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World Watch Research

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# Pakistan: Persecution Dynamics

December 2024



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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## World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

## World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

## Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- Persecution dynamics (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

## Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

## Brief country details

Pakistan: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
245,210,000	4,526,000	1.8

*Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024*

Pakistan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	4,526,000	1.8
Muslim	233,815,000	95.4
Hindu	3,413,000	1.4
Buddhist	131,000	0.1
Ethnic religionist	252,000	0.1
Jewish	920	0.0
Bahai	135,000	0.1
Atheist	11,700	0.0
Agnostic	357,000	0.1
Other	2,568,000	1.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

## Map of country



## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Pakistan: Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups
Organized corruption and crime	Government officials, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Organized crime cartels or networks, Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties
Clan oppression	Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Government officials, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Ethnic group leaders, One's own (extended) family

*Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.*

### Brief description of the persecution situation

Christians make up less than 2% of the population of Pakistan, while over 95% are Muslim in what, since independence in 1947, is a Muslim state. It is within that context that Christians experience increasing levels of persecution. Historical churches have had relative freedom for worship and other activities, however, they are heavily monitored and subjected to increasing restrictions. Churches more involved in missionary activities and youthwork face severer rights violations in society, especially when these violations benefit the Muslim majority. All Christians suffer from institutionalized discrimination, illustrated by the fact that occupations seen as low, dirty and denigrating are reserved for Christians by the authorities, as can be seen, for example, in job announcements.

The country's notorious blasphemy laws target religious minorities (including Muslim minorities), but affect the Christian minority in particular - roughly a quarter of all blasphemy accusations target Christians. The number of blasphemy cases is increasing as is the number of Christian (and other minority religion) girls being abducted, abused and forcefully converted to Islam. In 2023, the Senate passed a bill to [tighten](#) the country's notorious blasphemy law by (among other things) increasing the punishment for those charged from three to ten years' imprisonment (Dawn, 8 August 2023). This in turn is further encouraging vigilante attacks on Christians. In the city of Jaranwala in August 2023, after false blasphemy allegations were made against 2 Christians, up to 21 churches were burned or damaged and hundreds of Christians fled their settlement. One year on, Amnesty International notes that "despite the authorities' assurances of accountability, the grossly inadequate action has allowed a [climate of impunity](#) for the perpetrators of the Jaranwala violence" (Morning Star, 19 August 2024).

Although the new government coalition established in February 2024 seems to have settled in, the political tug-of-war between the government and the opposition is not over. Politics in Pakistan is and

remains highly polarized; this in turn could lead to religious minorities like Christians facing increased pressure and attacks.

## Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Pakistan has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Pakistan is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- Christians are pressured by their community to renounce their faith (ICCPR Art. 18)
- Christian women and girls are abducted, raped and gangraped (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christian girls are forced to marry their abductor and converted by force (ICCPR Art. 23; CEDAW Art. 16 and ICESCR Art. 10)
- Christian girls are trafficked into slave labor and sex trade (CRC Art. 34 and ICCPR Art. 8)
- Christians are falsely accused, charged of blasphemy and sentenced to death (ICCPR Art. 19)
- Christians are assumed to take jobs that are considered “dishonorable” and “low” because of their faith (ICCPR Art. 26 and ICESCR Art 11)

## Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

The list of specific examples of violations of rights listed here is far from exhaustive, but serves to illustrate the significant levels of hostility that Christians are facing.

- **18 September 2024:** A Christian mother of four children was [sentenced to death](#) for blasphemy, having forwarded content on a WhatsApp group that was considered disrespectful to Islam's Prophet (Morning Star News, 19 September 2024).
- **9 August 2024:** A 12-year-old Christian girl was [abducted](#), forcibly converted and married to a Muslim (Morning Star News, 28 August 2024)
- **13 April 2024:** A 13 year old boy from Lahore was forced to swallow an unknown substance by a security guard in an attempt to [poison](#) him after he refused to be converted (Asia News, 20 April 2024).
- **8 April 2024:** An influential opposition politician tried to [evict](#) 60 Christian families from an area in Akbarabad neighborhood, Faisalabad district (Asia News, 8 April 2024).
- **30 March 2024:** [Arson](#) destroyed the interior of the United Presbyterian Junior Church in the Gujar Khan area, Rawalpindi district (Morning Star News, 1 April 2024).
- **23 March 2024:** A farm laborer from Faisalabad asked for his wages and was [beaten up](#) by his Muslim employer and shot in the leg (Morning Star News, 5 April 2024).

- **17 March 2024:** Two Christian sewage workers [died](#) while they were cleaning a sinkhole and sewerage in front of the Sapphire Marquee Wedding Hall in Faisalabad district, Punjab province (Asia News, 19 March 2024).
- **12 March 2024:** New religious and legal opinions provide hope for a 70 year-old man, who has been on [death row](#) for years after being arrested in 2001 on blasphemy charges (Morning Star News, 25 March 2024)
- **6 March 2024:** 18 year old man was [arrested](#) after being accused of blasphemy by a former classmate. On 14 March, the court ordered his release on bail (Morning Star News, 15 March 2024).
- **20 February 2024:** A court in Bahawalnagar acquitted a man of blasphemy charges on the grounds of double jeopardy. Nevertheless, he remains on [death row](#) for his conviction in the first blasphemy case (Morning Star News, 28 February 2024).
- **12 February 2024:** Three Christian homes in Chak 6/11-L village in Sahiwal District, Punjab Province were [attacked](#) with gunshots and petrol bombs (Morning Star News, 15 February 2024).
- **10 February 2024:** A 72 year-old Christian from Jaranwala area, Faisalabad district, Punjab province, was accused of blasphemy and [arrested](#). In a rare move, the court acquitted him five days later, after the Christian accuser had admitted to have acted out of personal motives (Morning Star News, 15 February 2024).
- **24 January 2024:** 56 year-old man was [sentenced](#) to life-imprisonment for committing blasphemy by a court in Lahore (Morning Star News, 19 February 2024).
- **22 January 2024:** Two brothers from Sialkot district were [abducted](#), beaten and forced to recite the Islamic conversion creed (Morning Star News, 1 February 2024).
- **9 November 2023:** A 20 year-old man was [shot](#) in his house in Talwandi Inayat Khan village, Sialkot district, Punjab province, by a Muslim who had professed hatred against Christians and Jews before (Morning Star News, 24 November 2023).
- **Abductions:** Reports about abductions still happen frequently. One example is a 10 year-old girl from Faisalabad who was [kidnapped](#) on 12 February 2024 (Morning Star News, 11 March 2024). Other examples include a 13 year old girl from Multan, who was [kidnapped](#) on 13 March 2024 (Morning Star News, 21 March 2024) and a 15 year-old girl from Tando Ghulam Ali town in Badin district, Sindh province [went missing](#) on 11 March 2024 (Morning Star News, 26 April 2024).
- **Forced conversion:** A forced conversion bill stalled in parliament, although research showed an [increase](#) of 177% of such cases against religious minorities in 2020 (UCA News, 18 October 2021). Although the challenges of forced conversion are [recognized](#) more widely, Pakistan's politics seem impossible to change (LSE Religion and Global Society Blog, 8 December 2022). Six special rapporteurs of the United Nations wrote and published a [letter](#) to Pakistan's government on the practice of forced marriages and conversions on 26 October 2022. So far, no answer has been made public. On 11 April 2024, they reiterated their [statement](#) (Morning Star News, 12 April 2024). It remains to be seen whether the efforts being made to raise the marriage age in Punjab province will succeed (see above: *Brief description of the persecution situation*) and actually lead to implementation.

## Specific examples of positive developments

- **15 April 2024:** A High Court Justice in Lahore declared Punjab province's marriage act of 1929 as discriminatory, as the legal age for marriage for men is 18, while for women, it is 16 (Morning Star News, 24 April 2024). On 25 April, Punjab parliament tabled for debate a draft bill aiming to raise the marriage age for women (Morning Star News, 1 May 2024). It remains to be seen if the draft becomes law and how it will be implemented.
- **13 February 2024:** The Supreme Court re-ordered an independent investigation into the Jaranwala attacks which occurred in August 2023. It also continued its own hearings (Dawn, 13 April 2024).
- **22 January 2024:** In an official notification, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training approved a new curriculum, which makes studying Islam non-compulsory for Christian, Bahai, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Zoroastrian students in the Islamic nation (UCA News, 24 January 2024). Although it remains to be seen how this notification will be implemented on the ground, it is an encouraging sign.

Whereas the Catholic Church in Pakistan is homogenous, the Protestant Church is divided into many different denominations, the oldest of which are the Church of Pakistan (part of the Anglican Communion), the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the World Methodist Council and the Presbyterian Church. There are many smaller Protestant denominations present, among them Baptist, Brethren and a variety of Pentecostal churches.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians are not forced into isolation, but they cannot attend churches all over the country; their church attendance is mostly limited to the cities. They are facing high pressure, as their numbers are slowly growing. It is important to keep in mind that they are not only coming from Western countries.

**Historical Christian communities:** The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Pakistan (an interdenominational grouping of historical churches uniting Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran and others) are examples of this category. As the most visible churches, they increasingly face hostilities and experience difficulties in getting permits for certain meetings. They have to put up with strong control and monitoring. As one country expert put it: "They are known for their involvement in social welfare, especially through schools and medical facilities. As they are perceived as being less likely to proselytize than other Christian groups, they are less likely to face adverse reaction among Islamist groups."

**Converts to Christianity:** As one country expert put it: "The rejection of Islam is a crime punishable by death." Christians with a Muslim background suffer the brunt of religious freedom violations both from radical Islamic groups (who see them as apostates) and from families, friends and neighbors who see conversion as a shameful act of betrayal to family and community. There is also a small community of converts from a Hindu background.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal groups have come under closer scrutiny and are frequently harassed and attacked, especially when they are active in outreach

among Muslims, although most of their growth comes from Christians transferring from the historical churches. They have fewer resources at their disposal than historical churches.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

While there are many political hotspots in Pakistan, particular hotspots of rights violations against Christians are not so obvious. Since by far the most Christians are living in Punjab province, many incidents of persecution, discrimination and intolerance occur there. However, next to Punjab, the province of Sindh is also notorious for being a hotspot for bonded labor, affecting many Christians as well. As the "Specific examples of violations of rights" section above shows, even in provinces like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa incidents of violent persecution are taking place.

## Position on the World Watch List

Pakistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	87	8
WWL 2024	87	7
WWL 2023	86	7
WWL 2022	87	8
WWL 2021	88	5

The very high and extremely high scores for pressure in the individual spheres of life virtually stayed unchanged. This confirms the fact that Pakistan continues to be one of the countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian. The violence score has stayed at the maximum level for many years now. Violence against Christians does not only include widely publicized attacks against the Christian community, such as in Jaranwala in August 2023, but small scale, localized but increasingly persistent killings and attacks on Christians and churches, often associated with the country’s notorious blasphemy laws, which have been expanded in scope and punishment. Christian girls continue to be particularly vulnerable to abduction, forceful conversion and marriage to older, Muslim men.

## Persecution engines

Pakistan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Weak
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all

Pakistan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

### Islamic oppression (Very strong), blended with Clan oppression (Strong)

Pakistan is experiencing an increasingly Islamizing culture and is home to a plethora of radical Islamic groups. It is difficult to keep track of the different Islamist groups of varying size, names and influence, as they split, merge and re-appear as needed. One of the most recent ones entering the public sphere and claiming the headlines is *Tehreek-e-Labaik* (TLP). The Christian community feels increasingly trapped between these radical groups, the Islamic culture of Pakistani society and a government appeasing these groups. Those who hold a radical perspective based on Wahhabi ideology and who continue to buy into the caliphate theology and treatment of 'infidels', seem to have the strongest voice in society. They firmly identify themselves with supporters of the Islamic State group (IS) and the Taliban, which received a strong boost by the events in neighboring Afghanistan.

The introduction of a 'Single National Curriculum' in schools denigrates religious minorities and enforces the teaching of the Quran and subjects like Mathematics and Science in an Islamized manner. Thus, religion is permeating school education, dividing children and families. Radical Islamic groups are flourishing - despite a continued crackdown on some of them by the army - and are used by various political groups as allies. Their power to mobilize hundreds of thousands of predominantly young people and take them to the streets remains a political tool and offers strong leverage for enforcing political goals. Even efforts to protect underage girls belonging to minority religions from being abducted, forcefully converted and married are hindered and often especially lower courts simply follow the claims made by the perpetrators about the victim's age and free will.

While life expectancy is not very high at 67.3 years, the total fertility rate stands at 3.5. Although these figures are decreasing very slowly, they illustrate huge social challenges. If the fertility rate remains at this level, Pakistan will become the largest Muslim country in the world, overtaking Indonesia, in around 2030. This social structure means that there are huge numbers of young people leaving school, dreaming of a better future. But as the country struggles to give even well-educated youth any hope for good employment, social unrest is likely to build up which in turn paves the way for Islamic militants to lure young people into their groups, where they are given a feeling of worth that they have never had before. Radical Islamic groups and parties woo the general populace with social services and the youth with the offer of good future perspectives (which are otherwise badly lacking in the country). The majority of the population are below 25 years old (and 37% even below 14 years of age) and so there is a great need for the state to be able to provide genuine future prospects for this younger generation. Religious sentiments and resulting mob violence are easily stirred up and are targeted against religious minorities, especially Christians, as the August 2023 example of Jaranwala showed.

Pakistan suffers from ethnic fragmentation, not only in society but also in the country's administration. Balochistan province and the central Sindh regions are traditionally perceived as being beyond the reach of the state authorities. Feudal landowners maintain their own private militias, courts and prisons in parts of rural Sindh and Punjab. Corruption is rampant across the country. All this affects the generally unprotected Christian minority in Pakistan. Throughout the country, Christians and other religious minorities are seen as impure, mainly for religious reasons, but also because they do not belong to the ruling ethnic groups.

### **Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)**

Pakistani politics have always shown a mixture of *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. Every government has had to struggle with opposition, radical groups, a strong independent army pulling strings behind the scenes and corruption charges; as a result, all governments try everything possible to hold on to power, especially as politics in Pakistan has often meant family politics: The PML-N is run by family Sharif (the N in the party's name stands for Nawaz), PPP is run by family Bhutto. When Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to 10 years in prison on corruption charges in July 2018, his brother had already stepped in as candidate to take over his role. In October 2023, Nawaz Sharif [returned from self-exile](#) (CNN, 21 October 2023).

Imran Khan (Chairman of the PTI party and not linked to any of the big families) had filed a case against Prime Minister Sharif because of the leaked Panama Papers pointing to irregularities in the prime minister's personal financial affairs. Imran Khan then became prime minister in August 2018 until April 2022; he has a track record of neglecting and ignoring the plight of (religious) minorities and of wooing certain radical groups. His imprisonment and banning from elected office proved no barrier to his candidates winning a plurality of seats in the February 2024 elections, further [deepening the crisis](#) in Pakistani politics (Journal of Democracy, July 2024) and the insecurity of Christians.

### **Organized corruption and crime (Strong)**

Corruption is rampant in Pakistan at all levels of administration and in the army. The army is deeply entrenched in the country's economy and is a strong competitor in many economic fields. It enjoys unfair advantages which a popular joke about the army illustrates well: "All countries have armies, but here, an army has a country". Although it is difficult to access details, estimations say that the army holds assets valued at around 10 billion USD, including around 5 million hectares of farmland.

Organized crime affects Christians in particular since many of them are poor and without defense, especially in blasphemy cases. Bonded labor is an old form of slavery and is still widespread in certain parts of Pakistan, especially in rural areas. These laborers depend completely on the mercy of their employers and have no way out since they will never be able to pay their loans back due to the high interest rates. They have no legal way of registering complaints and are left without any defense or hope for change in the future. Another way *Organized corruption and crime* plays out is in land-grabbing cases, where either churches or (mainly poor) Christians are simply expropriated and chased away from their land.

A country expert explained: "There is a triangle of persecution that is exacerbated by the addition of criminal gangs and corruption. Government (civil service including police), the local mullah (religious leader of the local mosque) and criminal gangs work together to oppress and abuse the Christian

minority. Beatings are sometimes authorized and supported by the mullah, using local criminal gangs, and the police refuses to protect the community as they are in tacit agreement or they are too afraid to say anything. This is especially true with regards to the land mafia - the criminal gangs with the support of the local police and land offices in the government steal the land with the support of the mullah who gets a percentage of the land sale."

## Drivers of persecution

Pakistan: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			STRONG				VERY STRONG	STRONG
Government officials	Very strong			Strong				Strong	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium			Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong			Strong				Medium	Medium
Violent religious groups	Very strong			Strong				Medium	Very weak
Ideological pressure groups	Very strong			Strong					
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very strong			Strong					Medium
One's own (extended) family	Very strong			Medium					
Political parties	Very strong			Strong				Strong	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Very strong			Strong				Medium	Strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	Weak			Very weak				Weak	Medium

*The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.*

### Drivers of Islamic oppression (blended with Clan oppression)

- **Government officials (Very strong):** In Pakistan the situation of law and order from local to national level is poor, especially where Christians are concerned. Empty and false promises are often made and Christians feel particularly vulnerable. In 2019, the Supreme Court's acquittal of Asia Bibi despite pressure from radical Islamic groups had been seen as a ray of hope. Unfortunately, the number of blasphemy cases has not decreased since then. (Lower) courts also frequently allow forced conversions and marriages of minor girls. All parliamentary efforts to protect religious minorities from forced conversions have failed.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders, violent religious groups and revolutionaries or para-military groups (Very strong):** In Pakistan, several radical Islamic groups under various and at times changing names are gaining influence through being courted by political parties, the army and the government. Some are even forming their own political parties, although with limited success thus far. The army continues to follow a policy of distinguishing between 'good' Taliban and 'bad' Taliban, which is copied by the government, although there is considerable frustration with the Taliban ruling in Kabul. All radical Islamic groups received a boost of confidence when the Taliban took over full control of Afghanistan. As long as the policy of distinguishing does not change, radical Islamic groups will increase in influence, not least by running thousands of madrassas (with no state authority knowing exactly how many there are, what they are teaching or how they are financed). The new 'Single National Curriculum' is expanding the influence of religious leaders and pressure groups. Likewise, some religious leaders are helping men to kidnap, rape and forcibly convert young girls below the age of consent by providing 'marriage certificates'. Increasingly, new quasi-government 'advisory bodies' to the state are completely made up of religious (Islamic) scholars who can direct and influence the government and laws.
- **Political parties and ideological pressure groups (Very strong):** Ideological pressure groups, frequently connected with political parties and Islamic religious groups, exercise enormous pressure and continue to gain influence. There are many pressure groups organized and developed to support and protect the honor of Islam. They see themselves as 'defenders of the faith' (which is also claimed by many political parties) and in doing so are willing to unleash all their energy to silence any group that they see as a threat. This includes the Church, secular forces and any person or organization seeking to change society or bring in better protection for minorities. One country expert summed it up as follows: "All political parties work in partnership with extremist organizations. There is tacit support for their activities in areas of Islamization and economic oppression. This is due to the large voting block they represent at the general elections. There are entire political parties that feed off the political power of these organizations and espouse their beliefs in order to attract them to their party."
- **Extended family (Very strong):** Christians with a Muslim background are facing all the hostile forces mentioned above, but for them, their own families are the greatest danger, since leaving Islam brings great shame to both family and community. Sometimes, even fleeing abroad does not keep the converts safe.
- **Normal citizens (Very strong):** Radical Islamic groups are able to mobilize citizens all across the country, especially the youth, encouraging them to demonstrate against government decisions and stirring them up to act in hate and anger against religious minorities, including Christians. Moderate voices are increasingly being drowned out.

- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** Persecution, discrimination and intolerance is normally related to religious identity but ethnicity can play a role as well. Even though most Christians and Muslims in Pakistan come from the same ethnicities, many Islamic ethnic leaders and their supporters regard Christians as being 'impure' and 'alien'. This can be seen as a heritage of colonial times with its underlying caste system.

### Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Very strong):** As a small and weak group in society, Christians face double vulnerability when it comes to *Organized corruption and crime*. Thousands of Christians are still living in conditions of bonded labor without having any perspective that this could ever end. Many Christians are prone to exploitation as they are poor and bonded labor is a fate that is a reality for many of them, bringing their masters great profit. Rich landlords collude with politicians and local dignitaries (both from religious and political circles), benefitting greatly from this system. A second way government officials can be a driver of this engine is by assisting and rubber-stamping land-grabbing.
- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Strong):** Organized crime is frequently connected to violent Islamic militancy and impacts the electoral and political process in Pakistan and affects the life of Christians. The Haqqani Network, ISKP, *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan*, *Jamaatul Ahrar* (TTP-JA), *Lashkar E Jhangvi*, *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT), *Jaish-e-Mohammed* (JeM), al-Qaeda (among others) can be named in this context. All of these groups were impressed by the swift take-over of government by the Taliban in Afghanistan and at least some may be receiving (tacit) support from groups in the neighboring country. Local organized crime is a big problem in urban parts of Pakistan and in the tribal areas. In Karachi, gangs, extortionists and mafia groups are all part of the landscape. These organizations also have political connections and therefore political patronage. Massive corruption, especially in terms of patron-client relationship, is also rampant in Pakistan and permeates almost every segment of society including the police, courts and politicians.
- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Medium):** Pakistan has a long history of corruption; it is partly driven by the army but has multiple other drivers. Churches are not only attacked and squeezed for political gain, but also out of financial motives. Especially the historical churches often own property in strategic areas like city centers, making them prone to attacks from developers using criminal gangs. Additionally, the continued destruction of church property means that churches are forced to sell property to cover damage expenses. Another way crime cartels act as drivers is in human trafficking, e.g. Christian girls and young women being taken to China.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders, political parties, normal citizens (Medium):** As described above, Pakistan suffers from a closely-knit web of corruption, in which its benefactors help one another, while the weakest pay the price. The weakest are normal citizens, including Christians in particular due to their double vulnerability.

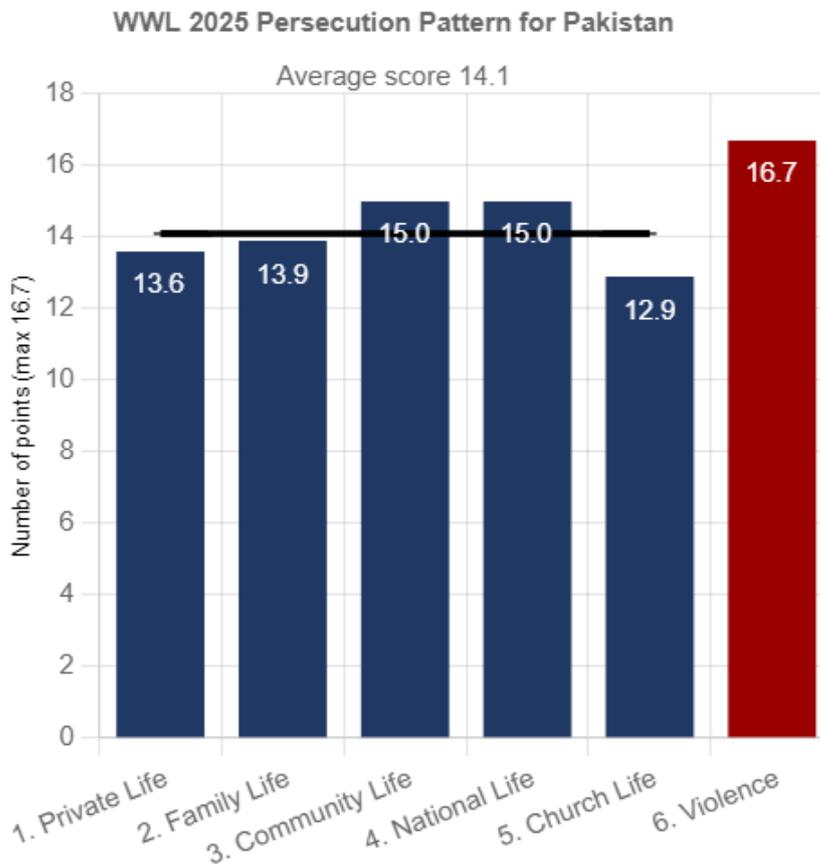
### Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials and political parties (Strong):** As already stated above, for many years politics in Pakistan has been family business, a trend which was only recently broken and is again

back on track. However, whoever is in power in Pakistan tends to cling to it and will do whatever is needed to gain enough support. One strong driver in this is a political player which seldom operates openly: The army. The way the army courts some radical Islamic groups to use them as a tool leads to Christians being targeted by such groups as well. Although the targeting of Christians is not army policy, it is considered as necessary collateral damage.

- **Non-Christian religious leaders, violent religious groups and revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Medium):** Insofar as religious leaders and groups are courted by the government, political parties and the army, they will support them in their struggle to stay in power. If they consider it necessary to act against the Christian minority - or simply continue to discriminate against them - they will do so. Christians quickly become scapegoats or are simply used as a bargaining chip in the political system.

## The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 Persecution pattern for Pakistan shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Pakistan continued so be at an extreme level (with the average continuing at 14.1 points in WWL 2025).
- Pressure is particularly high in the *Community* and *National spheres*. Converts are facing the strongest pressure but Christians in general are regarded as second-class citizens and as 'impure'. They face attacks and have their rights ignored on a regular basis. The blasphemy laws and the Islamist groups 'defending' them remain a major threat to all Christians.

- Violence against Christians continues to be at the maximum level of 16.7 points as has been the case consistently since WWL 2016. Although the attacks in the WWL 2025 reporting period were less high profile than the mob attacks of August 2023 in Jaranwala, they continued (albeit on a smaller scale), as did the abduction of women and girls, rape, forced marriages, evictions from homes and displacements in-country and abroad.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

*In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2025 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.*

### Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

***Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (4.00 points)***

Christians are wary of talking about their faith with Muslims because it can have dangerous consequences. While this is particularly the case for converts, it is true for other Christians as well, especially in the light of the recently expanded blasphemy laws. Any discussion with Muslims about faith could attract a religiously motivated attack against them, their community and their church. A country expert summed it up like this: "It is safe if the extended family and others are Christians, however, for converts from a Muslim or Hindu background it is not safe at all."

***Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.75 points)***

Conversion from Islam is widely considered as apostasy, and runs the risk in some cases of being blasphemous or subject to honor killings. In all cases, there is a cultural rejection of those leaving the faith. This is in stark contrast to when Christians convert to Islam, where there is a celebration and an acceptance by the majority community.

***Block 1.4: It has been risky for Christians to reveal their faith in written forms of personal expression (including expressions in blogs and Facebook etc.). (3.50 points)***

It is dangerous when the written content is seen as opposing or challenging the established teachings and values of Islam. All personal statements - for instance on Facebook - can also be used (and tampered with) in cases concerning the blasphemy law. The authorities and pressure groups are watching the Internet and social media closely, especially for blasphemous content. Because of the fear of misinterpretation and attacks, whether virtual or physical, many Christians avoid expressing their faith by exercising self-censorship. The danger was clearly illustrated in the case of Shagufta Kiran, a Christian mother, of four who was sentenced to death under the blasphemy laws for forwarding content in a WhatsApp group that was considered disrespectful of Islam's Prophet.

**Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)**

Displaying a Christian symbol is a visible trigger and can be a starting-point for the everyday discrimination Christians experience, which in turn can lead to violence. Even just having a Christian name is enough for this to start, as it may hinder moving to a predominantly Muslim neighborhood or starting a business. When an elementary schoolgirl drew crosses in her art book at school, she was mocked and insulted in front of the whole class and her book was thrown into the rubbish bin. A country expert explained: "Even how you say 'goodbye' can identify you as a non-Muslim as most Christians say 'Khuda Hafiz - God protect you', whereas Muslims insist on saying 'Allah Hafiz'. Therefore converts are forced to say 'Allah Hafiz - Allah protect you' to avoid being targeted." Additionally, Christians often face damage to their personal property where they display Christian symbols, e.g. on cars etc. Reports of Christians wearing a cross being spat at and targeted aggressively in the streets, in traffic or at the workplace, are indicators that the situation is becoming more difficult. In the small Christian majority areas, displaying Christian symbols is possible and comes with less risks.

**Block 1: Additional information**

A country expert wrote: "It is acceptable to be a Punjabi or Sindhi Christian. But it is far less acceptable to be a Balouchi or Pakhun believer." Whatever their ethnicity, converts from Islam always have to be very careful in the way they worship, especially if they are the only Christians in their family. Bibles and other Christian materials may be taken away by family, friends or neighbors, even when it is stored on a mobile phone. While house-arrest by families is another form of punishment for privately conducting worship, a milder form is for Christian converts to be put under surveillance. Christian girls who have been abducted and forcefully converted and married are often kept in a form of house-arrest as well and taught what to say. Converts sometimes have to go into hiding as well. In an illustration of the depth of isolation, one country expert said: "The biggest retailer in real estate in Pakistan (Bahria) refuses to allow its Christian residents (who number in the thousands) a space for public worship. The isolation is systemic."

**Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere****Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (4.00 points)**

Discrimination at school (and elsewhere) is a daily experience for Christian schoolchildren. At school, children of Christian parents are often not allowed to use the same water fountain as their Muslim classmates to avoid 'defiling' the drinking-water, and they are often bullied. Many Christian children are asked to clean the latrines or sweep the floor as Christians are commonly perceived as being sweepers. Some schoolbooks incite hatred against Christians. Even in some Christian institutions, some non-Christian students would choose not to socialize or even eat with Christians. This attitude is not always purely religious but also has its background in caste considerations since a majority of Christians come from low caste. Christian girls (and to a lesser extent boys) are also frequent targets of physical and sexual abuse, as are children from the Hindu minority.

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points)**

A country expert sums up the problems in a comprehensive way:

"Schools in Pakistan stand accused of being biased against Christians and stirring up hatred against them and their faith. This then presents problems for parents wishing to raise their children in their faith. The problems loosely fall into the following categories:

- a) Text books both in the Sindh and Punjab provinces have been found to contain passages and references discriminatory towards Christians. Although steps have been taken to remove the offending sections, criticisms persist.
- b) Especially in Hindu-language schools, there have been reports of bullying and segregation of Christians away from Muslims.
- c) Students learning Islam and memorizing the Quran are given extra marks."

In an official [notification](#), the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training approved a new curriculum, which makes studying Islam non-compulsory for Christian, Bahai, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Zoroastrian students in the Islamic nation (UCA News, 24 January 2024). However it remains to be seen if this will be implemented (as reports continue of Christian schoolchildren being forced to study Islam and being refused the opportunity to study an alternative) and whether this will apply beyond the schools run by the federal government.

***Block 2.4: Christian baptisms have been hindered. (3.50 points)***

From the moment a convert from Islam decides to be baptized, he or she is put under particular pressure since baptism is seen as the ultimate form of rejecting Islam and thus committing apostasy. For this reason, many converts never disclose that they are baptized. Even if a Pakistani of Christian background gets baptized, gunshots from the surrounding roofs and aggressive shouting against Christians are likely to be heard, even though it is not a crime for a Pakistani of Christian background to be baptized. Baptism is simply hated as it is a visible sign of the Christian presence growing.

***Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.25 points)***

Not least due to the prevailing pressure from society and the situation Christian children find themselves in when attending school, it is hard to raise children according to the Christian faith and withstand the pressure exerted. Due to fearing blasphemy accusations, parents even teach their children to be completely silent about their faith. Despite this pressure, many Christian parents find ways to raise their children according to their beliefs, within certain limits and often with the assistance of local churches.

A country expert points to some of the typical challenges: "Christian children are given a counter narrative from the teachers and other Muslim students that they are infidels and inferiors, and they are following a false faith. They are often told that the Bible has been corrupted from its original wording. And there is only the Quran which has been preserved in its original language over the centuries."

**Block 2: Additional information**

Registering one's conversion to the Christian faith is not possible. A child will be automatically registered as "Muslim" if his or her father was registered as "Muslim", no matter if in reality the religious affiliation has changed. Once converts are discovered, they face the threat of divorce (if married) and are likely to lose their inheritance rights. A country expert points to another problem on registration: "Due to the greater process of digitalization of the records system, those who are digitally literate are now able to access their data online through an app. This leaves over 90% of Christians ignorant of their status as they're not digitally literate or informed."

Organizing a Christian wedding or funeral can be difficult or even impossible in some communities. Christians with a Muslim background face either being physically attacked and discriminated against by the surrounding Islamic community and their own family, or they may be placed under a curse through black magic, potions, amulets and other occult practices.

**Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere**

***Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (4.00 points)***

As a country expert stated: "Local communities always monitor Christians which includes reporting to police in some cases and shadowing. Normally this is been done by people who are involved in Muslim organizations and radical groups." The threat of terrorism is used to justify high levels of digital surveillance by the government and a [national firewall is being installed](#) in various ISPs to curb social media and to prevent unwanted content from spreading across the internet through blocking websites and social media apps and preventing the use of VPNs (The News, 7 June 2024).

Another country expert elaborates on this state-driven monitoring: "Being watched is a way of life for all people. Christians in particular are more vulnerable to the continuous monitoring of activity. Due to the Chinese provision of anti-terrorist facial and vehicle recognition software - most urban centers have cameras constantly recording your movements. The mobile phone numbers are all linked to your ID card which registers the IMEI number of the phone with the government databases. All calls, even by WhatsApp, are monitored and tracked. Your phone can also have malware installed to switch on cameras and audio remotely. This has all meant greater surveillance of the Christian community." For converts, the family is the strongest source of control.

***Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.75 points)***

As the long list of cases provided above under *Specific examples of violations* shows, abduction and forced marriage are not just a threat, but a very sad reality across Pakistan. Christian (and Hindu) parents are getting increasingly fearful to let their daughters walk outside alone. This threat worsened in the WWL 2025 reporting period, not least because perpetrators are increasingly being supported by religious leaders and enjoy de facto impunity for their actions. One country expert explained: "Abduction and sexual violence of religious minorities is endemic in Pakistan. The Movement for Solidarity and Peace calculates that every year up to 1,000 young Christian and Hindu girls and young women aged between 12 and 25 are abducted by Muslim men. Christian girls make up 70 percent of these cases. Other research suggests that the same number applies to one province alone, namely

Sindh. These figures are seen as a low estimate as fear of retaliation and risk of social shame means that Christian families are reluctant to report incidents of this kind. Nor is the problem related only to women and girls."

***Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.75 points)***

Christians are sidelined constantly - so often, community resources, aid or relief are not being given to Christians unless they convert. A country expert states: "Christians are under constant pressure to renounce their faith from the age of 4 or when they go to nursery school. Those who are older face more serious challenges when asked to renounce the Christian faith. If a Christian refuses for the third time, that person can be executed, according to Sharia, so people are wary of being asked; it is therefore used as an intimidation tactic."

***Block 3.11: Christians have been hindered in the operation of their businesses for faith-related reasons (e.g. access to loans, subsidies, government contracts, client boycotts). (3.75 points)***

A country expert described the general attitude towards Christians when doing business as follows: "Christians are discriminated against as any money paid to Christians is seen as money not given to the 'Umma'. Therefore the financial/business success of Christians continues to remain elusive and the Christian community alone is too small to sustain businesses. When businesses are successful, they become a more visible target. In May 2024 a businessman in Sargodha was accused of blasphemy and [assaulted by a mob](#), later dying from his injuries, with his business set on fire (Asia News, 25 May 2024)

***Block 3: Additional information***

Many hospitals, pharmacies and other facilities have welfare schemes, which are being increasingly denied to Christians. Christians are also often told to pay exorbitant fees for health care or take out loans. Such costs are unpayable and hence block access to medical treatment. In government hospitals, Christians are not allowed to have access to the free medicines which have been supplied through Zakat funding (Islamic donations). As Christians do not pay Zakat, they do not benefit from a ['health card'](#) introduced in 2021 supplying government credit for treatment at hospitals (The Telegraph, 21 October 2021). Patients in hospitals frequently do not like to share wards with Christians, so Christians must often wait in hallways and corridors. Hospitals run by Christian associations do not benefit from Zakat and are being slowly squeezed out of funds.

Bonded laborers are tied to their employers by contracts which burden them with unpayable and ever increasing debts.

It is now compulsory for Christian organizations to provide written reports of movements, get approval for travel, and complete financial statements especially when they have international contacts so that they can be tracked by governmental institutions. Additionally, one country expert stated: "As Christians have little status in society and are often victimized or neglected, their presence in communal institutions is not encouraged. Where Christians have been involved in civil society associations, they have frequently found themselves marginalized. There have been cases where, for example, a residents' association is reviewing rental policies and members conclude they do not want to let out accommodation to Christians and other minorities. This has come to light when adverts have been published in newspapers and other media indicating that in effect 'Christians need not apply' to become residents."

In work places, the pressure against the Christian minority is often so great that Christians are forced to change their jobs multiple times to avoid being made to convert to Islam. Christians are frequently forced to do menial work like sweeping or carrying water. And even access to these jobs gets more and more restricted as reports show that new cleaning companies in the country are increasingly hiring only Muslims. A very good illustration is the five percent quota which had been introduced to guarantee minorities jobs in the government sector. Out of the total [vacant posts](#), 43% were reserved for minorities; that means there were more than 30,000 positions or minorities vacant at the end of September 2021 (UCA News, 6 October 2021).

#### **Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere**

##### ***Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points)***

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan adopted an Islamic Constitution in 1973 and Sharia law in its civil code, although Article 20 grants freedom of religion and belief. Ex-Prime Minister, Imran Khan (ousted in April 2022 but whose party has growing influence) stated that the government system in place in the days of Mohammed should be seen as the perfect governing system for Pakistan. Another example of how human rights are restricted can be seen in Article 19 on freedom of expression. This right can be limited "in the interest of the glory of Islam", which is open to subjective interpretation. A comprehensive [briefing paper](#) by the International Commission of Jurists dated 29 July 2021 details the limitations clearly. Measures for the protection of minorities, as [ordered](#) by Pakistan's Supreme Court, have not been implemented (UCA News, 20 June 2022).

##### ***Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (4.00 points)***

One of the most concerning trends in recent years has been that vigilante attacks on suspected blasphemers are not only being tolerated, but actually celebrated. In one case of a Muslim accused of blasphemy who was killed by a policeman in what the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan referred to as an "[extra-judicial killing](#)" (BBC News, 24 September 2024). This was the second such killing in one week. In the other case the family of the victim said they forgave the policeman who had killed their relative as indeed it was wrong to blaspheme. This impunity is clearly seen in the case of persecution of Christians by the fact that more than 90% of the suspects of the 2023 attack in Jaranwala are [still at large](#) (Amnesty International, 16 August 2024)

##### ***Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.75 points)***

Speaking out against injustice or simply expressing views is possible for Christians, but comes at a very high personal risk. Along with high levels of self-censoring among Christians (and withdrawal from the public sphere), Christian views are commonly ignored since they are seen as opposing or even just questioning Islamic teachings and values and are hence unacceptable. There are still entities speaking out, but the example of the National Commission on Minorities and the under-representation of religious minorities in the political arena are clear signs of how little their opinion is valued.

**Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.75 points)**

The recent process of Islamization started in the 1980s, when General Zia introduced the infamous laws on blasphemy in 1986. Blasphemy soon became one of the main issues the Christian minority had to face. The [blasphemy laws](#) are well-known for being used for [settling personal scores](#), making personal gains or for satisfying grudges one neighbor may have against another (USCIRF, Pakistan Country Update, 5 August 2022). According to a report in the [Catholic Herald](#) (21 May 2023), out of the 1,550 people accused of blasphemy since 1986, 238 involved Christians (15.3%), even though Christians are less than 2% of the population. The widening of the scope of blasphemy laws and the increase in penalties on conviction show the level of importance politics and society give this topic.

**Block 4: Additional information**

Travelling within the country is often limited for Christians and there are grave security risks connected with it. As one country expert explained: "Even with the option of government security and support from the local bishop, it has been judged unwise to travel to certain parts of the country, such as Peshawar, with religious hatred cited as one of the causes for concern. For Christian women, especially those travelling on their own, the risks are especially acute, particularly in areas with strong Islamist influence where the notion of travel by unaccompanied females is anathema."

Concerning biased media reporting against Christians, the same researcher observed the following: "English-language media are more even-handed in their reportage of minority affairs than their Urdu-language counterparts, which have been accused of running adverts for sewage workers effectively aimed exclusively at Christians. More generally, the media are perceived as routinely biased against Christians. For example, when a Muslim man is accused of abducting an under-age Christian girl and forcing her to marry him, the standard editorial approach is to declare it a 'love match' in which the girl is fully implicated. Such coverage will routinely fail to give consideration to the question of her being under-age and the undue pressure (potentially, if not actually) applied by the so-called husband who is often decades older and has often acted without the consent of the individual's parents and who in the West would be accused of paedophilia."

Another country expert added: "It remains a great challenge to achieve the official recognition of conversions. Converts from Islam will never be recognized officially and they continue having to live as Muslims. The biased approach of the government and officials becomes clear when the recognition of conversions to Islam from a Christian or Hindu background is swiftly accepted and the National Identity Card easily changed."

Discrimination and challenges for Christians are prevalent at every level of government and even in secular environments. This is true for the army, the judicial and the administrative services as well (especially at the local level), although Christians continue to serve in these areas. As a country expert explained: "As new legislation became oppressive and directed towards the marginalization of Christians, the demand for greater Islamic intervention into society created divisions and increased persecution. As a consequence, government departments, civil service, policy makers, senior government and army officials were unwilling to listen to the Christian voice." As an illustration, Pakistan's Supreme Court dismissed on technical grounds a plea by a Christian group to increase the [number of minority seats](#) in parliament (UCA News, 9 February 2022).

## Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

### ***Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (4.00 points)***

Since conversion from Islam to Christianity is so strongly opposed and fought against by family, society, government and radical groups, it would be highly dangerous if a church would dare to accept converts onto their premises. If a convert does attend a church service, this needs to happen without anyone, including the church, knowing that he or she is a convert. Another illustration for the strictness of this view is the fact that the National Database Registration Authority has no option for changing the religious affiliation from Muslim to another religion (or to no religion).

### ***Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (3.75 points)***

Government and radical Islamic groups alike monitor church teaching for any content perceived as anti-government or anti-Islam. One means of monitoring is through providing guards for church buildings. While they may indeed be offering protection, they also listen, monitor and report. It is suspected that such intelligence is being passed on to radical Islamic organizations and militants. Church buildings frequently resemble fortresses with high walls and narrow gates. Churches check that their materials contain no content which could be perceived as blasphemous; to be on the safe side, many churches decide only to share books and literature internally. Bibles are not provided by churches to the general public. Likewise, churches have been cautious about what and how to post and share material and information on social media.

### ***Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)***

Church leaders are the very first targets for harassment, as they are the most visible representatives of the despised Christian minority. This does not mean that all are attacked, but it means that the drivers of discrimination, intolerance and persecution realize very well that harming a church leader means harming the rest of the church congregation as well. Many pastors and Christian workers have received warnings that their activities are being watched by the authorities and pressure groups in the neighborhood. They also become targets because they represent the hope for change and are often involved in resolving conflicts with non-Christian leaders, financial disputes, emergency support and health care. Pastors and Christian leaders are also more vulnerable to action by criminal gangs.

### ***Block 5.18: Churches have been hindered in establishing, managing, maintaining and conducting schools, or charitable, humanitarian, medical, social or cultural organizations, institutions and associations. (3.50 points)***

As a country researcher states: "All NGOs have to report to the government on all activities - any money coming from outside the country will now be approved prior to the arrival of the money from a governmental intelligence department. There is no direct funding of NGOs; any donations or support from international organizations are especially scrutinized. And NGOs working with the Christian community are being closed down. Reports on compliance, staff, data gathering or any reports produced by the organization must be first approved by the government; and can never be shared internationally. These rules are new and they are being enforced by freezing bank accounts, forcing NGOs and churches into a narrow and repetitive process of compliance involving over 16 different

security agencies." He adds: "Many historical churches' accounts and registrations, which have been in effect for over 150 years, are forced to re-apply to the government to register as a Trust in order to free up their frozen accounts. Many church organizations have had to re-apply, and many church hospitals have had to close down as the compliance obligations involved too high a price."

### **Block 5: Additional information**

Advocacy for the oppressed minorities is highly dangerous as it challenges the government's narrative of providing safety and justice for everyone. It also challenges openly the overt injustice, corruption and attacks on vulnerable Christians which are carried out with impunity. Such advocacy not only irritates the government, it also angers many drivers of persecution, discrimination and intolerance in society as mentioned above. Many Christian human rights organizations and activists have been silenced, others had to flee the country and some simply disappeared.

Churches require registration and permission to proceed with new building projects. This is a long process as churches often have to wait for more than ten years to receive registration and get discouraged from proceeding with their building plans. There is high demand for bribes, and letters from influential members of parliament and governing bodies are needed. While there is no law against the building of churches as such, the process is made hard in an apparent effort to discourage Christians. Apart from the registration, churches also need a bank account to manage their funding, which is a separate cumbersome process.

While the pressure against churches reaching out to youth increases, there have been no reported cases of outright obstruction; 'safe spaces' still do exist. Apart from the Bible Society of Pakistan, all other Christian organizations are strongly discouraged from owning printing presses. Also, the work of the Bible Society is closely monitored and each Bible has a serial number that can be tracked.

Christians are being encouraged (and often compelled) to allow divorce in more cases than purely on grounds of adultery, and the law will be amended without any significant contribution by Christian leaders in Pakistan. On the other hand, conversion is seen as a way to divorce your spouse, as one country expert explains: "The marriage laws that govern Christian marriages are over 100 years old. They were set up by the British and these laws have not changed. The new marriage act for Christians still doesn't go as far as to encourage divorce. Therefore if spouses want to divorce they very often use conversion to Islam to divorce by reciting the words for divorce three times - Talak Talak Talak. This can be done even via text message. As the rules in Islam favor the male members of the family in terms of custody etc., women are forced to convert or lose their family to another woman."

## **Violence**

*Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:*

### **1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.**

*Possible reasons for this may be:*

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*

- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

**2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:**

- *Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).*
- *In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.*
- *Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.*

**3. The use of symbolic numbers:**

- In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10\*, 100\* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10\* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100\* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000\* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000\*, 100,000\* and 1,000,000\*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWR chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Pakistan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	14	14
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	40	40
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	100 *	100 *

Pakistan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	100 *	100 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10000 *	10000 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	100 *

The score for violence against Christians in Pakistan has been the maximum possible since WWL 2016. This may be surprising as there were no bomb attacks against churches since 2017, but every reporting period since then, more than the number of incidents necessary to reach the maximum score of a question has been reported.

- **Christians killed:** For examples on Christians killed for their faith, refer to the *Specific examples of violations of rights* section above.
- **Christians attacked:** Overt violence tends to conceal the daily violence behind the scenes against Christian girls and women who are often abducted, raped and forcefully married and converted. Examples for this abound - see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*.
- **Christians arrested:** Christians are more frequently arrested and charged than acquitted and although not all situations are linked with blasphemy accusations, those are the most prominent examples.
- **Churches attacked:** Attacks on churches or other public Christian properties take place frequently, although the buildings are not always destroyed or have to be closed. While there was no single incident on the scale of the 2023 attacks in Jaranwala, reports continue from across the country of smaller attacks, including churches being burned down and it being blamed on faulty wiring.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** In blasphemy cases, the homes of Christians are frequently attacked, forcing them and their families to go into hiding. In the WWL 2025 reporting period,

mob of hundreds of men and women attacked a village in November 2023, in retaliation for an inter-faith marriage between a Christian boy and a Muslim girl, destroying property and homes.

## 5 Year trends

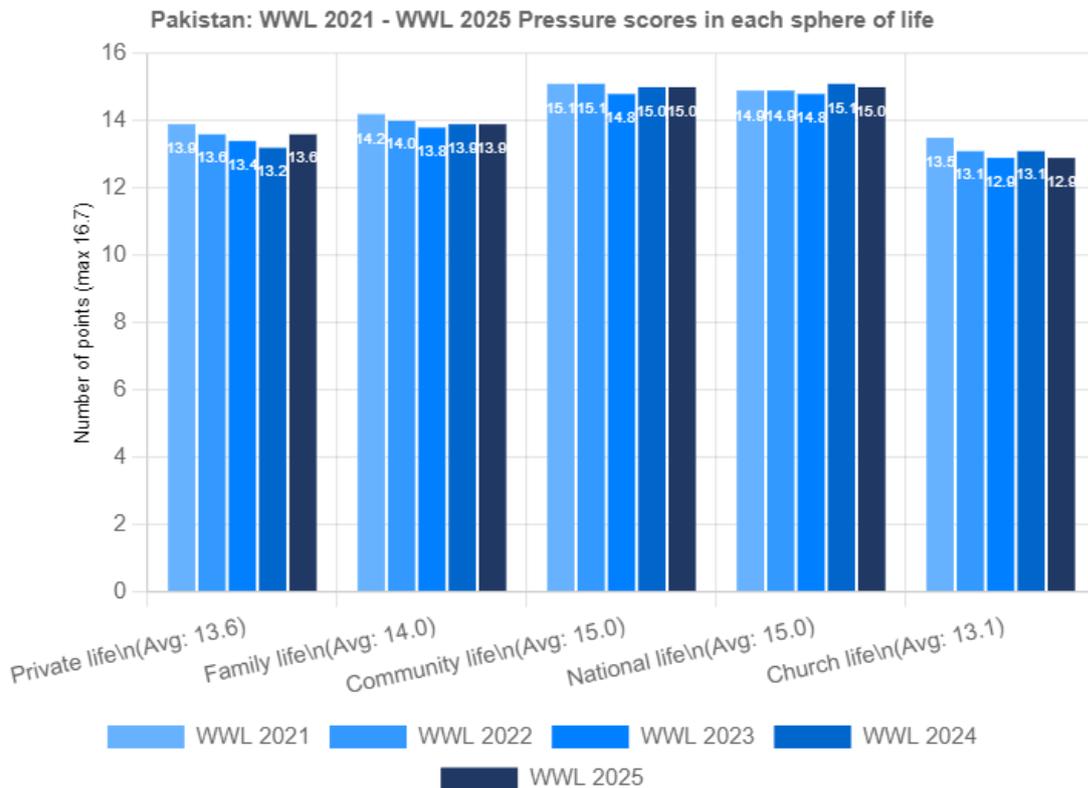
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Pakistan: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025		Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025		14.1
2024		14.1
2023		14.0
2022		14.1
2021		14.3

The average pressure on Christians in Pakistan is extreme and has consistently reached a point-level of 14.0 or above for five years in a row.

### 5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



Although there have been fluctuations, the level of pressure in all *spheres of life* has remained at very high and extreme levels, reflecting the operation of a relatively high number of (blended) persecution engines and their various drivers.

**5 Year trends: Violence against Christians**



Pakistan is one of the few countries in the WWL reaching the maximum score for violence and the only one reaching it every single year since WWL 2016. Although there has not been a suicide bomb-attack against a church since the WWL 2018 reporting period, each year witnessed so much violence against Christians that Pakistan has still reached the maximum score.

**Gender-specific religious persecution / Female**

Pakistan	Female Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abduction</li> <li>Economic harassment via business/job/work access</li> <li>Forced marriage</li> <li>Targeted seduction</li> <li>Trafficking</li> <li>Violence – death</li> <li>Violence – physical</li> <li>Violence – psychological</li> <li>Violence – sexual</li> </ul>

While all women are vulnerable to gender-based violence in Pakistan, women from religious minorities face overt and violent forms of gender-specific religious persecution. Reports of abductions of Christian women and girls in Pakistan have increased throughout the WWL 2024 reporting period, including in areas previously considered to be ‘safe’. Christian girls as young as 7 - primarily from poor families and including girls with physical disabilities - are kidnapped, forcibly married and, despite being underage, sexually assaulted and forced to convert to Islam on pain of death. In addition to abduction, reports indicate that Christian girls have been seduced as a means of converting them to Islam.

Many Christian families never see their girls again, the state authorities rarely take meaningful action to bring perpetrators to justice, and police are often biased, refusing to file reports from Christians. A country expert explained that “the legal system repeatedly fails these young women ... The psychological trauma and abuse continues even if a case is brought to bring back the girl. Many of them are forced to say they're over 18 years old or that they converted voluntarily.” It is reported that in many cases, Christian minority girls are forcibly married to men who are twice their age or more and who are already married with children near the victim's age ([Jubilee Campaign](#), written statement to UN Human Rights Council, February 2023). The challenges involved represent a huge emotional strain for the families who constantly fear retribution from the perpetrators and their supporters, as well as the reality that for most Christian girls a “return to her family is near impossible”. A country expert concludes that “most abduction cases do not get media coverage and the victims suffer in silence”. For the small minority of victims who are recovered, the shame of abduction and rape places a huge shadow over their lives within Pakistan’s honor-based culture, with girl survivors of abduction showing higher rates of PTSD, anxiety, depression, and detachment ([Jubilee Campaign](#), February 2023).

Christian women and girls are at risk of sexual violence in the public sphere, including in the workplace and in schools. This is part of a wider attitude towards Christian girls and women, with a country expert describing how Muslim men are more likely to think that Christian women and girls have loose morals and are easily available. Many are house-maids or cleaners, and are targeted for sexual exploitation. According to a country expert, it is becoming the norm to rape young Christian children, with reports revealing assaults against a three-year old girl and an eight-year old girl, the latter at the hands of her school principal ([International Christian Concern](#), 31 July 2021).

Christian women and girls are also trapped in cycles of debt and bonded labor, such as in brick-kiln factories. This affects Christians of both genders, although it is a context in which female Christians may be additionally exposed to sexual violence.

Christian women and girls are also at risk of honor killings and blasphemy allegations. It is estimated that around 1,000 women are killed in so-called honor killings every year ([HRW 2023, country chapter Pakistan](#)), including the case of 24-year old Sonia, from Rawalpindi, who was [fatally shot](#) by a Muslim man for refusing to marry him ([International Christian Concern](#), 12 June 2020).

## Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Pakistan	Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abduction</li> <li>Economic harassment via business/job/work acces</li> <li>False charges</li> <li>Imprisonment by government</li> <li>Violence - death</li> <li>Violence - physical</li> <li>Violence - psychological</li> <li>Violence - sexual</li> </ul>

Blasphemy laws, which enable the death penalty, continue to provide the structure for much of the human rights violations of Christian men in Pakistan. Christian men live in constant fear of blasphemy allegations, false charges, destruction of their property, arrest, imprisonment, beatings, torture and execution. A country expert explained that “Christian families usually worry about their men and boys being trapped in the blasphemy allegations and try to keep a low profile”. Exemplifying the dangers, murders of Christian men and boys and men are commonplace if they are seen to insult Islam. In late 2020 a Christian man was sentenced to death for having sent ‘blasphemous’ text messages to his former supervisor, having been in custody since 2013 ([Al-Jazeera, 8 September 2020](#)). As a country expert observed: “False imprisonment is one of the biggest areas [for men and boys] especially relating to false accusations of blasphemy/apostacy, in these instances entire families and communities are impacted.”

Christian men and boys are often compelled to take lower status and dangerous jobs. They are often referred to as "Chura," a derogatory word meaning "filthy", which is used for road sweepers or sewage cleaners. Christian men and boys are also trapped in cycles of bonded labor, such as in brick-kiln factories. Christian men have been tragically killed due to the hazardous conditions in which they are forced to work. There is also a Christian middle class and not all hold lower status jobs, but discrimination and social inferiority are ubiquitous. Islamic law and practices promote an attitude of Muslim superiority in society; thus, Muslims are encouraged not to accept Christian men being in more senior positions to them in workplaces. This can translate into a lack of employment opportunities and discrimination after a job is found.

There are also reports of Christian boys being subject to sexual abuse. Experts indicate that instances of rape and murder of young boys are on the rise in Pakistan. Young Christian men are being physically and sexually abused, and verbal insults, death threats and physical attacks are carried out with impunity.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department [IRFR 2023 Pakistan](#):

- "Religious minority community representatives stated the government was inconsistent in safeguarding their members against societal discrimination and neglect, and that official discrimination against Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Ahmadi Muslims persisted to varying degrees, with Ahmadis saying they experienced the worst treatment. Government officials and politicians attended and spoke at *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* (Finality of Prophethood) conferences that secular and Ahmadi critics argued were venues for hate speech against Ahmadi Muslims. Human rights advocates and Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders reported police and local authorities rarely took action to prevent attacks on, or to punish assailants who vandalized or destroyed, Ahmadi mosques, minarets, and gravestones."
- "There were reported cases of government intervention and action by courts, law enforcement, and local authorities in situations of attempted forced marriage and forced conversion, which often included kidnapping. Enforcement action against those responsible was rare, however, and religious minorities continued to protest what they stated was the government's weak response. According to CSJ, there were 103 cases of forced marriage and the conversion of Christian, Hindu, and Sikh women and girls during the year. In January, a UN panel of experts said it was "deeply troubled" by reports of the rise in abductions, forced marriages, and forced conversions of underage girls and women in the country."
- "Religious freedom activists and civil society groups continued to raise concerns regarding the limited powers of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) and the decision to exclude Ahmadi Muslims from the commission when it was formed. Ahmadi Muslim leaders again said they would not join the body as long as it required them to identify as non-Muslims; they would be willing to participate as a Muslim minority or on the basis of equal citizenship. The commission continued to function without legislative authority and without power to resolve problems. The National Assembly passed legislation to modify the NCM in August, but religious freedom activists and civil society groups said it was flawed and did not address major issues, such as Ahmadi membership. The Senate dropped the bill from its agenda just before the National Assembly was dissolved that month."
- "Civil society organizations and media outlets said that armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including TTP and the anti-Shia group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, continued to perpetrate violence and other abuses against religious minorities. Groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments, such as ISIS, also committed violent acts. Among the targets of these attacks were Shia Muslims, particularly the predominantly Shia Hazara community, and government security personnel. Data on sectarian attacks varied because no standardized definition existed among reporting organizations of what constituted a sectarian attack. When reporting on attacks that had a suspected sectarian motive, journalists said they often refrained from reporting the victim's sectarian identity to avoid stoking tensions."

### Further information

The situation of other religious minorities has not improved in recent months. Ahmadi are targets of discrimination, intolerance and persecution by a plethora of radical Islamic groups, just as the Christian

and the Hindu minorities are. However, the challenge for the Ahmadi is that they are not allowed to call themselves 'Muslims', which is what they are according to their own understanding. In most dealings with the government, from attending school to being employed by the state, Ahmadis have to sign documents which declare the finality of the Prophet Mohammed, which goes against their faith. Attacks against these minorities occur with a sickening frequency. One prominent example of discrimination against the Ahmadi minority took place in the government sphere. More than 170 Ahmadi graves and several houses of worship were desecrated. After the spokesperson of Indian ruling party BJP made controversial statements about the Prophet Muhammad in June 2022, a [Hindu temple](#) in Karachi was [destroyed](#) (USCIRF, Country Update Pakistan, 5 August 2022). The Bill on the National Commission for Minorities was passed by the National Assembly on 7 August 2023, but falls short of international standards and is likely to do [little to nothing](#) to improve the situation of religious minorities (CSW, 11 August 2023).

Blasphemy cases can also be brought against Muslims as happened in [April 2023](#) (Morning Star News, 24 April 2023; together with a Christian) and [July 2023](#) (Bitter Winter, 11 July 2023). They can also be brought against foreign nationals, in April 2023 a [Chinese national](#) was accused of having committed blasphemy, but at the political pressure of the government in Beijing, he was immediately released on bail (AP News, 17 April 2023).

On a more positive note, in 2020 Pakistan opened the [corridor of Kartarpur](#), paving the way for pilgrimages from India to one of the most important holy sites of the Sikh minority (Arab News, 4 October 2020). And when construction workers deliberately [destroyed an ancient Buddhist statue](#) discovered in construction work in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in July 2020, this led to criminal charges being brought against them (RFE/RL, 18 July 2020).

## Trends Summary

### 1) Politics is increasingly unstable

With the [bail-out agreement](#) with the IMF, the government of Shehbaz Sharif gained breathing space as Pakistan continues to face the immediate challenge of a struggling economy (Reuters, 26 September 2024). The Sharif government will be held responsible for all the hardships citizens are facing (caused in part by the "sound policies and reforms" required by the IMF bail-out conditions). With the still developing challenge of ex-PM Imran Khan bringing even more volatility to the political situation and the international environment posing additional challenges to a struggling economy, Pakistan will not see a quick end to the multiple problems the country is experiencing. Imran Khan is facing a host of charges, at least three of them related to 'terrorism'. In all political developments, the [army and judiciary](#) are the two entities that have to be watched closely (USIP, 11 May 2023). The political crisis has been building up over several years, but it comes at a time where the country is in serious economic trouble and the livelihoods of many in society are severely affected. Although army and establishment seem to have quickly returned to 'business as usual', the 2024 election outcome shows that voters can make their [voice heard](#) (Freedom House, 2 May 2024). Whether this translates into real changes remains to be seen.

## 2) Dealing with Islamic radicals - at home and abroad

While successive governments have actively opposed some radical and violent groups, they have also tried to co-opt others and use them for (foreign) political means. Such groups are innumerable and even a ban will only make them re-organize, re-brand and re-emerge. The default option for dealing with radical Islamic movements (who are able to mobilize millions for street demonstrations) is appeasement and even accommodation, as could be seen by the introduction of the new "Singular National Curriculum" in 2021. The Pakistani Taliban (TTP) gained new strength after the Taliban take-over in neighboring Afghanistan. Since the Taliban in Afghanistan tacitly support (or at least do not hinder) TTP growth, the army's long-standing policy of trying to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' Taliban groups in Pakistan may have run its course. One observer summed up the situation aptly: "[Pakistan reaps what it sowed](#)" (Foreign Affairs, 23 May 2022). The increasing number and sophistication of attacks against army and police installations are testing the [strategic alliance](#) between the Pakistani state, armed forces and the Taliban: "Pakistani leaders ... [welcomed the Afghan Taliban takeover](#) in 2021, apparently believing that a friendly regime in Kabul would promote Pakistan's security interests." That has now been proven wrong (Crisis Group, 29 March 2023). Continued attacks against Chinese interests may also bring Pakistan's good relationship with China under additional strain, although it seems that authorities gave way to Chinese pressure for additional and better protection for Chinese citizens and interests. One consequence of this has been the attacks against TTP targets on Afghan soil in March 2024, another is the forced repatriation of Afghan refugees, many of whom had been living for decades in Pakistan, or were born there. However, Pakistan cannot afford to fail at restricting Islamic radical groups; failure in this respect would also spell danger for vulnerable marginalized groups such as Christians.

## 3) The Christian minority is particularly vulnerable

Pakistan faces what one observer called the "[convergence](#) of a collapsing economy and surging terrorism" (Foreign Affairs, 28 February 2023). While the economic situation may witness a short respite and potentially even recovery due to the IMF bail-out agreement, the austerity measures tied to it will be difficult to bear and may embolden radical and violent Islamic groups. Pakistan risks – as another observer wrote – 'descending into [total anarchy](#)' (The Diplomat, 16 May 2023).

The protection and participation of the Christian minority in society has been a big question for years, with no quick and easy answers. The mob attack in Jaranwala in August 2023 illustrated how quickly Christian minorities and their settlements can come under attack. The sheer number of cases approved by lower courts in which Christian girls have been abducted and forcefully married and converted, shows that the marginalizing of minorities, especially Christians, continues unabated. A USCIRF country update from August 2022 [summarized](#) the situation (USCIRF, "Religious Freedom in Pakistan in 2022", 5 August 2022):

- "In 2022, the new government under Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif also weaponized the discriminatory blasphemy laws, traditionally used to persecute religious minorities, against former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his cabinet members. Religious minorities, however, remain particularly vulnerable to aggression and accusations under these laws as they continue to face threats of violence in a society that has grown increasingly intolerant of religious diversity."

The results of the latest census, no matter whether they reflect the situation on the ground or not, will most likely speed up this process of marginalization and cause the voice of the Christian minority to be heard even less.

## Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

## External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: tighten - <https://www.dawn.com/news/1769073>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: climate of impunity - <https://morningstarnews.org/2024/08/one-year-later-jaranwala-pakistan-still-reeling-from-attacks/>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: sentenced to death - <https://morningstarnews.org/2024/09/christian-mother-sentenced-to-death-in-pakistan-for-blasphemy/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: abducted - <https://morningstarnews.org/2024/08/christian-girl-12-forcibly-converted-married-in-pakistan/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: poison - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Lahore%2C-forced-conversions%3A-attempted-poisoning-of-a-13-year-old-Christian-60585.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: evict - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christian-families-take-to-the-street-in-Akbarabad-against-Raja-Riaz-who-wants-to-evict-them-60502.html>
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- Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points): notification - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/islamic-studies-no-longer-compulsory-for-pakistans-non-muslims/103931>
- Block 3.2: Christians have been monitored by their local communities or by private groups (this includes reporting to police, being shadowed, telephone lines listened to, emails read/censored, etc.). (4.00 points): national firewall is being installed - <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1197782-firewall-being-installed-to-rein-in-social-media>
- Block 3.11: Christians have been hindered in the operation of their businesses for faith-related reasons (e.g. access to loans, subsidies, government contracts, client boycotts). (3.75 points): assaulted by a mob - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christian-seriously-wounded-in-Sarghoda-in-the-latest-blasphemy-incident-60822.html>
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- Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.75 points): Catholic Herald - <https://catholicherald.co.uk/christians-in-pakistan-suffer-plight/>
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