

CIVIL AND POLITICAL LIBERTIES AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN PAKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF SACRILEGIOUS LAWS IN PUNJAB

NASEEM ANTHONY

PHD. SCHOLAR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GOVT. COLLEGE UNIVERSITY FAISALABAD (GCUF)

DR. GHULAM MUSTAFA

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GOVT. COLLEGE UNIVERSITY FAISALABAD (GCUF).

Abstract

The debate of civil and political liberties and context of excluded group is not an issue of a single country but a global phenomenon; however, the context of Pakistan is complex and complicated that have arrested the attention of international community. Specifically, the context of excluded groups, fundamental freedoms, and constitutional guarantees are much debated. This research paper primarily concentrates upon assessing the socio-cultural and socio-political context and practicality of equal status of citizenship amid the discriminatory laws and policies. More specifically, the research study opens a debate on sacrilegious laws and vulnerability of religious minorities. This research study explains that how supportive behavior towards religious extremist elements and often turning a blind eye to mob violence, have undermined the very possibility of equality in citizenship. Through qualitative method adopting inductive approach, the analysis is based on case studies of mob-violence, data related sacrilegious laws, and institutional framework for minorities. Simultaneously, the study also discussed the constitutional guarantees in the light of international human rights framework and its translation into practical actions de-facto and de-jure. The study highlighted that the misconceptions associated with and misinterpretation of apostasy, have laid a foundation to misuse of sacrilegious laws – with vague definition and stringent penalties. Such context increases the likelihood to abuse, where mere allegations could endanger hundreds of lives of the religious minorities.

Keywords: Minorities, Christian, Blasphemy, Equal Rights, Inclusivity, Hate Speech, Intolerance, Mob-Violence, Persecution

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the decades, political landscape in Pakistan reveals that religious extremists have systematically curtailed fundamental freedoms of religious minorities, leaving little room for their social, political, religious, and cultural expression. Several policies, based on religious preferences, such as awarding additional marks to *Hafiz-e-Quran* candidates in education and employment, making Islamic education compulsory, and introducing mandatory teaching of the Holy Quran in universities (Ahmed A. , 2020) not only contradicts the equal status of citizenship but also have tilted the playing field against minorities, pushing them further to the margins. The persistent link between janitorial and sanitation work with Christians and Hindus reinforces discriminatory stereotypes. As a consequence, they are confined to stigmatized roles. Such practices establish such impression that these minority groups are destined for such janitorial jobs. Simultaneously, political parties used the religious card and used it as a bargaining chip. The research study under review is explaining that how such supportive behaviour towards religious extremist elements and often turning a blind eye to mob violence, have undermined the very possibility of equality in citizenship.

The mentioned context of exclusion of minorities is not merely conceptual but has been played out in lived experiences. For instance, the Gojra incident in 2009 saw violent mob set Christian homes on fire after false blasphemy allegations, leaving eight people dead and hundreds displaced (Watch, Pakistan: Mob Attacks Christian Settlement, 2023). In a comparable way, Jaranwala-Faisalabad incident of August 2023 where vandalization of around twenty-six churches, along with eight small chapels, were noticed. Moreover, Christian neighborhoods were torched while law enforcement agencies largely remained passive observers. With respect to role of local political leadership, local political leadership refrained from issuing any statement condemning this act of violence. Another variant, of discrimination and exclusion, is the forced religious conversion and forced marriage which affects Hindu and Christian girls and young women. Moreover, the existing sacrilegious laws function as a Sword of Damocles, perpetually threatening their security and rights (Patras, 2021). Besides the Christians and Hindus, the 2010 Lahore attacks on Ahmadi worship places, which killed nearly 90 worshippers, revealed the vulnerability of the Ahmadiyya community in the face of organized violence (Watch, 2010). These cases represent a fraction of the problem. Each case exposes the failure of political authorities to clamp down on

perpetrators and reflecting how the politicization of religion and impunity for mob violence have become deeply entrenched. Such trends and tendency of mob violence and incidents of extremism illustrate, “when religion is weaponized in politics, it not only shapes exclusionary policies but also emboldens extremist groups to tighten their grip on society, thereby shrinking the civic space for minorities and eroding the principle of equal citizenship.”

The contribution of curricula and syllabus to strengthen the exclusionary patterns cannot be ignored. The omission of minorities’ contributions to the Pakistan Movement from the text books, coupled with the post-partition glorification of the two-nation theory and the deliberate downplaying of their sacrifices, has laid the groundwork for resentment and exclusion (Salim, 2003). The separate electorate system imposed for decades create a divide between majority and minority communities (Jacob, 2016). Consequently, bond of social cohesion weakened and undermined the unity envisioned by the country’s founders (Shakir, 1997). Although General Musharraf’s regime restored the joint electorate in 2001 (Pakistan Patent No. 7, 2002), minority representation still operates under an indirect democratic model. Representatives are usually handpicked by political parties on the basis of loyalty or nepotism, leaving them accountable to party leadership rather than their communities. Consequently, political representatives from religious minorities never be able to influence laws or policies affecting minorities in any meaningful way (Anthony, Mustafa, & Patras, 2022). As their loyalty to party leadership becomes more important than advocating for minority rights on the floor of the house. As Aristotle noted, “The city is a partnership in living well,” yet minorities in Pakistan have been cut off from this partnership and pushed further to the margins of national life.

As far as the social interaction with religious minorities, in everyday settings, is concerned, it reflects discriminatory attitudes. It is common to hear derogatory remarks aimed at minorities. Prejudices often dictate that a person with a darker complexion is presumed to be a non-Muslim. Furthermore, publicly inviting someone to embrace Islam is considered acceptable, but disparaging other religions or declaring them false carries no legal consequences. Contrary to it, despite constitution guarantee of religious freedom, religious minorities are not enjoying such liberty to preach or propagate their faith with the same level of freedom. Such double standards as mentioned directly contradict Article 20 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion without fear.

Media is another stakeholder who contributes in shaping public perceptions. Films and television dramas, often, depict minorities in a negative light. Bold women who wear Western clothing are often stereotypically portrayed as belonging to minority communities. In addition to it, stage dramas openly mock sanitation and sewerage workers. These trends are reinforcing the stigma attached to some specific professions and establishing a context that these janitorial and sanitation jobs are for minorities. Such biased representation of minorities by media chips away at the dignity of minorities and entrenches harmful stereotypes, shaping public perceptions that increases the vulnerability and marginalization these groups (George, 2025).

There is no doubt, the successive government has taken some positive protective measures; however, owing to the weak implementation these measures never be able to achieve the required goal. An affirmative measure for the socio-economic empowerment of religious minorities, five percent job quota, is formally reserved for minorities. Yet, it rests only on an administrative notification – without any legal framework or a comprehensive monitoring mechanism (Sohail, 2022). In practice, this quota is [often] filled through low-ranking posts in sanitation, maintenance, healthcare, or support services in educational institutions. When it comes to decision-making roles, minorities remain largely excluded from these avenues. This is the reason; such exclusion as from decision-making platform has made them visible at the bottom rung of the socio-political hierarchy. As John Stuart Mill observed, “The worth of a man is in proportion to the objects he pursues (Mill, 1843).” However, religious minorities in Pakistan are rarely find influential place or authority that would reflect equal status of citizenship.

Minorities in Pakistan are still struggling to define their existence and to persuade the broader society that they are the sons and daughters of this soil, firmly rooted in its history and destiny, rather than outsiders or representatives of foreign states (Patras S. , 2022). Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s early gestures clearly reflected a more inclusive vision: he invited Jagannath Azad, a Hindu poet, to write Pakistan’s first national anthem; he presided over the first session of the Constituent Assembly under the leadership of Jogendra Nath Mandal, a member of the Scheduled Castes; and he appointed minority representatives to key administrative and political positions. The deliberate actions to engage the religious minorities in such important political gestures were not mere symbolic acts but a clear message by the ‘father of the nation’ to embed equality in the foundations of the new state. Jinnah’s vision resonated with the principle that a state’s strength lies in its inclusivity. The strategy, being adopted by Jinnah, to engage religious minorities underscored that equality must not remain constitutional rhetoric but be translated into practice. Ill-luck-it-may-be, but over time Jinnah’s vision of welfare state grounded in inclusive governance has been overshadowed by exclusionary politics, religious orthodoxy, and systemic discrimination, that made religious minorities to constantly justify their belonging with the soil.

1.2. Demographic Profile

Rich diversity, in terms of ethnic and religious, along with rapid population growth are some majore factors that contribute to shape the landscape of civil and political liberties. According to the data of Census 2023, Table 1.1, Muslims constitute 96.28% of the population. On the other hand, Christians (1.59%) and Hindus (1.60%) appear as the two largest minority groups, followed by Ahmadis (0.22%), Scheduled Castes (0.25%), and others (0.07%).

Regarding the provincial breakdown of the population, Punjab has the highest percentage of Muslims at 97.21%, followed by Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (99.44%) and Balochistan (98.75%) while Sindh records the lowest proportion at 91.31%. Sindh, however, stands out as the province with the largest Hindu population (6.51%), in contrast to Punjab where Christians (2.31%) form the most significant minority group.

PROVINCE	Muslim (%)	Christian (%)	Hindu (%)	Ahmadi (%)	Scheduled Castes (%)	Others (%)
Punjab	97.21	2.31	0.13	0.25	0.03	0.07
Sindh	91.31	0.97	6.51	0.14	0.99	0.08
Balochistan	98.75	0.40	0.49	0.15	0.10	0.10
Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa	99.44	0.21	0.03	0.24	*	0.08
Pakistan (Total)	96.28	1.59	1.60	0.22	0.25	0.07

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2023 Via Population by Religion

None-the-less, in a case study of Pakistan, the overwhelming majority of the Muslim community [96.28 per cent on average scale] has institutionalized a majoritarian ethos that erodes the very concept of liberal pluralism. Though Christians form a significant portion of the population in Punjab, over two percent of the population, they remain disproportionately relegated to stigmatized forms of labour such as sanitation work, where social stratification meets religious identity to limit the ability to rise the social ladder and be represented.

In a similar vein, the Hindu community in Sindh, despite its majority of more than six percent, is often a victim of marginalization by being represented in the form of tokenism in reserved seats instead of being absorbed in mainstream party politics. In the terms of the state repression theory, such exclusion is not incidental, but a constitutional fact: Ahmadis, despite their small numbers, are constitutionally disenfranchised and systematically denied recognition of their religious identity, underscoring how the state itself acts as an agent of repression rather than a guarantor of rights. The Scheduled Castes, who are mostly concentrated in Sindh, face such secondary levels of discrimination [both caste and religious] that reduces their socio-political bargain power although their demographic strength is quantifiable. Therefore, the political economy of religious freedom in Pakistan can be defined as the phenomenon of what can be called as the invisibility of the demographics, in other words, minorities are present in numbers, yet these groups lack access to power and resources as well as recognition. Here, the liberal promise of equal citizenship fails under the pressure of majoritarian hegemony and the apparatus of state repression so that the minorities may be symbolically recognized and yet marginalized in fact, the effect of the interplay of demography, political economy and institutional design is of considerable importance to the precarious condition of religious freedom.

2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY:

Through successive political developments, the debate of civil and political liberties – particularly the context of religious freedom – in Pakistan demonstrate how institutional arrangements work hand in glove to shape the everyday realities of civil and political liberties for minorities.

A truly lawful state is one in which agents of the state remain bound by, and compelled to uphold, the very laws they enforce. There is no doubt, the article 25 of Constitution of Pakistan promises equal rights to all citizens; however, state apparatus and successive governments failed to full fill the promise of equal status of citizenship. Notwithstanding the reserved quotas in politics and jobs, religious minorities in Pakistan are striving for their equal status of citizenship. The misconceptions associated with and misinterpretation of apostasy, have laid a foundation to misuse of sacrilegious laws – with vague definition and stringent penalties. Such context increases the likelihood to abuse, where mere allegations could endanger hundreds of lives of the religious minorities.

So far as the role of the state is concerned, it meant for protection and ensuring equality, dignity, and freedom of religion. The deliberate negligence of authorities and political decision-makers in dislodging extremism and establishing such arrangements as to prevent misuse of laws has unleashed the extremists’ groups to decide about the fate of the minorities in the country. The rising graph of forced religious conversion of minority girls, mob attacks on Christian settlements, desecration of worship places belonging to Ahmadi, and lynching are the instances of such claim. In all these patterns of discrimination and social injustices, it is obvious that sacrilegious laws with vague definitions, forced conversions of minority girls, the practice of dedicating janitorial jobs to minorities are interconnected drivers of exclusion, and leaving religious minorities sandwiched between constitutional guarantees and systemic discrimination.

The existing socio-political and socio-cultural context of religious freedom in Pakistan highlights that the sincere efforts to protect minorities are at discount and the situation is crying for un-failed efforts – with strong political will to translate the constitutional guarantees into practical actions. In this circumstance such measures are inevitable as promoting inclusive dialogue, and as contributing to strengthen accountability mechanisms. It is

also important to ensure prima facie safety and security – of minorities – and to establish, de jure and de facto, arrangement to: (a) ensure equal access to justice, (b) unbiased education incorporating the concept of inclusivity, and (c) meaningful participation in public life for minorities. Nothing short of enacting and implementing laws and policies aimed at curbing the trends of religious intolerance. Particularly, the misuse of blasphemy laws, forced conversion and incitement to religious hatred – coupled with proportionate sanctions. In addition to it, without a comprehensive mechanism to monitor and regulate such extremist's outlet engaged in inciting mob-violence, to expect protection of minorities from abuse, strengthened oversight of security forces, and trained officials capacitated enough to prevent abuse is the futile exercise. In societies marked by polarization, such like Pakistan, formal and informal authorities, can either channel public resentment and frustration into violence or help to defuse it. Eventually, the state must not compromise the mob violence, instead uphold the rule of law, guarantee equal citizenship.

3. SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE

The mounting scale of intolerance among youth in Pakistan, and further frequent events of vandalizing Christian settlements, desecration of Ahmadi's worship places, lynching, forced conversion of minority girls, and workplace discrimination with minority workers, arrested the attentions of scholarly, journalistic, and policy attention.

The subject matter of civil and political liberties has not been confined to academia; sociologists, political scientists, and international relations experts have produced a substantial *corpus* of analysis. Universities, in toto, have encouraged research scholars to undertake in-depth and priori studies on the subject. Simultaneously, numerous columnists and analysts have enriched this debate by writing articles highlighting the challenges faced by religious minorities, thereby broaden the intellectual landscape on this critical issue.

In order to produce this analysis, the researcher has consulted various point views and material to comprehend the issue, understanding the severity of issue, and further observing the general perception about it.

In this regard, the international human rights instruments – particularly Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and the mechanism of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) – are worth mentioning as they establish guidelines and parameters for framing discussions aiming at addressing the issues concerning religious minorities in Pakistan.

Building on the existing body of literature, it becomes evident that in the context of the political economy of religious freedom, the term “minority” in a pluralistic society such as Pakistan [culturally and religiously diverse] requires further elucidation. The term ‘Minority’ has continued to evolve over time in tandem with changing socio-political and legal contexts. The definition of minorities provided by former Special Rapporteur Capotorti in his study *on the Rights of Persons belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* for the UN Sub-commission on Prevention of discrimination and Protection of Minorities can be considered (Capotorti, 1979). However, Deschenes (1985) raises concerns over it and suggested key changes to Capotorti's definition of minorities, notably replacing ‘nationals’ with ‘citizens’ and ‘numerically inferior’ with ‘constituting a numerical minority’ (Deschenes, 1985).

Furthermore, the definition's focus on numerical inferiority overlooked cases like apartheid South Africa, where the black majority, though dominant in numbers, was politically disadvantaged. Such groups were described as ‘reversed’ or ‘racial-political’ minorities, requiring complex anti-apartheid measures linked to self-determination rather than conventional minority protections. Capotorti take the minorities as “*A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members-being nationals of the state-poses ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, and religion or language.*”

Another significant debate related to Francesco Capotorti's definition is the restrictive reference to ‘minorities by will’, which can be referred to as voluntary minorities that demand to maintain their distinctive cultures, languages and religions leading to prevention of discrimination. The definition does not comprise of ‘minorities by force’ who are involuntary minorities that demands only a guarantee of non-discrimination to speed up their integration into the wider society, leading to protection of minorities (Thornberry, 1991).

In Pakistan, the concept of minorities by will and by force is a matter of concerns. For instance, the Ahmadi Community became minorities by force who want the protection of their rights and integration in the wider society, while the non-Muslims are minorities by will who are struggling to maintain their distinctive identities to prevent discrimination.

Thus, the debate around the term minority suggests, “a group of citizens constituting a numerical minority, living in a disempowered status who face different kinds of obstacles to perform their day-to-day affairs owing to their distinct ethnic, religious, gender or linguistic identities.”

Therefore, the attributes of the minorities, in the contemporary context, when viewed through a thorough review of international debates and the political economy of Pakistan, can be elaborated as, living in a non-dominant status, disadvantaged and vulnerable position, who are endowed with ethnic, religious, gender or linguistic characteristics, including social, voluntary and involuntary minorities, which differs from others of the population,

having a sense of solidarity with one another directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, gender identity, religious sentiments or language along with protection and prevention from any form of discrimination.”

Whiling navigating through international agreements, specifically UDHR, ICCPR, ICERD and UPR, it has been observed that, in one way or another, state authorities and political decision makers compromise human rights values in favour of national interests. Often, such coercive measures are justified under the umbrella of sovereignty. With respect to sovereignty in contemporary nation-state model, it is typically vested in the people or the state, exercised through elected representatives and institutions within defined territorial boundaries. Since the contemporary religious sentiments and intolerance are rooted back in colonial era on this land. Copley’s analysis, with respect to it, demonstrates the religious freedom in South Asia has historically been entangled with identity politics, majority/minority consciousness, and resistance to cultural domination. He elaborated on the missionary rhetoric and ambiguous stances contributed to escalate the vulnerability among religious groups. This context established a context “minority” or “majority” not in a manner of numbers but in relation to power, influence, and cultural survival. This consciousness regarded freedom as a struggle for recognition, dignity, and protection against forced assimilation or marginalization (Copley, 1999).

Viewed through this lens, it is crystal clear, if state enforce religion-specific laws or discriminatory policies, disregarding the shared spiritual values and composite heritage, it disrupts the socio-economic fabric. Ahmad Salim’s study (Salim A. , 2010) claims that such context, as mentioned, draws parallels between spiritual values and the material consequences of intolerance. For instance, workplace discrimination, biased curricula, and symbolic space at political arena.

In light of these discussions, one cannot disregard the standpoint of Langer and Brown particularly when calibrating political economy of religious freedom, and need for reforms to heal the wounds of minorities inflicted by the religious-specific laws and policies. Langer and Brown (Langer & Brown, 2016) argued that inclusive institutions, equitable socio-economic opportunities, and carefully sequenced reforms are essential for sustainable peace and for addressing the issues of marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Their framework emerges from post-conflict studies which is quite relevant with the context of political economy of religious freedom in Pakistan especially in the context of religious intolerance, mob-violence, and lynching. It offers a valuable lens for examining how religious freedom is undermined when minorities are excluded from jobs, education, and political representation.

In nutshell, the exercise of survey of literature help to trace the right thread, much like a weaver, from the mess of debates and contradictions to piece together a coherent understanding of the political economy of religious freedom in Pakistan.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The primary concentration of this research paper is on identifying recurring patterns of the mob-violence on religious settlements using the sacrilegious laws and identifying the factors that are strengthening the trends of mob-violence and street trials – particularly in cases of blasphemy when it is associated with non-Muslim communities. Simultaneously, the study is further providing a perspective civil and political freedom in Pakistan in the light of constitutional guarantees and role of the law-enforcement authorities and institutions to respond these issues that establish a concept of second-class citizens.

The evidence-based insights further amplifies its significance as this research study has identified multiple factors and explains how institutions, policies and social practices establish conducive circumstances for fanatics and extremists’ outlet. On the other hand, practical knowledge, factual data, and case study method further the additional attributes that aims at guiding them to corrective measures to reverse the discrimination and ensuring social inclusion of religious minorities. In nutshell, the research study brings out the urgency of change and the need to take societal responsibility because protecting religious freedom is not just a promise stipulated in the constitution, but a condition toward social harmony, social stability, and sustainable growth.

5. MATERIAL AND METHOD:

This study employs a qualitative research design, drawing on descriptive and case study approaches, while incorporating supportive quantitative data where available. The research study counted on issue of religious intolerance, forced conversions, and workplace discrimination in Punjab, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of social, legal, and institutional dynamics. The descriptive section provides a comprehensive explanation of who, what, where, and how these problems exist, and the case study approach looks at the main events which demonstrate greater structural trends.

The discussion follows a thematic approach that brings out common themes of exclusion, manipulation of the law and socio-economic marginalization. Categories and themes emerge out of the data themselves, rather than the preexisting theory, which makes the findings always remain evidence driven. This inductive approach provides methodological knowledge concerning the interaction of law, religion, and power.

The theoretical framework of the study is the political economy of religious freedom. This is one of the lenses that can be used to understand how legal structures, institutional arrangements, and socio-economic inequalities

contribute to religious intolerance. It does not just emphasize legal and cultural dimensions of exclusion, but also the governance and resource allocation processes that contribute to the development of discrimination.

5.1. Blasphemy Legislation in the Muslim World

The political economy of religious freedom in Pakistan, shaped by its blasphemy laws, is defined by exceptionally stringent provisions, particularly the mandatory death penalty under Section 295-C, whereas other Muslim-majority states display greater diversity in scope and severity.

Country	Legal Status of Blasphemy Law	Maximum Punishment (Prison/Fine)	Death Mandatory?
Indonesia	Criminalized under Article 156(a)	Up to 5 years prison, fine	No
Egypt	Criminalized under Article 98(f)	Up to 5 years prison, fine	No
Turkey	Insulting religious values (Art. 216)	Up to 1 year prison, fine	No
Jordan	Penal Code Article 273	Up to 3 years prison, fine	No
Malaysia	Penal Code Section 298A	Up to 5 years prison, fine	No
Bangladesh	Penal Code Section 295A	Up to 2 years prison, fine	No
Nigeria	Penal Code (Northern States)	Up to 2 years prison, fine	No (rarely in Sharia courts)
Tunisia	Penal Code Article 121(3)	Up to 3 years prison, fine	No
Morocco	Penal Code Article 220	Up to 3 years prison, fine	No
Saudi Arabia	No code; prosecuted under Sharia	Discretionary (imprisonment, lashes, fine; rarely death)	No (death rare; usually imprisonment, lashes, or fine)
UAE	Penal Code Article 312, 313	Up to 7 years prison, fine	No
Bahrain	Penal Code Article 309, 310	Up to 1 year prison, fine	No
Qatar	Penal Code Article 256, 257	Up to 7 years prison, fine	No

Source: <https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/>

In countries such like Indonesia, Egypt, Malaysia, and Jordan, blasphemy is criminalized under penal code provisions. However, punishment under these allegations generally range from one to five years' imprisonment or fines, and no death penalty is administered. Likewise, Bangladesh, Tunisia, Morocco, and Turkey are in a similar state of having blasphemy or religious insult laws, but maximum penalties remain limited to short prison terms or monetary sanctions. Blasphemy is a crime that is only considered as a problem in Nigeria in the Sharia focused states. This is not enforced and is not federalized.

Saudi Arabia has not set down codified penal codes; instead, prosecutions are carried out under Sharia law with punishments determined at judicial discretion. Imprisonment, lashes or fines are the usual penalty granted by the judiciary with death sentencing hardly publicized. Similarly, the Gulf countries, UAE, Bahrain and Qatar, also criminalize blasphemy in their penal legislation but typically provide fines. Death penalty is not compulsory. A case of blasphemy involving an expatriate in the UAE in 2013 was resolved with a fine and deportation, rather than an execution. Such precedent demonstrates how the the Gulf bring their laws into line with broader Islamic and international practices.

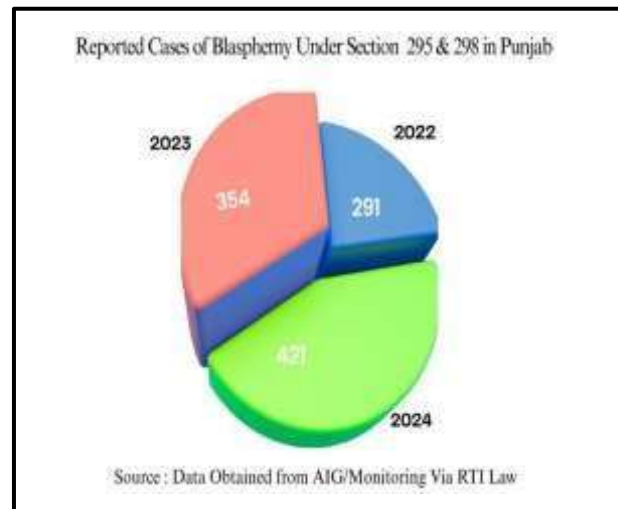
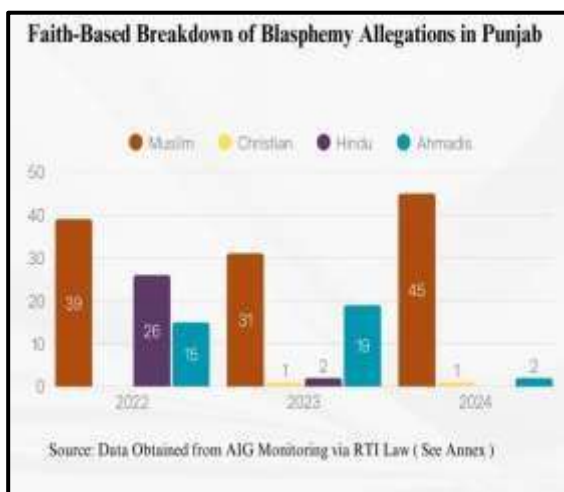
In sum, these diverse trends of legitimization of blasphemy point out that PPC Sections 295 and 298 of the Constitution of Pakistan can be regarded as a unique example, in which the punishment option is inconsistent with the general Islamic norms.

5.2. Demographics of Intolerance

The pattern of demographic dominance, where a single group holds majority, has **increased the** marginalization of religious minorities in both symbolic and structural terms. The numerical presence of minority groups has often

been **used to** justify exclusionary practices in the political discourse and further strengthened a narrative that question their equal status in the country. Consequently, blasphemy laws and related legal provisions have **ended up being** disproportionately applied against these small communities, mounting their vulnerability. Over time, the consolidation of an overwhelming Muslim population has **contributed in the rise of religious as well as political** intolerance. This factor also called majority–minority relations into question, dislodging the concept of peaceful coexistence and replacing it with structural inequality, securitization of religious identity, and susceptibility of minorities to charges under blasphemy laws.

The sharp rise of religious intolerance has been observed in Punjab where the frequent incident of vandalizing Christian settlements, desecration of Ahmadi’s places of worship and graveyards, and forced religious conversion of Christian and Hindu girls. Statistical data from 2022 to 2024 on reported blasphemy cases illustrates the political economy of religious freedom. A sharp rise regarding the blasphemy cases observed in the year 2023 with almost 6000 individuals accused. This surge highlights volatility blasphemy laws. In addition, the impunity granted to perpetrators further demonstrates the biased attitude of law-enforcers that created an insecure context for the religious minorities. Though Muslims form the largest number of accused in absolute terms, religious minorities [particularly Christians and Ahmadis] remain disproportionately vulnerable given their small demographic share. This disparity reflects the broader context of religious freedom, in which blasphemy provisions operate not only as legal instruments but also as tools of social coercion, reinforcing intolerance and sustaining an environment of systemic persecution.



5.3. The Context of Sacrilegious Laws in Pakistan:

Since 1973, Pakistan’s history has been marked by efforts to transform a welfare state into a theocratic one. Religion was excessively injected into nearly every sphere of governance, contaminating public consciousness and gradually building a narrative that excluded religious minorities from the social fabric. The insertion of Article 2A into the Constitution, incorporated the Objectives Resolution of 1949, which guaranteed minorities the right to ‘freely’ profess and practice their religion. However, when reproduced, the word ‘freely’ was deliberately omitted (Khan H. , 2017), weakening constitutional protections for religious liberty. Though during the 18th Amendments to the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973, the word ‘freely’ restored, the term ‘Legitimate Rights of Minorities’ still un-addressed (Khan H. , The Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Amendments to the Consitution (2010-2011), 2017). Later, the enactment of blasphemy laws, with vague definition, enabled extremist elements to influence social conduct. Collectively, these factors have compromised the social harmony, national unity and deepened the divide between majority and minority.

5.4. Trend of Mob Violence and Judicial Failure

Through the political economy of religious freedom, these cases- from Shanti Nagar in 1997, Gojra in 2009, Jaranwala in 2023, to Sargodha in 2024 illustrate a continuum of judicial complicity that has systematically undermined minority protections in Pakistan. In each case, the failures of the judiciary, either in the form of lack of prosecutions in Shanti Nagar, the victim-blaming discourses in Gojra, the acquittals and negligence of incitement in Jaranwala, or the failings in FIRs and allowing bails in Sargodha, can be seen as the working of the legal institutions in, and even constitutive of, majoritarian religious pressures. This pattern explains that judicial behavior is not merely a matter of legal weakness but it is a structural result of a political economy where protecting religious sentiment is given priority over minority rights. Such responses stand in stark contradiction to the constitutional guarantee of equality before the law under Article 25, which affirms equal protection for all citizens regardless of religion. By normalizing impunity, judicial institutions are destroying this constitutional promise, reinforcing the unequal distribution of power and protection between religious communities, and perpetuating an environment in which minorities remain vulnerable to mob violence and systematic exclusion.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

The available data related to sacrilegious laws in Punjab exposes the social trends and judicial practices towards religious minorities. The recurring patterns of persecution of minority community reveals that the rule of law tends to break down when particular classes of citizens cannot rely on the same avenues of redress as their neighbors. The analysis under this research study further underpins that religious freedom is not merely a legal issue but part of a larger system of exclusion. The findings echo core element of rule of law theory, which emphasizes that the legitimacy of a legal order hinges upon the equality before law. While navigating through various incidents of religious intolerance, mob-violence and legal safe guards, it has been noted that impunity to perpetrators of mob-violence has strengthened such culture of street trials in the allegations of blasphemy.

With regarding to patterns of social exclusion and treatment of second class citizens with minorities, it is evident that minorities are often sidelined through tokenistic representation, in politics, keeps them on the margins of decision-making. In a similar vein, socio-cultural dimension, stereotypes and discriminating policies relegate minorities to stigmatized roles like janitorial jobs, while restricting their participation in mainstream professions. With respect to socio-economic inclusion, minorities are not allowed to run businesses – particularly in the food industry – where social biases and discriminatory practices reinforce their exclusion and vulnerability. In addition, on the socio-religious front, the dominance of religion-preferred laws and the misuse of blasphemy propagate a culture of fear in which forced conversions, and mob violence are condoned and not prosecuted. These trends, as mentioned, indicate that religious freedom is not just a legal issue but part of a broader system of exclusion, where power, resources, and accounts are not distributed equally, and minorities are left insecure.

There is no doubt, the state cannot interfere with the internal discipline of a religious body, but can consider the influence of communal convictions which shape conduct in the public sphere and safeguard the legal persona of religious groups against violence or threat. In the case study of Pakistan, the state has often handed out humanitarian aid and rehabilitation services yet turned a blind eye to address the grievances in holistic manner. Mere avoidance of discrimination is not enough; special measures is necessary to safeguard the rights of minorities and maintain their identity and culture as defined in Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and in the UN Declaration on the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities. In the case study of Jaranwala, while churches have been repaired and homes reconstructed, those behind mob violence are seldom brought to book. Without fixing the root causes of disparity and fanaticism, which are highly political, there will be no tolerance to diversity and safeguarding of religious minorities. Political solutions, though, are often elusive, especially when we are dealing with an open conflict or when our political attachment is grounded in religion and ethnicity. To genuinely uphold minority rights, the state should go beyond tokenism and handle the issues of justice, accountability, and compliance with its international obligations.

The study under review identifies five patterns of persecution:

- First, targeted killings, carried out almost entirely by extremists and radicalized mobs, have killed members of vulnerable groups such as the Hazara and Ahmadi communities, showing how violence has been allowed to spiral out of control;
- Second, forcible conversions of Christian and Hindu girls remain a defining feature of religious persecution, with recurring cases underscoring the systemic nature of this violation;
- Third, abductions of minority women and girls are frequently employed as a vehicle for sexual violence and coerced conversions, leaving families shattered and communities living in fear;
- Fourth, the desecration of worship places of religious minorities and establishing derogatory terms and dedicated janitorial jobs. Attacks on Christian settlements and the desecration of Ahmadi places of worship unravel the fabric of social coexistence and reveal how sacred spaces are transformed into arenas of violence; and
- Fifth, false allegation of blasphemy lies in the punishment of alleged blasphemy, where Pakistan's sacrilegious laws have empowered extremists to settle scores and silence dissent, effectively granting them a licence to kill.

These patterns also expose the deliberate negligence of the state to address the issue related to religious freedom and stand in clear violation of Pakistan's obligations under the ICCPR, Article 2 related to respect and ensure rights without discrimination, Article 18 on religious freedom, and Article 27 on the rights of minorities. These patterns also breach Article 5 of the ICERD, which requires states to guarantee equality before the law in the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The state's behaviour turning a blind eye to such patterns not only abandons its minorities but also erodes the very principles of equal protection and accountability that international human rights law is built upon.

The progressive and regressive judicial trends to deal with the affairs related to religious minorities demonstrate that religious freedom in Pakistan cannot be secured through symbolic measures alone but requires structural reforms, sincere political will, and un-failed efforts for compliance with international human rights obligations.

7. CONCLUSION

This research paper peeps into look into the extent to which religious freedom is influenced by economic and political factors, the rights of minority religions as well as their entitlement to participate in community matters. The issue is difficult to define since the constitution offers equality and dignity, but systemic discrimination, impunity, and exclusionary politics are still present. This leads to the marginalization of minorities in virtually all

spheres of life, including social, political and economic ones. The objective of the study is to reveal the barriers that minorities encounter in taking part and representation, which ought to inform the development of specific participation systems. Evolution of state and religion relation demonstrates the blending of religion in government policy through law and political bargaining.

Hence, such social and political environment gives way to the utilization of abusive laws, coercive conversions, and lynching as the means of coercion. The way institutions are torn between constitutional pledges, on the one hand, and the majority pressure, on the other, leads to even more fear and mistrust, and it is all revealed in the courts, which are trying to push progress forward or hold fast to tradition. Minorities in Pakistan cannot enjoy full participation in the decision-making process because they are often limited to low-paid, stigmatized positions in society. Simultaneously, school curricula and media are biased, which contributes to the notion that they are excluded.

Some of the major UN treaties that have been ratified by Pakistan include ICCPR, ICERD and CEDAW. These agreements compel the state to prevent discrimination of the minorities in political life and to make practical measures which would enable the religious minorities to enjoy their fundamental freedoms. These International agreements provide a better platform on how to safeguard minorities and assist them in achieving real equality in political involvement.

Such commitments, combined with the internal demands of reform, testify to the fact that something more radical is required, such as mending the legal loopholes, reinforcing institutions, and encouraging inclusive citizenship. The evaluation cautions that unless the authorities break the tradition of impunity and stop viewing pluralism as an element of governance, persecution will continue to develop. This will not only undermine minority rights but also the moral and democratic basis of the country.

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