## Legal framework

Pakistan is an Islamic republic, and the majority of the population follows Sunni Islam, but the constitution guarantees freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all and specifically protects religious minorities.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws criminalise anyone who insults Islam, including by outraging religious feeling (Section 295(A)), defiling the Qur'an (295(B)), and defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed (295(C)), which carries the death penalty or life imprisonment. Bail is granted at the discretion of the court. The law is poorly defined and has low standards for evidence, as it does not require specific proof of intent to commit blasphemy. As a result, spurious accusations are common and levied maliciously against both Muslims and non-Muslims to settle personal disputes.

On 19 June 2014 Pakistan's Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling on religious minorities that called for the establishment of a National Council for Minorities, the revision of school curricula, the protection of places of worship, human rights training for law enforcement agencies, the implementation of job quotas for religious minorities in public sector employment, and the creation of a special task force to monitor the implementation of the Supreme Court's directives. Implementation of this judgement has been slow, and nominal steps towards it have yet to translate to significant improvements in reality.[1]

The Ahmadiyya community is the most widely institutionally and constitutionally persecuted religious group in Pakistan. Various laws categorise Ahmadis as 'non-Muslims' and place restrictions on the community, including a 1974 constitutional amendment, 1984 Ordinance XX (20), and sections 298(B) and (C) of the penal code.

## Blasphemy charges

According to the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) in Pakistan, at least 362 individuals were accused of blasphemy in 2025, up from 344 in 2024; 213 of the accused were Muslims, 141 were Ahmadis, and eight were Christians. Many others remain imprisoned or on death row.

On 2 October 2025 the Rawalpindi bench of the Lahore High Court overturned the blasphemy conviction of 62-year-old Pastor Zafar Bhatti, founder of the Jesus World Mission Church. Pastor Bhatti was arrested in July 2012 after a Muslim cleric accused him of sending text messages which defamed the mother of the Prophet Mohammed. He was reportedly tortured in custody to confess to the crime, and in May 2017 he was sentenced to life imprisonment under Article 295(C) of the Penal Code. In January 2022 his sentence was increased to the death penalty by the Rawalpindi Sessions Court.

Pastor Bhatti suffered from various health problems whilst imprisoned, including diabetes and heart disease, but was reportedly denied bail on medical grounds even after he suffered two minor heart attacks, and had at least 47 separate appeal hearings adjourned between his conviction and acquittal. Tragically he passed away just three days after his acquittal and release from prison.

Blasphemy accusations can also trigger mass violence against minority communities. On 16 August 2023 a large mob attacked the Christian colony of Essa Nagri in the city of Jaranwala in Punjab province after two young Christian men, Rocky Masih and Raja Masih, were accused of blasphemy. The mob was mobilised 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. At least 21 churches and hundreds of homes were vandalised and burnt in the ensuing violence. In June 2025, ten Muslims were acquitted of their alleged involvement in burning a church and ransacking a Christian home during the riots, despite reportedly strong evidence against them.

## Violations against religious minorities

There is entrenched discrimination in Pakistan against members of the Christian and Hindu communities, most of whom are working class, have low levels of education, and work as labourers.

Since the mass exodus in 1947 of Hindus during Partition there has been a continued decline in their numbers, with many migrating to India due to the rise in discrimination and religious polarisation. A false narrative that Partition created Pakistan as a separate state for Muslims is pushed by right-wing elements including politicians and reinforced in the education system, with school textbooks, particularly on the subject of Pakistan Studies and History, further stigmatising Hindus. Many come from the scheduled and lower castes, and as a result face deep-rooted marginalisation.

The legacy of the caste system means Christians are often perceived as unclean by the Muslim majority. They are also perceived as being sympathetic to the 'West', making them targets of Islamist groups. This idea is partly based in the fact that in the past, school textbooks directly connected British imperialism with Christian rule over the Indian subcontinent. Although in a positive development these claims have since been removed from school materials, it will take time and effort to change this perception.

The Shi'a community has also experienced sectarian violence in recent years. In one recent example in February 2026 at least 30 people were killed and over 160 were injured in a suicide bomb attack on a Shi'a Mosque in the Tarlai area of Islamabad which marked one of the deadliest attacks in the country in recent years.

The Ahmadiyya community faces persistent and systematic structural discrimination, and targeted physical violence.

1 FoRB in Full, 'Ten long years: Reflections on the Supreme Court ruling that promised much for Pakistan's religious minorities', 19 June 2024 https://forbinfull.org/2024/06/19/ten-long-years-reflections-on-the-supreme-court-ruling-that-promised-much-for-pakistans-religious-minorities/

According to the International Human Rights Desk (IHRD) of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the UK, three Ahmadis were murdered for their faith and another died in police custody in 2025.[2] The IHRD also recorded the organisation of at least 27 hate rallies targeting Ahmadis and the desecration of 381 Ahmadi graves in the same year.

On 10 October 2025 a shooting outside the Baitul Aqsa Ahmadi mosque in Rabwah (Chenab Nagar), Punjab Province, left six people injured. On 5 June 2026 three security personnel who had been posted outside the same mosque were shot and injured when an unidentified gunman opened fire on their vehicle.

In May 2026 CSW received several reports in which the Ahmadiyya Community faced a coordinated, state-facilitated campaign of religious suppression across the country around the religious festival of Eid-ul-Adha. Ahmadis were arrested and detained; criminal investigations were opened; goats were seized from Ahmadi homes; and mosque loudspeakers were used to call on the public to report Ahmadi animal sacrifices to police. Ahmadi places of worship across Punjab Province were locked by police while Eid prayers in dozens of districts were restricted and curtailed. This is consistent with an uptick in the targeting of the community during other significant Islamic festivals and observances, including Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr, since 2024.

## Abduction, rape, forced conversion and marriage

Cases of abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage of Christian and Hindu girls have increased in recent years, particularly in Punjab and Sindh provinces. Girls from 'low' caste Hindu communities are particularly at risk. Many of those kidnapped are forcibly converted to Islam and married off to their abductors.

Perpetrators are emboldened by a culture of impunity, and victims and their families are often intimidated by abductors and their relatives. As a result, crimes are often unreported and figures underestimated. The failure of law enforcement officials to carry out proper investigations further impedes justice.

The CSJ documented 94 cases involving the abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage of religious minority women and minor girls in 2025 – an increase from 83 in 2024. 71 victims were Hindu and 23 were Christian. The true figures are assumed to be much higher as many cases are not reported due to the intimidation of victims and their families by abductors, their relatives, or extremist groups.

In a welcome development on 27 April 2026, the Punjab Assembly passed the Child Marriage Restraint Bill 2026, raising the minimum legal age for marriage for girls from 16 to 18 – as was already the case for boys – and declaring underage marriage a non-bailable offence. The passage of the bill means that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) is now the only province in Pakistan in which the legal age for marriage is currently 16 for girls.

## Biased education and discrimination

The National Curriculum of Pakistan (NCP), formerly known as the Single National Curriculum (SNC), is in its final phase of drafting and is expected to be completed by the end of 2026 and enacted in 2027. The National Curriculum Council (NCC) has prioritised religious studies while the removal of religious content from non-religious subjects has not been implemented, despite orders from the Supreme Court's One-Man Commission on minority rights. Beyond curriculum content, there is a pressing need to address issues relating to teachers' skills and competencies. Textbook content, teachers' capacity and competencies are also essential for harmonising the classroom and teaching accurate facts and history in relation to the rights and beliefs of religious minorities in Pakistan. Due to a lack of education on human rights in teacher training manuals, and the omission of the contributions of religious minorities towards the country in school textbooks, instructors often lack the teaching and scholastic tactics necessary to engage with students and encourage harmony.

Official textbooks promote intolerance by omitting religious minority heroes, and including errors, omissions, and in some cases derogatory language towards religious minorities. Religious minority students can also face physical and psychological abuse from teachers and classmates. The new curriculum requires students to undergo even more Islamic religious teaching in compulsory subjects, in violation of Article 22(1) of the Pakistani constitution.

Non-Muslims are often reluctant to opt to study an alternative ethics class because this identifies them as a religious minority and increases discrimination. However, for the first time in the country's history, the NCC has allowed the publication of religious textbooks for students of seven minority religious groups (Bahaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Kalasha, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism) enrolled in educational institutions supervised by the federal government. These books were expected to be introduced in school in the educational year 2025, however there have been delays due to a lack of credible subject writers and implementation challenges. This is a welcome development among religious minority communities and civil society in Pakistan. Once enacted, students belonging to minority communities will not be required to study Ethics in lieu of Islamic Studies or be forced to take up Islamic Studies in order to better their grades or avoid discrimination from examiners. Despite this encouraging development many academics and civil society members have raised concerns on the practical implementation of such a measure. Due to lack of resources in most if not all public schools and many private schools, there are concerns on how provisions will be made for teachers to teach one or a few students from the religious minority communities.

2 Instagram, International Human Rights Desk @ihrdesk 24 February 2026 https://www.instagram.com/p/DVI4nFYjJcS/?img_index=1

## Religious discrimination in prisons

According to the CSJ, prisoners belonging to religious minority communities are unable to benefit from jail remission, i.e. reductions to their sentences for good behaviour, outlined in Pakistan's Prison Rules 1978 due to a failure in implementation of existing rules, such as Rule 215 (vii) which states that religious minority prisoners can earn remission by reading and understanding their religious books.

## Threats to lawyers, judges and human rights defenders

Lawyers defending blasphemy-related or other sensitive cases relating to minority issues frequently face intimidation and threats of violence, and in some cases extra-judicial killings. Judges have been physically attacked and threatened with torture, even during court hearings. Many are afraid to hear prominent minority cases for fear of reprisal, resulting in slow progress in these cases.

## Recommendations

***To the government of Pakistan:***

- Review Sections 295(A), (B) and (C) of the blasphemy laws and ensure procedural amendments are implemented to minimise the abuse of these laws in the short term, moving towards full repeal in the long term.
- Ensure adequate protection of the accused, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and witnesses in cases involving blasphemy charges, and provide reparations to those wrongfully accused of blasphemy.
- Enact legislation that explicitly criminalises forced conversion, ensuring that perpetrators and those complicit in such acts are held to account, and introduce legal safeguards to prevent the misuse of religious conversion claims in cases involving minority girls.
- Amend all existing laws governing marriages of Muslims and religious minorities to standardise the legal age of 18 years for marriage.
- Repeal Sections 298(B) and 298(C) concerning the Ahmadiyya community, in line with constitutional guarantees.
- Rewrite textbooks so that they are based on scientific and empirical principles of thought and inquiry, and incorporate lessons on peace, tolerance, diversity and respect for human rights.
- Review the National Curriculum of Pakistan (NCP) and ensure that it respects and recognises the rights and contributions of religious minority communities in Pakistan.
- Consider removing religious content from non-religious subjects, as per instructions from the Supreme Court's One-Man Commission, which is mandatory for all to study, including religious minorities.
- Develop guidelines for teachers on teaching topics related to religion, culture and gender in an unbiased and respectful manner to foster an inclusive classroom environment.
- Provide the necessary protections and safeguards to civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders and prosecute those who attack them.
- Prosecute and bring to trial without delay all those responsible for committing violent attacks against minorities and other vulnerable groups.
- Fully cooperate with all UN Special Procedures and issue a standing invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB to visit Pakistan, with unhindered access to all parts of the country.

***To the government of the United Kingdom:***

- Support the passage of laws that prevent forced marriage.
- Call for the removal of discriminatory content in educational curricula and promote inclusivity, especially for religious minorities.
- Advocate for the safety and protection of civil society activists, journalists and human rights defenders, ensuring legal protections are in place for those working on sensitive issues.
- Urge the government of Pakistan to repeal or, as an interim measure, reform Sections 295(A), 295(B), and 295(C) of the Penal Code to prevent misuse against religious minorities. Emphasise the need for procedural safeguards, including stringent evidentiary standards and protections for the accused, legal professionals, and witnesses involved in blasphemy cases, particularly religious minorities such as Christians and Ahmadis.
- Urge Pakistan to enact and enforce legislation that explicitly criminalises forced conversions and marriages, particularly of women and girls from minority communities.
- Employ the UK's Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime to impose targeted sanctions on individuals and entities responsible for severe violations of FoRB, such as orchestrating violence against religious minorities, abduction of girls, particularly from Christian and Hindu communities, and strengthen law enforcement's capacity to protect them.
- Urge the government of Pakistan, at every appropriate opportunity, to make the reforms highlighted in the recommendation section above 'To the government of Pakistan'.

***To the United Nations and Member States:***

- Urge Pakistan to guarantee the right to FoRB for all, in law and in practice, including by amending or repealing discriminatory legislation, in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to which the state is party.
- Ensure that concerns of violations of the right to FoRB and other intersecting rights are consistently raised with the government of Pakistan, including during high-

level visits and other bilateral exchanges, and call on Pakistan to allow impartial and timely investigations into allegations of violations against religious or belief minorities, ensuring that perpetrators are held to account.

- Urge the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and all relevant UN mechanisms, including the Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies, to include the right to FoRB, minority rights, and the rights of women and girls in their reporting on Pakistan, addressing the vulnerabilities and violations faced by minority religion or belief communities and those seeking to defend them.
- Utilise the Universal Periodic Review process, Human Rights Council sessions and other key international human rights instruments to hold Pakistan accountable for FoRB violations and to offer recommendations to advance FoRB.
- Urge Pakistan to ensure 'no-one is left behind' when implementing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including supporting Pakistan in the implementation of goals on education, gender equality, water and sanitation and reducing inequalities.
- Urge the government of Pakistan, at every appropriate opportunity, to make the reforms highlighted in the recommendation section above 'To the government of Pakistan'.

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