷¹ For example, in September 2025, an Ahmadi house of worship in Bahawalnaggar in Punjab Province was desecrated by authorities. Radical clerics backed by law enforcement have been known to demolish minarets on Ahmadiyya places of worship, arguing that their resemblance to Muslim mosques is offensive. In Pakistan, Ahmadis are criminalized for identifying as Muslim, prohibited⁷² from referring to their places of worship as mosques, and banned from using Quranic verses on any banners, signs, or gravestones. The country's anti-Ahmadi laws have facilitated violence against the community, putting their everyday lives at great risk.

6. TARGETED KILLINGS

Targeted killings of religious minority community members have also been on the rise over the last five years. These attacks reflect a lack of tolerance for diverse religious beliefs and perspectives, including those within the Muslim community itself. According to human rights experts,⁷³ Pakistan recorded 11 targeted killings in 2024, with more than half of the victims belonging to the Ahmadiyya community.

Targeted attacks tend to be carried out by unidentified gunmen thought to be influenced by far-right extremist ideology. When these attackers cannot be identified, securing justice for victims becomes extremely challenging. The Pakistani police and judicial system are not well equipped to effectively investigate and prosecute these hate crimes. Additionally, in several instances, the targeted acts of violence towards those accused of blasphemy are justified, forgiven, even glorified, and at times even carried out by the police.

In September 2024, a police officer shot and killed⁷⁴ a man accused of blasphemy inside a police station in Quetta, Balochistan. The family of the victim forgave the police officer “in the name of God,” while locally the officer was hailed as a “hero” for his actions in defence of Islam. A similar incident occurred during the same month in Sindh Province,⁷⁵ where a doctor accused of sharing blasphemous posts on Facebook was shot and killed in an encounter by police. In celebration, people tossed rose petals⁷⁶ on the officers in question.

The Ahmadiyya community has reported that in 2024, six members of the community were targeted for their faith and brutally killed. In June 2024, two members of the Ahmadi community were shot dead⁷⁷ in separate incidents in Punjab. A month later, in July 2024, an Ahmadi doctor from the United States was shot dead in Punjab.⁷⁸ In April 2025, two young Ahmadi men were attacked by a group of armed assailants⁷⁹ in Kasur in Punjab Province. Nineteen-year-old Muhammad Asif was killed and his cousin wounded. The police arrested two of the suspects⁸⁰ identified by the wounded victim and confirmed that the accused had ties to the TLP. The suspects had previously inflamed religious tensions in the context of personal disputes. In May 2025, an Ahmadi doctor at Fatima Hospital in Sargodha, Punjab Province, was shot in broad daylight⁸¹ by an unidentified gunman in the corridors of the hospital where he had worked for over seven years.

Kurram District of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province, home to a majority of Shia Muslims, has been plagued by targeted assaults that have led to sectarian violence. In November 2024, deadly violence erupted⁸² between Sunnis and Shia tribesmen in Kurram District over land disputes. A convoy of Shia Muslims traveling from Parachinar to Peshawar was attacked by a group of gunmen believed to be Sunni, resulting in the killing of 52 people, including children. This was followed by retaliatory strikes from Shia Muslims, targeting Sunnis in Kurram. The clashes left more than 80 people dead and nearly 200 injured.

Journalists in Chitral, an area in northern Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Province that is home to other Pakistani religious minority communities such as the Ismaili, a branch of Shia Islam, as well as the Kalasha people, who practice a unique polytheistic and animistic religion, reported an increase in hostility from locals, including land grabbing and instigating the boycotts of businesses⁸³ of these minority communities. This rise in tension is attributed to the growing influence of religious fundamentalism propagated by the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban, which issues death threats to the local population and demands conversions⁸⁴ of them at the risk of serious repercussions.

While there were no reported targeted killings of members of the Sikh community during 2024 or the early months of 2025, this does not imply that they have not been impacted by violence. Between 2022 and 2023,⁸⁵ there was a troubling pattern of targeted attacks against members of the Sikh community in different parts of the country. A Sikh man named Manmohan Singh⁸⁶ was murdered in Peshawar in 2023 by an unidentified gunman. The same year, Sardar Singh⁸⁷ was killed in his neighborhood in Lahore by unidentified gunmen riding on a motorcycle. Dayal Singh⁸⁸, a Sikh businessman, was shot by an unknown assailant outside of his shop in Peshawar in 2023. In 2022, two Sikh businessmen, Saljeet Singh and Ranjeet Singh, were gunned down by unknown assailants in Peshawar.

Sikhs in Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan have faced such severe violence that many have been forced to live in isolation as a means of protection. Unless victims of targeted hate crimes can identify their attackers, such incidents typically remain unpunished. In cases where the perpetrators are known, they are often celebrated, or even pardoned, which leaves religious minorities feeling vulnerable and unprotected.

7. WEAPONIZATION OF BLASPHEMY LAWS

Pakistan's draconian blasphemy laws remain one of the main sources of human rights abuses in the country. Pakistan's Penal Code enshrines these laws in sections 295-298-C under the category of "offences relating to religion".

FIGURE 1. PAKISTAN PENAL CODE-XV OF OFFENCES RELATING TO RELIGION

XV	
OF OFFENCES RELATING TO RELIGION	
295. Injuring or defiling place of worship, with Intent to insult the religion of any class:	Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship, or any object held sacred by any class of persons with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction damage or defilement as an insult to their religion. shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.
295-A. Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting Its religion or religious beliefs:	Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the 'religious feelings of any class of the citizens of Pakistan, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations insults the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, or with fine, or with both.
295-B. Defiling, etc., of Holy Qur'an:	Whoever wilfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Qur'an or of an extract therefrom or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life.
295-C. Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet:	Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.
296. Disturbing religious assembly:	Whoever voluntarily causes disturbance to any assembly lawfully engaged in the performance of religious worship, or religious ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.
297. Trespassing on burial places, etc.:	Whoever, with the intention of wounding the feelings of any person, or of insulting the religion of any person, or with the knowledge that the feelings of any person are likely to be wounded, or that the religion of any person is likely to be insulted thereby, commits any trespass in any place of worship or on any place of sculpture, or any place set apart for the performance of funeral rites or as a, depository for the remains of the dead, or offers any indignity to any human corpse or causes disturbance to any persons assembled for the performance of funeral ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.
298. Uttering words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings:	Whoever, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person or makes any gesture in the sight of that person or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year or with fine, or with both.
298-A. Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of holy personages:	Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of any wife (Ummul Mumineen), or members of the family (Ahle-bait), of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), or any of the righteous Caliphs (Khulafa-e-Rashideen) or companions (Sahaaba) of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.

298-B. Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles, etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places:

- (1) Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation-
 - (a) refers to or addresses, any person, other than a Caliph or companion of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as "Ameer-ul-Mumineen", "Khalifatul- Mumineen", "Khalifa-tul-Muslimeen", "Sahaabi" or "Razi Allah Anho";
 - (b) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as "Ummul-Mumineen";
 - (c) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a member of the family "Ahle-bait" of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as "Ahle-bait"; or
 - (d) refers to, or names, or calls, his place of worship a "Masjid";shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine.
- (2) Any person of the Qadiani group or Lahori group (who call themselves "Ahmadis" or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation refers to the mode or form of call to prayers followed by his faith as "Azan", or recites Azan as used by the Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine.

298-C. Person of Qadiani group, etc., calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith:

Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name), who directly or indirectly, poses himself as a Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

The laws were framed to include severe penalties, including long-term imprisonment, hefty fines, and even the death sentence. International human rights organizations, including the United Nations, have frequently reminded Pakistan of its obligation to protect the right to freedom of religion or belief. However, Pakistan has ignored these requests,⁸⁹ asserting that these laws were established to protect Islam, making it one of seven countries in the world that have the death penalty for blasphemy. As such, Pakistan is designated a 'country of particular concern'⁹⁰ by the U.S. Department of State due to its violations of religious freedom.

In a June 2025 report, Human Rights Watch (HRW) painted a grim picture of how blasphemy allegations are weaponized⁹¹ in Pakistan. The report noted that individuals accused under these vague and discriminatory laws, often without credible evidence, are subjected to prolonged pretrial detention, denied due process, and face deeply flawed legal proceedings that can lead to years of unjust imprisonment. Meanwhile, those who commit acts of violence in the name of blasphemy are rarely held accountable, reinforcing a climate of impunity and fear.

Blasphemy laws are frequently abused due to a lack of procedural safeguards. For example, police and prosecutors often accept accusations of blasphemy without a proper investigation or evidence. Individuals accused of blasphemy are often denied bail even though they meet the requirements under the law and are subject to incredibly lengthy waits and unfair trials.⁹² For example, Junaid Hafeez, a young Muslim academic from Punjab, was on trial⁹³ for blasphemy for six years before receiving the death sentence in 2019. He has been on death row since.

Importantly, there are no specific laws that provide redress for false allegations of blasphemy, which results in the constant abuse of these laws. Blasphemy laws are frequently misused to settle personal vendettas⁹⁴ and disputes, with religious minority communities disproportionately targeted in such conflicts. CSOH has also noted some recent instances where individuals from religious minority communities have accused fellow members⁹⁵ of their community of blasphemy.

While the Pakistani state has not yet executed anyone convicted of blasphemy, individuals charged with the offence frequently face mob violence. Those who are acquitted of charges of blasphemy tend to face ostracization or continued aggression. Individuals accused of blasphemy, and even their families, often have to relocate after acquittal due to ongoing death threats and fear for their safety.

Lawmakers as well as lawyers often avoid taking on cases of individuals accused of blasphemy due to the risk of becoming targets themselves. The case of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman accused of blasphemy, serves as a prime example. Bibi's lawyer, Saiful Mulook, was forced to flee Pakistan due to threats from extremists. In 2011, Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab, was assassinated⁹⁶ for speaking out in support of Bibi and for advocating for the reform of blasphemy laws. Unless a case attracts international attention from global human rights organizations, individuals accused of blasphemy, especially those from religious minority communities, typically struggle to receive adequate legal representation.

Judges often encounter threats and intimidation when presiding over such cases. In 2024, Justice Qazi Faez Isa, the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, became the target of an intense smear campaign after he granted bail to an Ahmadi man accused of blasphemy. The hate campaign⁹⁷ was spearheaded by far-right religious political parties, which not only criticized the judge but also issued threats of violence⁹⁸ against him.

According to a report by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) in Pakistan, at least 344 individuals⁹⁹ were accused under the country's blasphemy laws in 2024, up from 329 in 2023. Of those charged, 70% were Muslims, 6% were Christians, 9% were Hindus, and 14% belonged to the Ahmadiyya community. Human rights advocates point out that these numbers should be seen in the context of the significantly smaller populations of religious minority communities compared to the majority religion.

The Ahmadiyya community has reported that each year, dozens of baseless cases are filed against its members. In 2024 alone, 74 faith-related charges were brought against Ahmadis. For instance, in August 2024, police in Narowal, Punjab Province, arrested four Ahmadi men¹⁰⁰ and registered a case against them on charges of burning pages of the Quran. A local religious leader of the Jamaat Ahle Sunnat Pakistan, known for its sectarian views, claimed he saw the four men allegedly burning some papers on a garbage heap late at night. The mere accusation was enough for the police to charge and imprison the men.

8. DIGITAL EXTREMISM

Social media has become a powerful tool in Pakistan, used for both positive engagement and for the dissemination of hate. Even though digital platforms have provided space for voices typically shut out from mainstream media, the rise in the use of digital platforms such as Facebook, X, TikTok, and WhatsApp has facilitated the spread of hate speech and misinformation, particularly against religious minorities. The enforcement of blasphemy laws has expanded into the digital realm through the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) of 2016, under which individuals face prosecution for online speech¹⁰¹ deemed offensive by the state. In 2025, the Pakistani government further tightened its control over online content, cracking down on dissenting voices¹⁰² through the passage of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025.¹⁰³ These changes raise serious concerns over the government's sweeping authority to regulate a wide range of content deemed unlawful,¹⁰⁴ including blasphemy, hate speech, incitement to violence, obscenity, defamation, and material against the defence or security of Pakistan. These amendments to PECA have the potential to further endanger religious minorities, particularly with regard to blasphemy allegations.

One of the most concerning aspects of social media in Pakistan is its ability to quickly amplify extremist rhetoric and transform online vitriol into offline violence.¹⁰⁵ Far-right Islamic political parties, private vigilante groups, as well as government officials use social media to not only seek popularity and funds but also to mobilize mobs to carry out vigilante justice. Social media is also an effective tool for instigating individuals to carry out violent targeted attacks on religious minorities or anyone with beliefs deemed offensive or heretical.

Both private and public social media posts have been used to incriminate individuals under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. For example, in March 2024, in two separate cases, a court in Pakistan sentenced a 22-year-old student to death and handed a teenager a life sentence after finding them guilty on charges of blasphemy over WhatsApp messages that allegedly contained derogatory words¹⁰⁶ about Prophet Muhammad and his wives. In July 2024, Ehsan Shan, a Christian man, was sentenced to death for posting defaced pages of the Quran on TikTok.¹⁰⁷ Shan wasn't involved in the desecration of the Quran but was accused of reposting the pages on his TikTok account. In September 2024, Shagufta Kiran, a Christian woman, was sentenced to death for blasphemy. According to the judges, Kiran was guilty of sharing an offensive message against Islam on WhatsApp.¹⁰⁸ Kiran was sentenced to death at the end of a grueling three-year trial.

In the early part of 2025, four individuals, Rana Usman, Ashfaq Alli, Salman Sajjad, and Wajid Ali, were found guilty of blasphemy¹⁰⁹ under Section 11 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) and charged under sections 295-A, 295-B, 295-C, 298-A, 34, and 109 of the Pakistan Penal Code. The anti-terrorism court sentenced them to death¹¹⁰ for allegedly posting sacrilegious material on Facebook. Along with the death sentences, the judge imposed

collective fines of over 4 million Pakistani rupees (approximately \$14,000 U.S. dollars) on them. Defense lawyer Manzoor Rahmani argued that in such cases, courts frequently overlook procedural doubts in the prosecution's case, as they are intimidated by fears of mob violence by religious groups. PECA, a legal framework designed to tackle electronic crimes such as data theft, online harassment, and the distribution of malicious content, has also garnered considerable criticism for the manner in which it is used. Human rights defenders argue that PECA is frequently misused, targeting dissenting voices¹¹¹ and suppressing independent media.

One of the main culprits of promoting extremism¹¹² online is the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, a movement that has metamorphosed into a far-right Islamic political party under the leadership of Khadim Hussain's son, Saad Hussain Rizvi. The core ideology of the party is based on the notion of the finality of the Prophet, that is, the belief that the Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet sent by god, and on safeguarding Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Although other religious political parties, such as Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazal (JUI-F), advocate for hardline political conservatism and also incite violence against religious minorities through hate speech, the TLP in particular stands out for its aggression. For instance, the police investigation report¹¹³ submitted to the Supreme Court with regard to the 2023 Jaranwala incident confirmed that those involved in the attacks were affiliated with the TLP.

The TLP and its supporters utilize social media platforms like YouTube, X, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp to cultivate online crowds¹¹⁴ for advancing their religious fundamentalist agenda. They are adept at using these digital spaces and forums to propagate hate speech and to mobilize large groups of supporters for action at specific locations. This year, during Eid-ul-Fitr, the TLP, in collaboration with police officials, prevented Ahmadis from performing Eid prayers at 15 different Ahmadi places of worship. The April 2025 lynching of an Ahmadi man in Karachi, carried out by TLP supporters who had gathered outside of an Ahmadiyya place of worship, was also organized online. The TLP also led nationwide demonstrations against the verdict issued by a Supreme Court judge in a blasphemy case involving an Ahmadi man. At one of the demonstrations, Pir Zaheerul Hasan Shah, the vice-emir of TLP, made remarks¹¹⁵ inciting violence against Qazi Faez Isa, the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP). Despite facing threats of legal action¹¹⁶, the TLP has a historical reputation for persisting with its extremist tactics. It bears noting that the TLP's growth on social media coincides with the increase in the number of mobile internet users in Pakistan.

Private online vigilante groups¹¹⁷ that share the TLP's ideological leanings have been at the forefront of prosecuting online blasphemy cases. According to the UN, Pakistan's Federal Investigation Authority's Cyber Crime Wing charges hundreds of young people with blasphemy based on social media content, often in coordination with organizations that profit from the business of accusations of blasphemy. The troubling rise in online blasphemy¹¹⁸ cases compelled the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), a Pakistani government

body created in 2012 to monitor human rights within the country, to undertake an investigation into the matter after rights groups raised concerns. The NCHR report found “a sharp increase in registration of blasphemy cases, the majority of whom were initiated by the Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) Cybercrime unit, frequently in collaboration with a private entity. This rise in cases correlates with the operationalisation of the PECA Act Amendment of 2018. Young men were reportedly targeted through entrapment tactics involving female operatives using pseudonyms to lure them into blasphemous activities online, resulting in their subsequent arrests.”¹¹⁹

Although the NCHR called on the Pakistani government to hold the FIA and its officials engaged in wrongdoing accountable for their actions, the business of blasphemy continues to flourish. Social media platforms remain potent tools for religious persecution, political intimidation, and mob incitement in Pakistan.

9. CONCLUSION

The state of religious freedom in Pakistan continues to deteriorate, with religious minority groups facing widespread discrimination, persecution, and violence. Despite constitutional protections for religious freedom, the government often tolerates or enables the marginalization of religious minorities.

Pakistan's laws and its law enforcement agencies fail to protect¹²⁰ religious minorities from the increasing risk of abduction, forced marriage, and forced conversion to Islam. Cases of abduction, forced conversion to Islam, rape, and forced marriage remained imminent threats for religious minority women and children, particularly from the Hindu and Christian faiths. Men from religious minority groups also face threats of violence if they resist forced conversion.

The Pakistani state has also failed to effectively prevent or address incidents of violence, including mob violence and lynchings. Additionally, mob violence triggered by blasphemy allegations has resulted in the destruction of property, including places of worship.

The Ahmadiyya community, viewed as heretics by the Pakistani government, continues to face significant challenges in practicing their faith, while enduring systemic discrimination, violence, and destruction of their properties, including cemeteries. Their classification as non-Muslims in the Pakistani constitution and the repercussions they face for identifying as such, given provisions of Pakistan's Penal Code, place them in a situation of legal precarity. The laws and policies of the Pakistani state effectively amount to an endorsement of the persecution of Ahmadiyyas providing a de facto guarantee that perpetrators will not be held accountable for their actions.

Targeted killings of religious minorities in Pakistan are frequently perpetrated by unknown assailants believed to be influenced and supported by far-right religious groups. The anonymity of those who commit these hate crimes poses a significant barrier to accountability and justice for the targeted religious minorities. The police and judicial systems often lack the necessary resources and training to thoroughly investigate and prosecute such crimes. In many cases, acts of violence against individuals of minority faiths or individuals accused of blasphemy are not only excused but pardoned and celebrated as heroes.

Accusations of blasphemy, enabled by Pakistan's blasphemy laws and penal code, have given rise to a racket of fabricated cases and extortion, with individuals subject to deception and false allegations by a network of individuals and groups that includes government officials.

The swift dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, primarily through digital platforms, has exacerbated religious intolerance and contributed to an already hostile landscape for religious freedom in Pakistan. Far-right actors use online spaces to amplify their

messaging and to mobilize mobs against minorities, contributing to a deepening association between online hate and real-world violence.

While there have been small victories for the religious rights of minorities within the Pakistani justice system, these communities still endure widespread discrimination and violence, facing abiding challenges in their quest for safety, dignity, and equality. The combination of the country's more unjust laws, the force of the state, bias of state authorities and representatives, and the power and reach of digital platforms and tools has proven to be a deadly mix for Pakistan's minorities.

As this report has demonstrated, there are several areas that require immediate attention. Of these, the issue of blasphemy, which places religious minorities and some members of the Muslim religious majority as well, in a condition of permanent precarity, with constant threat of loss of livelihood, ostracism, violence, and death, requires the most urgent redress. A nebulous concept that can be easily abused with grave consequences, blasphemy becomes an especially dangerous weapon when endorsed and enforced by the state, whether of its own accord or at the behest of mobs or popular sentiment. The very existence of blasphemy laws contradicts the constitutional status of protections for minorities. As such, the revocation of blasphemy laws is essential for religious minorities to be able to enjoy full religious freedom without fear of retribution.

Secondly, the gendered nature of violence against minorities calls for focused attention on the part of the state as a point of action. Women and girls from minority communities are doubly vulnerable on the grounds of gender and religion, exposed, on the one hand, to patriarchal violence enabled by the Pakistani state and rooted in society and, on the other, to violence aimed at them because of their religious identity.

A third issue calling for attention is the timely need for revision of the country's Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, which has rightly been criticized by global and national human rights organizations for its potential to be misused, given the expansive power it hands the government and the poorly-defined nature of the criteria on the basis of which the state can criminalize online activity. The most recent amendments to PECA have further strengthened the hand of the state. Additionally, the Pakistani state, regardless of the government of the day, must strengthen both state institutions and non-state actors who are engaged in the protection of the rights of religious minorities. To this end, state officials and those who speak for or provide legal representation to religious minorities in blasphemy cases, or even on other matters, should be provided protection so that minorities and defendants can seek remedy and access justice freely, without fear of reprisal or the threat of physical violence.

Buttressing state bodies mandated to protect religious freedom and protection of minority rights and strengthening the space and support for civil society organizations that are focused

on minority rights must proceed apace with holding state officials who are guilty of complicity in violence against minorities accountable for their actions.

Finally, the Pakistani state must also develop a robust framework of accountability to ensure that technology companies consistently follow and enforce their own policies about violation of community standards, harmful content, and the use of online platforms to incite and organize violence against religious minorities. Appropriate measures in all these directions will be an essential step in ensuring that Pakistan's religious minorities can live and participate in Pakistani society without fear as citizens with full dignity, belonging, and rights.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Pakistani government must repeal blasphemy and other laws targeting the Ahmadiyya community with immediate effect.
- In parallel, the Pakistani government, in consultation with experts from civil society, must create mechanisms and implement measures to ensure that no individual or group is harassed or subjected to violence on the grounds of blasphemy. This requires three distinct but related initiatives on the part of the government. One, it must provide timely and adequate protection to any individual or group accused of blasphemy to ensure their physical safety. Two, it must act post-haste to dismantle blasphemy accusation rackets and ensure that those who engage in such criminal activity are held accountable. Three, it must take urgent steps to counter the malaise of online disinformation that incites violence related to accusations of blasphemy.
- The protection of the rights of women and girl children from minority religious communities against abduction, rape, forced conversions, and forced marriages deserves focused attention and should be an urgent priority for the Pakistani government. Laws protecting the rights of children in certain areas, such as the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill 121, should be formulated and rigorously enforced in other regions as well.
- Federal and provincial authorities must make extra efforts to protect Ahmadis, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, and other vulnerable groups and guarantee justice for victims of false accusations of blasphemy. Law enforcement, supported by relevant local authorities, must investigate and prosecute officials involved in fabricating blasphemy cases. Safeguards should be put in place so that personal biases of personnel cannot influence action in cases involving religious minorities.
- The Pakistani government should revisit its legislation that regulates online activity in the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). In this regard, it should consult with human rights groups as well as organizations with domain expertise in online regulation to develop laws that adequately address online abuse, threats of violence, and hateful content yet are robust enough to be insulated from abuse by the state or the majority community. This is particularly urgent given the nature of state power and the extensive range of surveillance technologies available today.
- The Pakistani state and law enforcement must end the long-standing practice of appeasing far-right groups that pressure authorities to target already-persecuted minority religious communities. Law enforcement agencies must also train their personnel to properly handle and investigate blasphemy charges. Officers should be equipped to proactively prevent harm, whether in the form of individual assaults or mob violence, which often follows verbal accusations of blasphemy. Procedural safeguards must be established to ensure that personal biases do not influence actions in cases involving religious minorities.
- The Pakistani government must take decisive action to hold accountable and prosecute individuals, including clerics, politicians, and state officials, who incite hatred and violence against religious minorities, ensuring that they do not operate with impunity. Political actors

mustn't weaponize religious sentiments as a means of gathering votes, boosting popularity, or securing the support and endorsement of far-right religious groups.

- The state should strengthen the role of civil society and encourage grassroots activism to promote human rights. The government should make changes in educational curricula at all levels to promote religious equality and tolerance. In keeping with this objective, the government should introduce basic training to identify and counter-hate speech.
- Initiatives to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding must be pursued by the Pakistani government. The state must implement policies that promote inclusion and increased participation of religious minorities in government and political life.
- Pakistan is a signatory to¹²² the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which it ratified in 1996. It was also one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which it did in 1990. Pakistan has also expressed strong and consistent support for the Charter of the United Nations, which includes a commitment to human rights as a core principle. The international community must hold Pakistan to these obligations as they pertain to the situation of religious minorities and the right to religious freedom within the country.
- Social media platforms should deploy robust Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Saraiki, Sindhi, Hindko, Shina, Balti, and Balochi trust-and-safety teams, supported by context-aware AI models attuned to local dialects and religious references. These hybrid human-machine units must proactively detect and remove hateful, violent, or disinformation content that targets religious minorities before it spreads, especially in forums that facilitators of mob violence frequently use. Regular model-evaluation sprints, carried out with vetted civil-society partners, should refine detection accuracy and reduce false positives that might chill legitimate speech.
- Social media platforms should create “trusted flagger” fast lanes with vetted civil-society organizations. Alerts submitted through this channel must reach senior moderation staff within hours instead of days, and public reports should share average response times, reversal rates, and follow-up actions. Institutionalizing two-way feedback empowers local experts to surface imminent threats quickly while demonstrating accountability to at-risk communities.
- Social-media platforms should uniformly designate Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and other similar organizations as dangerous or violent extremist organizations and enforce that status consistently. Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, where the designation already applies¹²³, should run regular enforcement audits, publish disaggregated metrics, and issue clear reviewer guidance that separates mobilization content from neutral news reporting. X, YouTube, TikTok, Telegram, and other platforms should adopt the same designation, align takedown rules, and join shared hash-matching databases so that TLP propaganda and calls to violence cannot migrate across platforms.

11. ENDNOTES

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