

World  
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Research

# Pakistan: Full Country Dossier

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**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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## Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes 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 conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 01 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

# WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Pakistan

## Brief country details

Pakistan: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
229,489,000	4,194,000	1.8

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

## Map of country



Pakistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	86	7
WWL 2022	87	8
WWL 2021	88	5
WWL 2020	88	5
WWL 2019	87	5

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

## 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, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Political parties, 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, Organized crime cartels or networks, Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.), Non-Christian religious leaders, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Political parties
Ethno-religious hostility	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

In 1947, the year of the country's independence, the situation for the Christian minority became more complicated as Pakistan officially became a Muslim state. Historical churches have relative freedom for worship and other activities, however, they are heavily monitored and have regularly been [targeted](#) for bomb attacks (the last large bomb attack happened on 17 December 2017 in Quetta) (World Watch Monitor, 18 April 2017). Christian churches more active in outreach and youthwork face severer rights violations in society. 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. On the other hand, there are Christians belonging to the middle class as well, but this does not save them from being marginalized or persecuted.

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, who only make up 1.8% of the population. 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. A draft bill on forced conversion was [rejected](#) by parliament, after religious scholars had deemed it as "anti-Islamic" (Dawn, 14 October 2021). With the ousting of Imran Khan and his resorting to street protests (see below: *Political and legal landscape*), politics will become more sectarian, meaning that religious minorities like Christians are likely to come under increased attack.

## 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

- **8 August 2022:** 65-year-old Christian William Masih was [killed](#) and three Christian teenagers were wounded in a drive-by shooting at a playground at the Christian colony in Mastung, Balochistan province (UCA News, 10 August 2022).
- **30 January 2022:** Reverend William Siraj was [killed](#) in an ambush after he drove home from a church service in Peshawar, another pastor was wounded (DW, 30 January 2022).
- **Police custody:** Church leaders can get arrested if they do not abide by the authorities' wishes. This acts as a warning to the Christian minority and intimidates them further. According to a report, a disproportionate number of Christians are [dying in police custody](#), leading to calls by Christians to criminalize torture (UCA News, 27 September 2022).
- **Abductions:** The cases of 12 year-old [Meerab Abbas](#) (The Christian Post, 16 November 2021), 14 year-old [Mahnoor Ashraf](#) (Morning Star News, 14 January 2022), [three other girls](#) (Agenzia fides, 15 January 2022) as well as [Saba Masih](#) (Morning Star News, 27 May 2022) show that kidnapping and forced conversion is a continuing pattern. The [pattern](#) is also beginning to be recognized by the media (Vice News, 30 November 2020). However, courts are still rarely granting custody to their parents for girls rescued from their abductors and abusers, as the case of [Zarvia](#) showed (Morning Star News, 23 August 2022).
- **Forced conversion:** The COVID-19 crisis led to an increase of aid being provided to Christian day laborers under the condition that they cite the Islamic creed and thus convert. 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).



## Specific examples of positive developments

- Two Christian nurses, charged with "defiling the Koran" were [granted bail](#) in September 2021, a decision so politically charged that it was only made public in November 2021 (Morning Star News, 19 November 2021). One Christian charged with false blasphemy accusations was [acquitted](#) after having spent almost ten years in prison (Morning Star News, 22 November 2021), and two other Christians charged with blasphemy were [granted bail](#) (UCA News, 7 January 2022). However, [death sentences](#) for Christians accused of blasphemy continue to be handed out (Morning Star News, 11 July 2022).
- The court decision in June 2021 to nationalize the historic Edwardes College in Peshawar was [reversed](#) in January 2022. Thus, the Church of Pakistan regained control of the oldest missionary education institution in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (UCA News, 5 January 2022)
- A court ordered the [return](#) of Arzoo Raja into the custody of her parents in December 2021. Reports of her abduction and forced conversion by a 44 year-old neighbor had been widely published in 2021. The 13 year-old, now known as Arzoo Fatima, was allowed to live with her parents under the condition that she can practice her Muslim faith freely, implying that the court accepted the conversion (or, more likely, did not want to dive into this politically charged question) (UCA News, 23 December 2021).

## External Links - Situation in brief

- Brief description of the persecution situation: targeted - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/04/pakistan-prevents-another-easter-attack-christians/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: rejected - <https://www.dawn.com/news/1651919>
- 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: killed - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/one-killed-in-shooting-at-christian-colony-in-pakistan/98344>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: killed - <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-gunmen-shoot-dead-christian-priest-in-peshawar/a-60604509>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: dying in police custody - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-church-demands-criminalizing-torture/98908>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Meerab Abbas - <https://www.christianpost.com/news/12-year-old-christian-girl-abducted-in-pakistan-by-muslim-man.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Mahnoor Ashraf - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/another-christian-girl-allegedly-forced-to-convertmarry-in-pakistan>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: three other girls - [http://www.fides.org/en/news/71446-ASIA\\_PAKISTAN\\_Muslim\\_men\\_arrested\\_for\\_kidnapping\\_Christian\\_teenager](http://www.fides.org/en/news/71446-ASIA_PAKISTAN_Muslim_men_arrested_for_kidnapping_Christian_teenager)

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Saba Masih - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/muslim-in-pakistan-forcibly-marries-converts-christian-girl-family-says>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: pattern - <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjpvz5/he-bought-me-how-forced-conversion-turned-this-christian-girls-life-upside-down>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Zarvia - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/christian-parents-in-pakistan-denied-custody-of-kidnapped-girl>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: increase - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-sees-record-leap-in-forced-conversions/94582>
- Specific examples of positive developments: granted bail - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/historic-bail-for-nurses-charged-with-blasphemy-lawyer-says>
- Specific examples of positive developments: acquitted - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/christian-sentenced-to-death-for-blasphemy-acquitted>
- Specific examples of positive developments: granted bail - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/another-pakistani-granted-bail-in-blasphemy-case/95639>
- Specific examples of positive developments: death sentences - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/christian-in-pakistan-sentenced-to-death-for-blasphemy>
- Specific examples of positive developments: reversed - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistani-christians-rejoice-over-liberation-of-college/95606>
- Specific examples of positive developments: return - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistani-court-orders-return-of-converted-child-bride/95493>

## WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Pakistan

### Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp.286-289)	<a href="https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf">https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf</a>	27 May 2022
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	<a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12965779">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12965779</a>	27 May 2022
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	<a href="https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/PAK">https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/PAK</a>	27 May 2022
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	<a href="https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/pakistan/">https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/pakistan/</a>	27 May 2022
Crisis24 country report (Garda World)	Crisis24 country report	<a href="https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/pakistan">https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/pakistan</a>	27 May 2022
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.15)	<a href="https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf">https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf</a>	27 May 2022
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	<a href="https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/">https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/</a>	3 August 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Democracy index – 29 countries, Pakistan not included	Democracy Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores">https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores</a>	27 May 2022
Freedom House's 2022 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan/freedom-world/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan/freedom-world/2022</a>	27 May 2022
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	<a href="https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan/freedom-net/2022">https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan/freedom-net/2022</a>	23 December 2022
Human Rights Watch World Report 2022 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2022 country chapter	<a href="https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/pakistan">https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/pakistan</a>	27 May 2022
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	<a href="https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#pk">https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#pk</a>	27 May 2022
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	<a href="https://rsf.org/en/country/pakistan">https://rsf.org/en/country/pakistan</a>	27 May 2022
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2021	<a href="https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/pak">https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021/index/pak</a>	27 May 2022
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 189 countries	HDI profile	<a href="https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/PAK">https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/PAK</a>	8 June 2022
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2021	<a href="https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/pakistan">https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/pakistan</a>	6 June 2022
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL	USCIRF 2022	<a href="https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022%20Pakistan.pdf">https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022%20Pakistan.pdf</a>	27 May 2022
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank 2022	<a href="https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview#1">https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview#1</a>	27 May 2022

World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2020 data)	<a href="https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=PAK">https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=PAK</a>	27 May 2022
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 – covering 147 countries (divided per region)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (South Asia, pp.14-15)	<a href="https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/5d1783db09a0e09d15bbcea8ef0cec0b-0500052021/related/mpo-sar.pdf">https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/5d1783db09a0e09d15bbcea8ef0cec0b-0500052021/related/mpo-sar.pdf</a>	27 May 2022

## Recent history

Pakistan became an independent nation separate from India at the end of British colonial rule in 1947. In 1971 East Pakistan became the independent nation Bangladesh. The territory of Kashmir remains disputed with India to this day and in February 2019 both countries were involved in a violent skirmish across the unofficial (but in practice accepted) "Line of Control". The conflict flared up, when Pakistani militants from the group *Jaish-e-Mohammed*, which claimed immediate responsibility, attacked an Indian military convoy on 14 February 2019 and killed 40 people (Pulwama incident). India retaliated, but both sides avoided letting the conflict escalate further. However, in August 2019, the Indian government revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, stripping them off their status as Indian states and making them Union territories under the direct rule of Delhi instead. This step angered and provoked Pakistan, but so far, no action has been taken.

Pakistan has suffered from an unstable government system with three prolonged phases of military rule, with the last phase ending in 2008. The attacks in December 2014 on an army school in Peshawar, leaving 141 dead, led to a hasty amendment to the Constitution, re-introducing the death penalty and setting up special military courts for terrorism-linked cases, fulfilling the army's long-standing demands. Army and government are still executing a plan allegedly targeting Islamic militants.

The Pakistani government had to accept an offer from the IMF for a bail out, which comes with very strong controls and expected hardships, especially for the middle class. Another strain on relations with the USA has been caused by the Taliban government take-over in neighboring Afghanistan, which was [supported](#) by groups based in Pakistan (Gandhara, 21 June 2021).

The army is still pulling the strings of politics behind the scenes. Army leaders had been content with Prime Minister Imran Khan in office taking the blame for the dire economic situation, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but their patience came to an end when Khan tried to [influence and delay](#) military appointments, such as the Chief of Army Intelligence (ISI) (Reuters, 26 October 2021). On 11 April 2022, a no-confidence motion against Imran Khan passed and Shehbaz Sharif became the new Prime Minister, immediately facing a barrage of challenges (see below: Political and legal landscape). A new army leader was announced at the end of November 2022: [Syed Asim Munir](#), a former chief of the military intelligence ISI, who had been ousted by former PM Imran Khan (The Diplomat, 24 November 2022).

While Christians were encouraged by the final decision to acquit Asia Bibi and allow her to finally leave the country in May 2019, this ruling has not made their everyday life any easier. Christians face ubiquitous discrimination. They - like other religious minorities (and even Muslim minorities) - continue to be accused, arrested and tried for blasphemy. Young girls from the Christian and other minorities continue to be abducted, forcefully converted and married off.

The government has by-and-large managed to keep violent Islamic groups in check as no major attacks against Christians took place in the WWL 2023 reporting period. However, the government continued its appeasement policy towards radical Islamic groups. Since many Christians rely on earning a daily wage, they were particularly vulnerable to the restrictions introduced to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Christian nurses were also targeted with blasphemy allegations (see below: *Pressure in Spheres of life, Block 4, 4.8*).

## Political and legal landscape

As mentioned above (in: Recent history), Prime Minister Imran Khan lost a no-confidence vote, the first PM in Pakistan's history to do so. On the other hand, his length in office confirms a typical factor of Pakistan's politics: Since independence, no prime minister ever served a full term. While there had been earlier talks about a no-confidence vote, only in March 2022 were the parties sufficiently confident they had the numbers. Imran Khan, who came to power in 2018 and had survived earlier attempts to sideline him, did not go down without a fight, however. He tried to pre-empt an attempted 'no confidence' vote in a [surprise move](#) on 2 April 2022, by dissolving parliament and calling for early elections (New York Times, 3 April 2022). While political turmoil is certainly not unknown in Pakistan's history, Prime Minister Khan's move was unprecedented and the Constitutional Court decided that such action was unconstitutional; hence the Court re-instated parliament and the original no-confidence motion. Opposition politician Shehbaz Sharif was [elected](#) as his replacement on 11 April 2022 (Reuters, 11 April 2022).

Ousted former Prime Minister Imran Khan resorted to the conspiracy theory that the no-confidence vote was the work of the USA acting behind the scenes and called his supporters to stage demonstrations. While this narrative resonates well with his supporters and he is known to be close to Islamist circles, it remains to be seen how much room for maneuver he has left now that he has lost the army's backing. While joining his anti-government convoy in Eastern Pakistan, Imran Khan was [shot at](#), receiving a leg-wound. His supporters see this as an assassination attempt and have blamed the government (Reuters, 4 November 2022). Just days earlier, Pakistan's election commission had ruled to [disqualify](#) him from holding public office for five years (CNN, 21 October 2022).

Islam plays a dominant role in every aspect of life. For example, according to the Constitution, every citizen has the right of free speech, which is, however, subject to the restrictions necessary in the interest of "the glory of Islam". Government and army alike have a long history of trying to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' jihadists. It fights the latter and courts the former. Since the introduction of the blasphemy laws in 1986, Christians have come under increasing pressure and are victims of roughly a quarter of all blasphemy accusations. In the protests against the acquittal of Asia Bibi in November 2018, the radical Islamic groups (headed by the Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan party -TLP) made a mistake (although it turned out not to be a fatal mistake, since such groups have the ability to lie low, re-structure and re-emerge after a while): They would have been forgiven for just calling for the downfall of the government and the killing of the judges. However, they also called for an uprising against the army and its chief as well. The army is regarded as one of the main pillars of power in Pakistan and is arguably the strongest one, as was shown again when the army leaders withdrew their support from former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Events in the WWL 2023 reporting period illustrate that Pakistan's politics are volatile and involve many players and spoilers. Such volatility is bad for minorities, especially religious minorities. Christians continue to be pushed to the margins of society; they still lack proper representation in politics and although there have been no major attacks against churches in the WWL 2023 reporting period, there are almost constant attacks against individuals, making it hard for Christians to feel safe and worship freely.

### Gender issues

The '[Global Gender Gap Report 2021](#)' published by the World Economic Forum revealed that Pakistan has shown a dismal performance in regards to gender parity. Pakistan's gender gap had broadened by 0.7 percentage points in the past year, to 55.6 percent. Only Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan fared worse. While it ratified the CEDAW convention in 1996, a [2020 CEDAW periodic report](#) (p.7) highlighted concerns about ongoing harmful practices, such as child marriage, forced marriage (often linked to cases of forced conversion) and so-called 'honor' crimes. Some Pakistani states continue to permit child marriage; in 2020, the Sindh High Court in Karachi ruled that Pakistani men may marry underage girls as long as they have had their first period ([Forbes, 1 March 2020](#)). Whilst rates are slowly declining, an estimated 18% of girls are married by the age of 18 ([Girls Not Brides](#)).

[Bride trafficking](#) along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a big problem (Brookings Institution, March 2022). The Brookings report highlights cultural and religious differences between China and Pakistan and touches upon the concept of family honor in Pakistan. It then goes on to state:

*Offsetting this was the fact that many of the victims belonged to the Christian community of Pakistan — less surrounded by society's notions of honor, and less protected because they are marginalized. ... That most of the victims belonged to the poor and marginalized Christian community of Pakistan sadly made it easier for Pakistan to divert attention away from the issue without an ensuing public outcry.*

Thus, due to a lack of interest in the plight of the Christian minority, the whole issue has been quietly ignored by most government officials.

Although there is a law against domestic violence, implementation of the legislation is weak and marital rape is not criminalized. Similarly, whilst laws against honor killings were tightened in 2016 following the murder of Qandeel Baloch ([The Guardian, 17 May 2019](#)), an estimated 1,000 honor killings take place each year ([Human Rights Watch, Pakistan: Events of 2021](#)). Divorce laws prevent women and girls from escaping an abusive situation. Under Sharia law, a man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq*, whereas a woman may file for divorce through the courts. Following a divorce, women are usually granted custody of the children until they reach the age of 7, whilst guardianship remains with the father, and with it, decision-making power over the child ([OECD, p.3](#)). If the case is made that the child should be raised a Muslim however, it is likely that custody of the children will be given to the Muslim parent regardless of the child's age.

## Religious landscape

Pakistan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	4,194,000	1.8
Muslim	221,645,000	96.6
Hindu	2,916,000	1.3
Buddhist	127,000	0.1
Ethno-religionist	232,000	0.1
Jewish	900	0.0
Bahai	112,000	0.0
Atheist	10,600	0.0
Agnostic	186,000	0.1
Other	65,200	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

While Muslims make up more than 96% of the total population, by far the majority of them follow the Sunni tradition; Shiites make up less than 10% and the Ahmadi around 0.2%. (The exact percentages between Sunni and Shia are hotly debated).

The World Christian Database (accessed April 2022), uses government censuses as one source among others and gives the current percentage of Christians in Pakistan as 1.89%. A new nationwide census was conducted in 2017, the first for 19 years. It included religious affiliation, and in June 2021, the government finally released the [religious statistics](#) (Pakistan Daily Times, 7 June 2021). The census shows a drop in the population's percentage of Christians compared to 1998. According to the 2017 census, 1.27% of all Pakistani citizens are Christian, down from 1.59% in the 1998 census. (In comparison, the census shows that the Hindu minority grew in the same time from 1.6% to 1.73%.) These results come as a disappointment to the Christian minority and have caused several questions to be raised. The most obvious question is: Why did it take the Bureau of Statistics more than three years to publish results for a census that was held in 2017? It has also been questioned how well the census enumerators were trained in explaining the census and the religious affiliation section to the respondents. It should be noted that many Christians are poor and illiterate and many may well have been completely left out of the census. Many of these Christians do not see a reason for obtaining a National Identity Card or for registering their children. Finally, it is also possible that the percentage has been kept low for political reasons as has been seen happening to Christians in other Asian countries such as Myanmar. On the other hand, there is currently a wave of emigration by better educated Christians, thus reducing the number of Christians in Pakistan.

The question of religion is a highly sensitive one and is very political. One decision connected to the census concerns whether (and how far) political representation of religious minorities will be increased at the national and state level; the most recent elections in July 2018 were still conducted according to the old system with poor representation. Radical Islamic groups will oppose every change of the status quo, just as they have already violently opposed all efforts to open discussions about reviewing the country's notorious blasphemy laws.

Reportedly, the data published by Pakistan's National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) in March 2022 is [inconsistent](#) with the census data of 2017 (UCA News 9 June 2022). This has been [highlighted](#) by the Catholic Center for Social Justice Pakistan (CSJP). The 2017 census reports there being 2.7 million Christians and 4.5 million Hindus in Pakistan, while NADRA (which is responsible for issuing identification documents) states that there are only 1.8 million Christians and 2.2 million Hindus. This is a very large discrepancy and has an impact on the socio-economic and political rights of the two main religious minorities. However, while the discrepancy can be partly explained by the use of different census categories, in both cases Christians are more concerned about their numbers being grossly underreported. It remains to be seen if the "[Digital Census](#)", planned for 2022 is able to shine any light on the contradicting data, if and when the results are published.

## Economic landscape

According to UNDP's HDI profile:

- **Gross National Income (2017 PPP \$):** 5.005
- **Rate of multidimensional poverty:** The rate of people living in multidimensional poverty is 38.3%, 21.5% of the population lives in severe multidimensional poverty, a further 12.9% are vulnerable to it, 24.3% of the population lives below the national poverty line (2018)
- **Remittances:** Remittances from citizens working abroad make up 8.02% of the national GDP.

According to World Bank country profile:

- Pakistan is classified as a lower middle income country.
- **GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2017 international USD):** 5.350
- **GDP growth rate:** 6%
- **Poverty gap at 5.50 USD a day (2011 PPP):** 29.4% (2018).

Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, Pakistan was already struggling to keep its economy afloat, not least because the long-term political friendship with the USA had cooled off. As this process was already tangible for some time, Pakistan looked for new sources of revenue and turned like many other countries eastwards. The country had seemingly begun to rely increasingly on China and the latter's willingness to invest in Pakistan in its "New Silk Road" framework ("One Belt, One Road"). China is investing 57 billion USD in the so called "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC) and the port city of Gwadar is one of the hubs the Chinese are building; in 2017 it was leased from the Pakistan government for 40 years. However, Pakistan's [cancellation](#) of a planned oil refinery in Gwadar, an investment of an estimated 10 billion USD and sometimes called the

"crown jewel", may indicate second thoughts and a re-orientation of Pakistan politics, not just in the economy (Eurasia Review, 20 June 2021). Additionally, the [killing of two Chinese Christians](#) in Pakistan in May 2017 (close to the CPEC construction site) illustrates how challenging the situation is, as well as highlighting some of the opportunities and risks Christians face (China Aid, 29 June 2017). The same is true for the Taliban suicide-bombing of the [Serena Hotel](#) in Quetta in April 2021, which was allegedly targeting the Chinese ambassador (BBC News, 22 April 2021). After another attack killing nine Chinese nationals in July 2021, China pushed Pakistan and the Taliban-led Afghanistan for a better [counter-terrorism coordination](#) (Jamestown Foundation, 7 September 2021). This pressure increased when [three Chinese teachers were killed](#) at the Confucius Institute of the University of Karachi (BBC News, 27 April 2022). Reportedly, China is considering deploying its own security forces to protect Chinese nationals - a request strongly opposed by the hosts.

Although these hiccups in the relationship with China will most likely just mean a re-balancing of economic dependency, not a complete cutting of ties with China or the USA, it is clear that Pakistan cannot go it alone economically. The country had sought economic assistance (i.e. credit) from various countries after the USA refused to step in once again to support its long-term ally. In the end, the government turned back to the IMF, seeking a bail-out of 6.6 billion USD on harsh terms of domestic reform. This was the [13th bail-out](#) from the IMF (Reuters, 13 May 2019) and has led observers to question whether Pakistan will ever [be able to end the cycle](#) of repeated bail-outs and accept the demands for genuine reform (Tribune, 3 June 2019). COVID-19 derailed almost all economic activities, whichever road to recovery Pakistan may have hoped to be on. The government continues to run a widening budget and trade deficit and the rupee lost value against the US Dollar by 14.3% in the period from July 2021 to March 2022 (Source: World Bank country overview).

Prime Minister Khan [travelled to Saudi Arabia](#) in May 2021 to repair relations (Reuters, 7 May 2021) and subsequently, Saudi Arabia was willing to give Pakistan financial support. But this is not the only reason that Pakistan depends on having a good relations with Jeddah; another reason is that the equivalent of more than six billion USD in the form of remittances annually is sent home from migrant workers. In a rare connection of human rights and economy, the European Parliament [publicly questioned](#) the justification for Pakistan's preferential status with the bloc (so-called "GSP plus"), given its dismal handling of blasphemy accusations, explicitly naming the Christian couple which was then released in June 2021 (AP News, 1 May 2021). Although Pakistani officials were quick to stress that no international pressure had influenced this decision, this is hardly credible.

Pakistan has a strong population growth, most recently reflected by the nation's census in 2017, which put the annual growth at 2.4% (the World Bank's estimate is 2.1% for 2021, the CIA Factbook's estimate is 2.65% for 2022). This is especially true for urban areas, illustrated by Lahore, the country's second biggest city, which grew in population by 53% within 20 years. If these rates of growth continue, the country's population could double again over the next decades. This comes with big challenges as it is the younger generation in particular that lacks any real economic perspective. While the youth unemployment rate, as listed by the UNDP, is not particularly high at 4.7%, the percentage of youth aged 15-24 neither in school or employment stands at 31%. This is especially the case for ethnic and religious minorities.



Child labor is rampant, bonded labor is particularly common in the province of Sindh, although numbers are hard to establish. The NGO, Borgen Project, gives an estimated total number of [12.5 million](#), but this cannot be verified (Borgen Project, 15 May 2017). More recent in-country estimations talk about [four million](#) bonded laborers (Dawn, 8 February 2021), but to this number children would have to be added. The whole population suffers greatly from these poor conditions, but minority groups (such as Christians) even more so. Many of them are day-laborers (for example in brick kilns) with treatment from employers often being arbitrary and violent. Women and children are especially vulnerable groups.

Pakistan's response to the COVID-19 pandemic initially was [slow and patchy](#) and when the government finally decided to institute lockdowns, this was immediately met by strong resistance from radical Islamic groups who strictly opposed all restrictions on religious gatherings (Hudson Institute, May 2020). It should be noted that gatherings (carried out by all religious groups) were among the main factors for spreading infections. An example were *Tablighi Jamaat* conferences and mass gatherings in Pakistan, India, Malaysia and Indonesia. The economic consequences of the handling of the pandemic are not to be underestimated, but the ideological consequences are likewise dangerous. As of July 2022, there had been only 30,423 COVID-related deaths in total recorded, and around 69% of the population had been vaccinated with two doses.

A rather surprising consequence of the COVID crisis - and unexpected boost for the economy - came from the doubling of [remittances](#) (Reuters, 17 August 2020). While millions of migrant workers from around the world lost their jobs, were sent home or isolated under 'lockdown' measures (often in dire circumstances), many Pakistani migrant workers apparently managed to stay abroad, one important place being Saudi Arabia. Because they could not spend their money earned for the *hajj* or *umrah*, they sent more home to their families than expected, giving the economy a much needed shot in the arm. This shows that the pandemic had positive consequences, too. However, few Christian families benefit from such remittances.

Women are typically more economically vulnerable than men in Pakistan. Due to low [education rates](#) for girls (exacerbated by girls entering early marriages, impoverished communities and pressure from Taliban groups against girls receiving education beyond a certain level) many women do not work (Borgen Project, 2019). According to the [Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/22](#), nearly 75% of Pakistani men think it is unacceptable for women to have a paid job (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, p.79). Making it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence, various inheritance laws discriminate against women (OECD, 2019). Considering these economic vulnerabilities, Christian women depend heavily on their husbands and families. Should this support be lost, they will likely fall into destitution, and converts may be forcibly married to a Muslim man. Divorcees are also economically vulnerable as there are no legal provisions for the division of matrimonial property and have very limited financial protection ([The Express Tribune](#), 2020).

Christians were particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis since the marginalization they face from society and government extended to health and emergency relief as well. Apart from being marginalized in economic life, they were also [discriminated](#) against when it came to receiving medical treatment or emergency relief, as the Catholic "National Commission for Justice and

Peace" reported in June 2020.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the UNDP's HDI profile and CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Punjabi (44.7%), Pashtun (15.4%), Sindhi (14.1%), Saraiki (8.4%), Muhajirs (7.6%), Balochi (3.6%), other (6.3%)
- **Main languages:** Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Saraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashto (alternate name, Pashtu) 8%, Urdu (official) 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, English (as the second official language)
- **Urbanization:** 37.7%, rate of urbanization 2.1%
- **Literacy rate:** 58% (age 15 and above)
- **Mean years of schooling:** 5.2 (3.8 for girls and 6.3 for boys).
- **Health and education indicators:** Per 10,000 people, Pakistan has 9.8 physicians and 6 hospital beds. The pupil teacher ratio in elementary school is 44:1.

According to the World Bank country profile:

- **Population/age:** 34.8% of the population are below 14 years of age, 4.4% are above 65 (2021).
- **Education:** The completion rate for primary education is 73.3% (2019), as of 2018, an estimated 6 million children dropped out of school.
- **Unemployment:** 4.5%, the rate of vulnerable employment is 54.9% (modeled ILO estimate).
- **IDPs/Refugees:** In 2015, an estimated 4 million migrants were living in Pakistan. In 2017, an estimated 6 million Pakistanis worked abroad, according to the [IOM](#) (IOM, Pakistan - Migration snapshot, August 2019).

According to the UNDP's HDI profile:

- **HDI score:** With a score of 0.557, Pakistan ranks 154 of 189 listed countries in the UNDP's HDI (medium human development). While the score continues to improve, progress has slowed down since 2015 and the country was overtaken by the development in other countries.
- **Life expectancy:** 67.3 years
- **Median age:** 22.8
- **Gini coefficient:** 33.5
- **Gender inequality:** A score of 0.538 gives Pakistan the rank 135 of in the Gender Inequality Index
- **Unemployment:** The unemployment rate is 4.5% and 55.5% of the population are in vulnerable employment. The rate of unemployed youth is 8.9%, the rate of youth neither in school nor employment is 31.3% (between 15 and 24 years of age). The rate of children between 5 and 17 working is 12.8%.

Although the issue of ethnicity is not as dominant in Pakistan as in many other countries in the region, it should not be ignored. This becomes immediately clear when Pakistan is seen together with Afghanistan: The Pashtun minority in particular covers large areas on both sides of the border. The decision by the Pakistani authorities to [fence off](#) the more than 2,500 kilometer long

border with Afghanistan has strongly affected Pashtuns on both sides of the border, as family ties and trading patterns from both sides have been cut off (Gandhara, 17 May 2021). The Pashtuns are one of the largest minorities worldwide without a nation state of their own. (It is frequently stated that the Kurdish people - numbering under 40 million - are the largest people without a nation. Pashtuns however number around 45 million.) Their strong reaction to the Indian decision to strip the Indian state Jammu and Kashmir of its statehood indicates that ethnic and religious motives are always part of such political decisions. Another minority coming to the limelight are the country's Balochs. An independency movement has grown in strength and the April 2022 attack against the Chinese teachers was reportedly carried out by a Baloch [insurgency group](#) (Jamestown Foundation, 1 July 2022).

According to a report by [UNICEF](#), Pakistan still has the second-highest out-of-school rate in the world, with 22.8 million aged 5-16 not attending school, representing a staggering 44% of all children in this age group (UNICEF, undated, accessed 12 July 2022). At primary level, five million children are out of school, 60% of whom are girls. Disparities are based on gender, socio-economic status and geography, as can be seen for example in Balochistan, where 78% of all girls do not attend school. It should be noted that efforts to improve the poverty situation in Pakistan did not include minorities such as Christians, a prime example of this is the [Poverty Alleviation Fund](#) set up by the World Bank (UCA News, 28 October 2022).

The nation's low investment in education over recent decades has led to a growth in the number of Islamic madrassas. An estimated 11,000 of these (out of a total of roughly 35,000) follow the strict teachings of Deobandi Islam. Exact student numbers are unknown. While some madrassas may make pupils literate and teach them mathematics, many others simply offer Quran reading, Islamic Studies and nothing else. As these madrassas are not registered and supervised, the authorities have no real idea what is going on in them. Various governments have tried to at least register them in the past but encountered fierce opposition. The Khan government was [Islamizing state schools](#) by introducing changes in the curriculum according to which all students were required to read the entire Quran with translation, learn Islamic prayers and hadith. It further stipulated that every school has to employ a *Hafiz* (a person who has memorized the Quran) and a *Qari* (a Quran reciter) to teach these subjects (DW, 24 May 2021). This is also a way to open a career path for graduates from madrassas and pour their ideology into mainstream schooling. At the same time, the authorities are struggling to take some madrassa leaders to account for [sexual abuse cases](#) which have become very public for some years now (The Diplomat, 7 July 2021).

Beginning in June 2022, Pakistan experienced [unusual strong monsoon weather](#), which saw precipitation 67% above the yearlong average in this month alone. As of September 2022, 72 districts across Pakistan have been declared "calamity hit". More than 1700 people have been killed and more than 2.1 million people have been temporarily or permanently displaced. Rescue and rebuilding efforts have been on their way, with international support (UN, 2 September 2022).

As experienced across the world, the measures introduced to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan most strongly affected the poor and most vulnerable parts of society. For day laborers, the main risk was not the virus, but the fact that they could not earn money and feed

their families. Many Christians belong to the poorer levels of society and were frequently excluded from aid programs or benevolence funds which religious organizations (Islamic) or the state provided.

Pakistan is a deeply patriarchal society and heavily influenced by the Islamic religious landscape. Within marriages, women reportedly experience high rates of domestic violence (exacerbated by the economic strain caused by the COVID-19 crisis) ([Deutsche Welle, 7 July 2020](#)). Few women choose to file for divorce due to the high levels of social [stigma](#) attached ([OECD, 2019, p.4](#)).

## Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022):

- **Internet usage:** 49.8% penetration – survey date: January 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 23.9% penetration – survey date: January 2022  
According to [Napoleon Cat \(June 2022\)](#), 77.1% of Facebook users are male and just 22.9% are female.  
This reflects women's restricted access to information and community networks.

According to the World Bank profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 80 per 100 people. According to a 2022 [report](#), 51% of Pakistani women are mobile phone owners compared to 76% of men (GSMA, 2022, “The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2022” p.15).

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report:

- Pakistan is marked as "Not free".
- "Internet freedom remained constricted during the coverage period, as the Pakistani government continued to tightly control the online environment. Authorities routinely use internet shutdowns, platform blocking, and arrests and harsh convictions to suppress unwanted online speech. The Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Content (Procedure, Oversight, and Safeguards) Rules were passed during the coverage period and dramatically expand authorities' control over the online information space. Online activists and journalists are often subjected to harassment, including some cases of physical assaults and enforced disappearances. An ongoing economic crisis and catastrophic flooding in August 2022, after the coverage period, also impeded access to the internet across the country."
- "Internet penetration increased at a steady rate over the pandemic, the reporting period included. As of May 2022, internet penetration stood at 53.1 percent, compared to 46.9 in June 2021, according to data from the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA). Mobile internet penetration rates stood at 51.73 percent as of May 2022, compared to 45.6 percent in the previous coverage period."
- "The digital divide between men and women in Pakistan is among the highest in the world; religious, social, and cultural norms discourage women from owning devices. According to the GSMA, women are 33 percent less likely than men to own a mobile device and 38 percent less likely to use the internet as of June 2022. A January 2021 report by Media Matters for Democracy found that 6 of every 10 Pakistani women are likely to have their internet usage restricted, monitored, or controlled by family members. Women who are

active online report high levels of harassment that discourages greater use of ICTs."

The World Internet Stats' estimate of 49.8% means that well over 100 million people do not have Internet access. Pakistan announced the implementation of a very [strict Internet law](#), according to which the government's Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) would have the power to shutdown an entire online system, leading observers to call the plan "draconian" (Reuters, 19 November 2020). Google, Facebook and Twitter [threatened to leave](#) Pakistan if this law is strictly implemented (Associated Press, 20 November 2020). All three companies were still active in Pakistan as of 2022, but complied with government demands of censorship to varying degrees.

In a strong reminder that pressure and censorship are daily challenges in the offline world as well, one of the most prominent TV presenters, Hamid Mir, was [banned from TV](#) in 2021 after he gave a speech criticizing the army (Gandhara, 31 May 2021). After he and his family received death threats he apologized, and was allowed to [return](#) to the screen in March 2022 (The Friday Times, 8 March 2022).

## Security situation

Security in Pakistan has always been volatile and even more so in the WWL 2023 reporting period, after the Taliban took over control of neighboring Afghanistan. The number of suicide attacks since the take-over [surged](#) and they are not restricted to being committed by Islamic violent groups TTP and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) (Jamestown Foundation, 6 May 2022). As already mentioned above, although the army and the government have declared war against some Islamic radicals, they continue to follow a policy of trying to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' jihadists. While it fights the latter, it works with the former (eg. Lashkar-e-Toiba, now Jamaat-ud-Dawah, and the Haqqani network, which is prominently represented with several members in the new Afghan Taliban government) and uses them as a proxy to reach its goals in neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and India.

Pakistan is having to cope with a [delicate balancing act](#) (International Crisis Group - ICG, 4 February 2022): Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban in Afghanistan may have become less smooth than it appeared at first sight and it could well be that the Pakistan government and army find themselves challenged by emboldened Islamic insurgents in 2022. This in turn is bad news for all vulnerable religious minorities who can become easy targets. One way of influencing Afghanistan is to send back hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees, who have lived in Pakistan for more than two decades, knowingly causing immense social and economic challenges for an already struggling country. On the other hand, tens and maybe hundreds of thousands are currently trying to leave Afghanistan and are looking to neighboring Pakistan as a possibility for doing so.

Afghanistan holds other major challenges for Pakistan as well: The [assassination](#) of a high-ranking TTP member in the Afghan province of Nangarhar on 9 January 2022 suddenly made the Pakistan Taliban unsure whether they can rely on having a safe haven in Afghanistan (Jamestown Foundation, 28 January 2022). No-one claimed responsibility for the targeted killing. Another [assassination](#) of three high-ranking TTP members took place in August 2022 (Gandhara, 7 August 2022). As late as April 2021, the TTP was able to stage a [major attack](#) against a heavily secured

luxury hotel in Quetta (Long War Journal, 22 April 2021), showing their strength, regardless of whether the Chinese ambassador was the actual target or not. The Taliban was successful in brokering yet another ceasefire [extension](#) between the government of Pakistan and the TTP, which is largely based on Afghan soil (Long War Journal, 18 May 2022). However, the series of roughly a dozen earlier ceasefires has shown that the root problem of the conflict has not yet been tackled. The Afghan Taliban also [complained](#) that Pakistan had allowed the USA to use its airspace for drone strikes against targets in Afghanistan, showing growing discontent within the movement towards the government (Gandhara, 30 September 2022).

The Islamic State group (IS), although weakened, is still alive and may refresh its forces with disgruntled members of the Taliban or benefit from the dire security situation in neighboring Afghanistan. IS made its presence felt by claiming the [killing of the Taliban shadow governor](#) of Nangarhar Province (Afghanistan), who resided in Peshawar (Jamestown Foundation, 3 May 2021). The increasing presence of militant groups specifically naming Christians as their targets has worsened the situation for Christians in the region; examples are internationally known groups like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group (ISKP), but also Pakistan's own groups like *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, *Jaish-e-Mohammed* and others.

It is not only the TTP staging high-profile attacks against Chinese nationals (as in the 2021 bus attack which killed nine Chinese). On 26 April 2022, a female suicide bomber and student at Karachi University, [killed three](#) Chinese language teachers and their driver working for the university's Confucius Institute. The ethnically motivated separatist Baloch Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the attack (BBC News, 27 April 2022). Baloch militant attacks are increasing and have reached the [highest level](#) since 2018 (Jamestown Foundation, 23 September 2022).

The simmering conflict between Pakistan and India over Punjab came briefly to the boil in February 2019, as already mentioned above under Recent History. India's decision to put Jammu and Kashmir under direct rule of Delhi in August 2019 caused a great deal of [\(diplomatic\) protest](#), but so far no military or violent reaction (The Diplomat, 9 July 2020). Also, jurisdiction over the federally administered tribal areas (FATA) is still limited. This volatile region bordering Afghanistan is still ruled according to a colonial law called "Frontiers Crime Regulation" dating back to 1901, which effectively bans intervention from police and courts and adds to the local peoples' alienation. In this region, Pakistan's Constitution seems to be effectively abrogated. The decision to merge the federally administered tribal areas with neighboring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in 2018 was taken due to public pressure and comes [fraught with challenges](#) (ICG, 20 August 2018). As mentioned above, another hotspot is [Balochistan](#) where separatist groups carry out attacks, aimed not least at the Chinese presence in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, all the way down to Gwadar (Jamestown Foundation, 28 July 2020).

Christians in Pakistan suffer from the volatile security situation and the high level of violence as does society in general. However, as a religious minority, they do not have the necessary channels for seeking protection: They have no connections to politicians, strongmen or other influential people with the power to give protection and relief. Additionally, Christians and other religious minorities not only face social hostility, but also a security apparatus, especially the police force, which is more interested in appeasing local strongmen and keeping things calm

than in implementing the law and protecting minorities. Courts, however, - at least the higher ones - have a slightly better track-record in this respect. However, when they are finally in a position to judge a case, Christians have often languished in prison for years before any ruling is made and it is then often too late to bring change to a situation.

Against this backdrop of violence towards Christians, daily life is a challenge for both men and women. If identified, a male Christian convert from Islam might be accused of blasphemy, beaten or killed. For women and girls on the other hand, the greatest threat is forced marriage. Girls from religious minorities are commonly targeted for abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage ([CEDAW, 2020, p.10](#)). Statistics reveal that over 1,000 Christian and Hindu girls, typically between 12 and 25 years, are kidnapped, forced to convert, and married off to Muslim men, annually ([Forbes, 2020](#)).

As noted in a report by [CREID \(2020, p.55\)](#) ideologically targeted sexual abuse is directed specifically at religious minorities, both for sexual predation but also as a 'conquest' to win the girl over to the majority religion. There have been several reports of cases where the court ruled that the victim should live with her abductor, on the basis that she had 'willingly' converted to Islam ([CLAAS, June 2021; Church in Chains, March 2022](#)). These cases exemplify the impunity granted perpetrators and why many families consider it pointless to take legal action. Pakistan's Commission on Implementation of Minority Rights has set out a plan to deal with the concerning rate of forced marriages and conversions ([David Alton, March 2021](#)). Linked to this issue, the trafficking of Christian girls (usually into China) also remains an ongoing concern ([Brookings Institution, March 2022](#)).

## Trends analysis

### 1) The new government is facing enormous challenges

The new government of Shehbaz Sharif is facing the immediate challenge of a contracting and struggling economy. He will be held responsible for all the hardships citizens are facing (caused in part by the IMF bail-outs). Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is president of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) and one of the new government's first steps was [to meet](#) with the exiled PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif in London. This shows how difficult the political situation is (Dawn, 12 May 2022). Also, with ex-PM Imran Khan continuing to talk of his ousting as a conspiracy and calling upon his supporters to take to the streets, more violence can be expected. Imran Khan should not be seen as a politically spent force. As one long-term observer [cautioned](#) (East Asia Forum, 31 March 2022):

*The current political brawl will not end with the 'no confidence' motion. The economy is so fractured that the short-term populist measures the opposition parties adopted during their terms in office cannot sustain the state structure. They have actually caused the current predicament. Being an import economy, most prices are tied to dollar appreciation. Khan was a deadlier foe in opposition than he has proved to be in the government — largely due to the inept governance and corruption within the system rather than his intent. Even most of his detractors admit that he is well-meaning. If he is toppled now, with his proven tenacity and energy, his chances of returning to power will remain high.*

Other observers showed how much Imran Khan contributed to [polarizing](#) the country (Foreign Affairs, 24 November 2022).

## **2) Dealing with Islamic radicals - indigenous and abroad**

While the former PTI government under Imran Khan actively opposed some radical and violent groups, there are countless others 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) indeed gained new strength after the Taliban take-over in neighboring Afghanistan, as predicted in the Trends analysis of WWL 2022. If 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. Talks about ceasefire extensions with the TTP are almost routinely held in Afghanistan, showing a growing interdependency. One observer summed up the situation aptly: "[Pakistan reaps what it sowed](#)" (Foreign Affairs, 23 May 2022). Continued attacks against Chinese interests may also bring Pakistan's good relationship with China under additional strain. If the government fails in protecting these interests, Pakistan's economy may struggle even more and perspectives for its citizens are likely to remain gloomy. A failure to hedge in Islamic radical groups also spells danger for vulnerable marginalized groups such as Christians.

## **3) The Christian minority is likely to become even more marginalized**

The protection and participation of the Christian minority in society has been a big question for years, with no quick and easy answers. 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. According to a [study](#) over the period January - October 2021, there were 36 cases of abduction and forced conversion of non-Muslims recorded; 21 of those involved Christians and 15 Hindus (UCA News, 18 October 2021). This represents a 177% increase compared to 2020 and does not take into account the high number of unreported cases. The cases of abduction and forced conversion in the WWL 2023 reporting period mentioned above (see: Specific examples of violations of rights of Christians) bear witness to the continuation of this problem and its deep-rootedness in society. A USCIRF country update from August 2022 [summarizes](#) 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.



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## WWL 2023: Church information / Pakistan

### Christian origins

According to the Church historian, Eusebius, writing in the 4th century AD, the apostles Thomas and Bartholomew were assigned to Parthia (modern Iran) and India. By the time of the establishment of the Second Persian Empire (AD 226), there were bishops of the Church of the East in northwest India, Afghanistan and Baluchistan (which includes parts of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan), with laymen and clergy alike engaging in missionary activity. Roman Catholic missionary work took off on the Indian continent with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century and became [established in Lahore](#) from about 1579 onwards (Catholic Online, accessed 26 November 2020). In more modern times, Christianity became firmly established through Protestant missionary work in the late 18th and 19th centuries and has continued to grow ever since. However, due to rising pressure in recent years, many Pakistani Christians have emigrated to countries like Sri Lanka or Thailand.

### Church spectrum today

Pakistan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	1,137,000	27.1
Protestant	2,535,000	60.4
Independent	651,000	15.5
Unaffiliated	21,100	0.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-150,000	-3.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,194,100</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,039,000	24.8
Renewalist movement	920,000	21.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

**Orthodox:** Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

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.

## Areas where Christians face most difficulties

While there are many political hotspots in Pakistan, particular hotspots for 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.

## 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 (Anglican Church) 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 a country expert puts 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.

## External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: established in Lahore - <https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/view.php?id=6781>

# WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Pakistan

## Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

## Position on the World Watch List

Pakistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	86	7
WWL 2022	87	8
WWL 2021	88	5
WWL 2020	88	5
WWL 2019	87	5

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

The very high and extremely high scores for pressure in the individual spheres of life decreased to a small extent. 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. Despite the fact that there have been no major attacks against churches or gatherings of Christians since the Quetta attacks in December 2017, Pakistan has continued to score the maximum for killings and attacks against church buildings. The country's notorious blasphemy laws have continued to be like a Sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of Christians. Christian girls continued to be abducted and forcefully converted and married on a frequent basis.

## Persecution engines

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

There are politicians, judges and religious leaders who are considering (or even advocating for) an amendment to the country's notorious blasphemy laws. However, all such well-meaning attempts are openly threatened and silenced by those who hold a radical perspective based on Wahhabi ideology and who continue to buy into the caliphate theology and treatment of 'infidels', firmly identifying themselves with supporters of the Islamic State group (IS) and the Taliban, which received a strong boost by the ground-shaking events in neighboring Afghanistan. They are also countered by facts on the ground such as the introduction of a 'Single National Curriculum' in schools, which 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 from 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 67.1 years, the total fertility rate stands at 2.62. Although these figures are changing 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 almost one third even below 14 years of age) and so there is a great need for the state to be able to offer this younger generation future prospects.

Pakistan suffers from ethnic fragmentation, not only in society but also in the country's administration. Baluchistan 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. Therefore, *Ethno-religious hostility* and *Islamic oppression* are blended.

### **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 Pakistan politics 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. 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 and even though he is currently banned from any elected office, this does not mean he is no longer a significant factor in politics. Another important driver behind this engine is the army, which will go to great lengths to protect its steering power over politics as well as their economic influence. They, too, have become more Islamic over the years, although it is not clear how much of this is a calculated strategy. In any case, Christians as a minority in Pakistan cannot expect any protection; on the contrary, if it matches political goals, neglecting and even attacking them will be justified and occur with impunity.

### **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.



## 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	
Organized crime cartels or networks	Weak		Very weak					Very weak	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)									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. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

### Drivers of Islamic oppression (blended with Ethno-religious hostility)

- 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. (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 paramilitary 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. 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 (see above: *Social and cultural landscape*). 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

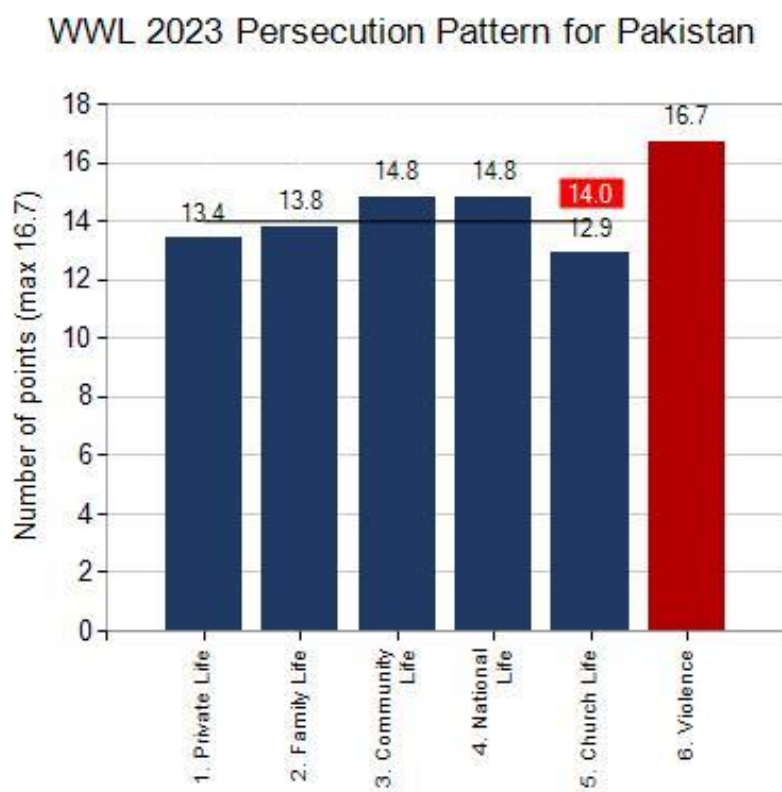
labor is a fate that is a reality for many of them, bringing their masters great profit. Rich landlords collude with politicians and local dignitaries (both from religious and political circles), benefitting greatly from this system. A second way government officials can be a driver of this engine is by assisting and rubber-stamping land-grabbing.

- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Very 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 (Strong):** 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 2023 Persecution pattern for Pakistan shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Pakistan is at an extreme level with the average pressure reaching 14 points in WWL 2023 (0.1 points less than in WWL 2022).
- Pressure decreased slightly over all spheres of life, reflecting among other things how Christians continue to suffer from the country's blasphemy laws and from the increasing control of churches and meetings, but also testifying to their resilience. Pressure remains at an extreme level in the *Community* and *Family 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 there have been no major bomb attacks against Christians since 2017, the continuing abduction of women and girls, rape, forced marriages, evictions from homes and displacements in-country and abroad has to be mentioned here.

## 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 2023 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://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).*

## 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)**

Many Christians avoid 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 blasphemy laws. Any such discussion 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 1.4: 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 Internet and social media are watched by both governmental and non-governmental watchdogs and [new rules](#) have given authorities blanket powers of censorship (Reuters, 19 November 2021). Because of the fear of misinterpretation and attacks, whether virtual or physical, many Christians avoid expressing their faith by exercising self-censorship.

### **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. A country expert explained: "Even how you say 'goodbye' can now 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 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.25 points)**

While expatriate Christians can basically possess any material they want, it is dangerous for Pakistani Christians to keep materials beyond their immediate personal use, as this could be viewed as a tool for advertising and reaching out to Muslims, even if it is only for discussion. Books, especially with an apologetic content, can be declared anti-State and anti-Muslim and owning them can lead to punishment. For converts, it is very risky to openly possess any Christian materials.

## 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 Pakthun 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 it's 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 and even previously 'untouchable' backgrounds. As the US State Department noted on page 24 of IRFR 2020: "Religious minority community members stated public schools gave Muslim students bonus grade points for memorizing the Quran, but there were no analogous opportunities for extra academic credit available for religious minority students." A *hafiz quran* is given 20 extra points for admission to the next academic level, although this rule is under scrutiny by the [Supreme Court](#) (UCA News, 11 January 2022). 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)**

One 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.

The "Single National Curriculum" which is to be implemented step by step will [Islamize](#) schools further, especially as textbooks are biased against Pakistan's religious and cultural diversity (UCA News, 11 February 2022). This will put additional pressure on the students and their parents. In some cases, Christian students were also hindered in continuing their studies, as they were threatened with a charge of blasphemy when taking the mandatory course on Islamic studies as Christians.

**Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.25 points)**

Generally speaking, there is no formal process for adoption and no law to regulate it in Pakistan. The only legal form is when an individual becomes another person's 'ward' which is not exactly adoption. If a couple informally adopts a child, the expectation is that the child should follow the religion of the real parents, and if that is unknown, the default is Islam. As a country expert stated: "Christian parents would be very unlikely to apply to adopt a child for fear of being accused of wanting to convert the individual." Christians can only adopt or become wards by using a Christian adoption institution which are monitored to ensure they are not giving away children of non-Christian background. The adoption of Christian children by non-Christians is still the exception, but it does occur, so as "to not let it remain a minority child anymore", as a country expert put it.

**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 in their beliefs, within certain limits and with the assistance of the church. A country expert points to increasing challenges: "The new curriculum tries to allow and accredit madrassas as competent and complete educational institutions."

**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. The US State Department explains on page 8 of IRFR 2021: "Some court judgments have considered the marriage of a non-Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man dissolved if she converts to Islam, although the marriage of a non-Muslim man who converts remains recognized." A country expert points to another problem on registration: "Due to the greater process of digitalisation 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. 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. 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.*

## 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. Listening to phone calls and access to emails can only be done by the security agencies of the country and happens in specific situation and cases." 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 daughter walk outside alone. Compared to previous years, this threat worsened in the WWL 2023 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. One report states that the [poverty](#) of Christians is driving forced conversion (UCA News, 24 November 2021). 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 describes the general attitude towards Christians when doing business: "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." Another expert provides a drastic example for this mindset: "Government contracts are never been given to Christians. Christians are also totally excluded from food businesses as Muslims will not buy meat sold by Christians. In my locality one Christian man started a Chicken Meat Shop, Muslims asked to stop the shop immediately because the meat sold by Christians is "haram" (unclean to eat) for them. When he refused they attacked and killed him."

**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 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 for 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) 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 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)**

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).

**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. According to a press report from 2010 (more recent data is not available), 801 of the 1,031 people imprisoned under blasphemy laws were Muslims (the vast majority of cases most likely affecting Islamic minorities). Of the remaining 230 prisoners, 162 were Christians (70.4%), 15 were Sikh (6.5%), 28 were Buddhist (12.2%), while 25 adhered to other religions.

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 more recent statistic quoted by a country expert, out of the 1,550 people accused of blasphemy since 1986, 238 involved Christians (15%), even though Christians are less than 2% of the population. The [killing](#) of a Buddhist Sri Lankan national by an enraged mob, stirred up by blasphemy accusations, shows that this can be a danger for expatriates of any non-Muslim faith (BBC News, 6 December 2021).

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (3.50 points)**

Speaking out against injustice or simply expressing views remains 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.

The US State Department stated on page 23 of IRFR 2021: "As of year's end, the National Commission for Minorities continued to function without legislative authority and without power to resolve problems." In what could have been a positive item of news, its tasks and influence remain unclear and one of its arguably most important fields of work - helping to keep girls from religious minorities safe from abduction and forced conversion/marriage - is seen by many politicians as being unnecessary.

**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."*

## 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" (NADRA) 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 church 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." The court decision to reverse the nationalization of the Edwardes College (see above: *Positive examples*) is noteworthy, but so far an outlier and an illustration of the struggles churches are facing.

**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. One example in the WWL 2023 reporting period is the action the Interior Ministry took against the Catholic "Center for Social Justice" because of "[anti-state activities](#)". The Center had sent reports to the UN on topics such as forced conversions or the blasphemy laws (UCA News, 24 August 2022).*

*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 order 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 5 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. For further discussion** (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor’s article dated 13 November 2013 available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

**4. 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.

**5. The symbol “x” in the table:** This denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security concerns.

Pakistan: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1	How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	12	620
6.2	How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10	183
6.3	How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	26	1000 *
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?	25	50
6.5	How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	10 *	1000 *
6.6	How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	10 *	1000
6.7	How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	1000 *
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	14	1000 *
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?	12	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?	10	100 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	50	1000
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	250	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 high-profile 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 violence*" 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 in the reporting period*.
- **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. To name but two cases, [Ashfaq Masih](#), who is awaiting the death sentence in jail (RLP Bulletin, 12 July 2022). [Zafar Bhatti](#) whose life sentence has been changed to a death sentence (Morning Star News, 10 January 2022).
- **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. In one widely reported incident, a [Christian school](#) was attacked in Sheikhpura (UCA News, 2 May 2022).
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** In blasphemy cases, the homes of Christians are frequently attacked, forcing them and their families to go into hiding. In "planning and restructuring" cases, Christian neighborhoods are threatened with being completely demolished by the authorities or developers.

## 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.

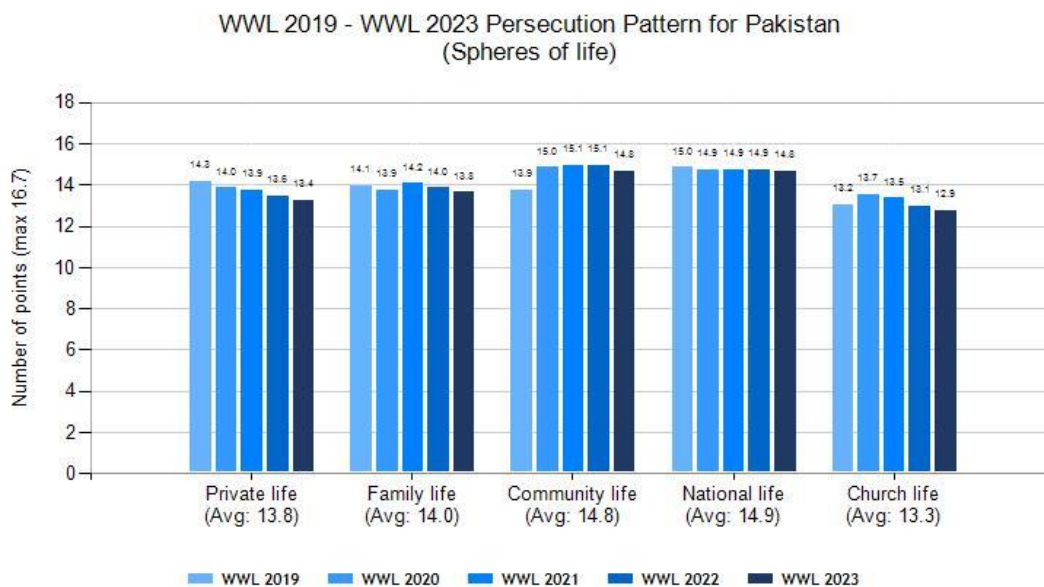
### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

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



Pakistan: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	14.0
2022	14.1
2021	14.3
2020	14.3
2019	14.1

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

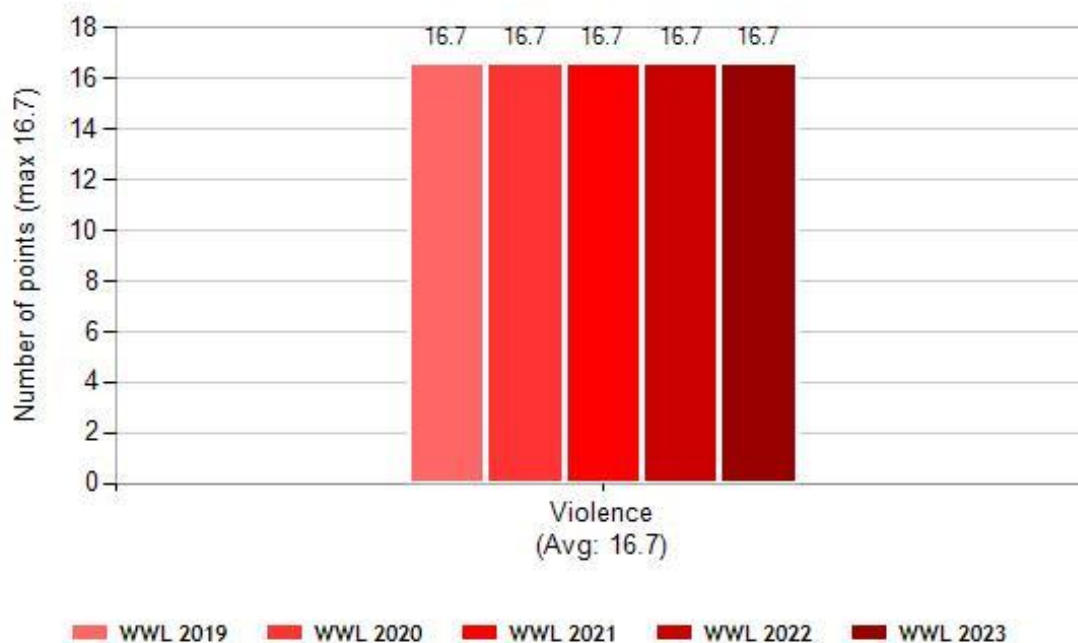


Although there have been fluctuations, the level of pressure in all *spheres of life* has remained at very high and extreme levels, reflecting the operation of a relatively high number of (blended) persecution engines and their various drivers.

## 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 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.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Pakistan (Violence)



## Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied legal ability to marry Christian spouse; False charges; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

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. In 2019, the trafficking of women from Pakistan sold as ‘brides’ in China gained international media attention ([PBJ Learning, 17 March 2022](#)). These dangers, alongside more insidious forms of human trafficking that center around forced conversion, remain live risks for women from religious minorities ([CREID, 30 July 2021](#)).

Reports of the abduction of Christian women and girls have increased throughout the WWL 2023 reporting period, including in areas previously considered to be ‘safe’. Christian girls as young as 8 - primarily from poor families and including girls with physical disabilities - are kidnapped, forcibly married, sexually assaulted and forced to convert to Islam on pain of death ([CLAAS, 18 August 2021](#); [CREID, November 2020](#)). In addition to abduction, reports indicate that Christian girls have been seduced as a means of converting them to Islam.

Many families never see their girls again, partly because the authorities rarely take meaningful action to bring perpetrators to justice. A country expert explains: “The legal system repeatedly fails these young women. Many between the ages of 8-18 are being abducted, raped and married to older men. Some of them over 50 years old. 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.” The challenges involved represent a huge emotional strain for the families who constantly fear retribution from the perpetrators and their supporters. For victims who are recovered, the shame of abduction and rape places a huge shadow over their lives within Pakistan’s honor-based culture.

Christian women and girls are at risk of sexual violence in the public sphere, including in the workplace and in schools. Many of them are maids, or cleaners, and are targeted for sexual exploitation. According to a country expert, it is becoming the norm to rape Christian children, with reports from 2021 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. A country expert shared an account of a woman who “committed suicide because of abuse and sexual harassment, departmental negligence and religious oppression.”

Christian women and girls are also at risk of honor killings and blasphemy allegations. They additionally risk being killed, such as in 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

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	False charges; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Blasphemy laws continue to provide the framework for many of the rights violations against 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. Exemplifying the dangers, 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 and sewage cleaners. Whereas there is also a Christian middle class and not all hold lower status jobs, 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, including young Christians. Christian men and boys are also trapped in cycles of bonded labor, such as in brick-kiln factories.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion and requires all provisions of the law to be consistent with Islam. The constitution states, 'Subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion.' It also states, 'A person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis), is a non-Muslim.'" (page 1)
- "Civil society organizations and media said that armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including the TTP, and the once-banned 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." (page 29)
- "NGOs expressed concern about what they stated was the increasing frequency of attempts to kidnap, forcibly convert, and forcibly marry young women and girls from religious minority communities, especially Hindus and Christians. The Center for Social Justice recorded 41 cases of forced conversions through October 31. There continued to be reports of attacks on Ahmadi, Hindu, and Christian holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols. The government continued to implement its National Action Plan against terrorism, by countering sectarian hate speech and extremism and by conducting military and law enforcement operations against violent groups. According to Ahmadi civil society organizations, however, the government failed to restrict advertisements or speeches

inciting anti-Ahmadi violence, as provided for in the National Action Plan. Civil society groups continued to express concerns about the safety of religious minorities. Multiple civil society groups and faith community leaders stated the government had increased efforts to provide enhanced security at religious minority places of worship." (pp. 2-3)

Further information:

The situation of other religious minorities did not improve when Imran Khan took over as Prime Minister in 2018: Attacks, killings and blasphemy cases continued unabated. In October and November 2020, three [Hindu temples](#) were attacked (UCA News, 4 November 2020) and reports show how [Shia Muslims](#) are affected by the country's blasphemy laws as well (UCA News, 1 December 2020). They were even the [main group](#) targeted, with Ahmadi being a distant second, according to a report published in September 2021 (UCA News, 10 September 2021). From Sindh province, a report emerged that [Hindu girls](#) are being forcefully converted on a large scale (Gandhara, 20 April 2021). Another incident took place in the village of Rahim Yar Khan in Punjab Province, when a [Hindu temple was vandalized](#), after a court ordered the release of an 8 year old Hindu boy who had been accused of blasphemy (DW, 5 August 2021).

The Ahmadi are targets of persecution, discrimination and intolerance 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 and 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).

As stated by the US State Department (IRFR 2021, page 9):

- "The constitution prohibits discriminatory admission based on religious affiliation to any governmental educational institution. According to regulations, the only factors affecting admission to government schools are students' grades and home provinces; however, students must declare their religious affiliation on application forms. This declaration is also required for private educational institutions, including universities. Students who identify themselves as Muslims must declare in writing they believe the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet. Non-Muslims are required to have the head of their local religious communities verify their religious affiliation. There is no provision in the law for atheists."

On a more positive note, 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).

## Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

### **Islamic oppression, blended with Ethno-religious hostility**

Competition between the Taliban and IS increases the pressure on both groups to recruit followers. Their recruitment strategy requires each group to appear closer to the heart of Islam than the other. In their efforts to appear more Islamic, one strategy has been to attack the 'dhimmi' as they are most vulnerable to the ideology of 'pure Islam'. This competition is beginning to affect politics too, especially as some radical Islamic groups are being wooed by politicians.

The Taliban governing Afghanistan will most likely give their connections in Pakistan additional weight, credibility and funds, adding to their level of influence in Pakistan's politics as well. Striving for a purer Islamic identity (as carried out by the radical Islamic groups) seems to focus on Islamizing the school curriculum, thus bringing radical Islamic madrassa ideology into public schools. This is likely to go hand in hand with more violations against Christians and the removal of as many of the rights of Christians as possible at a time when the government is not particularly interested in granting rights to minorities. This can be seen in the new Commission on National Minorities' lack of effective powers and the findings of the Commission on Forced Conversions, namely the denial that such conversions happen in the first place. This in turn fits well into wider society's negative attitude towards Christians. *Islamic oppression* will thus most likely remain very strong in Pakistan.

### **Organized corruption and crime**

Christians will continue to be discriminated against and often exploited, not least in cases involving bonded labor and land-grabbing. The increasing media coverage about the dire working conditions for such Christians and the basis for discrimination in the caste system, is hardly likely to bring any change.

### **Dictatorial paranoia**

Pakistan's politicians have a track record for clinging to power and causing religious minorities to suffer and be used as scapegoats. Ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan seems not to be willing to leave the political arena without a fight. But the army is a driver of this engine as well and while it remains to be seen how strong the new army chief will prove to be, having been challenged by Imran Khan's strong opposition, the army may see itself facing emboldened, strengthened and growing radical Islamic groups in the future.

## External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- 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): new rules - <https://www.reuters.com/article/pakistan-socialmedia-censorship/new-internet-rules-to-give-pakistan-blanket-powers-of-censorship-idUSL8N2I53OW>
- Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (4.00 points): Supreme Court - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-court-questions-extra-marks-for-reciting-quran/95679>

- Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points): islamize - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/experts-accuse-pakistan-of-ignoring-warnings-on-biased-textbooks/96064>
- Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.75 points): poverty - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/in-pakistan-poverty-drives-forced-conversions/95096>
- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: health card - <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/pakistans-miraculous-new-health-card-scheme-provides-affordable/>
- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: vacant posts - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/elite-civil-service-jobs-a-step-too-far-for-pakistani-catholics/94410>
- 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): briefing paper - <https://www.icj.org/pakistan-right-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-under-sustained-attack/>
- 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): protection of minorities - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-still-failing-to-protect-religious-minorities/97715>
- Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points): number of minority seats - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistans-top-court-rejects-petition-to-increase-minority-seats/96034>
- 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): blasphemy laws - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/2022%20Pakistan%20Country%20Update.pdf>
- 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): killing - <https://www.bbc.com/news/59501368>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: anti-state activities - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-activists-back-under-fire-christian-group/98508>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Ashfaq Masih - <https://rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com/2022/07/rlpb-653-pakistan-death-for-blasphemy.html>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Zafar Bhatti - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/christians-prison-term-changed-to-death-sentence-in-pakistan>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Christian school - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/christian-school-attacked-in-pakistans-punjab-province/97108>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: PBJ Learning, 17 March 2022 - <https://pbjlearning.com/2022/03/17/bride-trafficking-along-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: CREID, 30 July 2021 - <https://creid.ac/religious-inequalities-trafficking-and-forced-labour/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: CLAAS, 18 August 2021 - <https://www.claas.org.uk/2021/08/18/two-christian-girls-kidnapped-at-gunpoint-outside-their-house/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: CREID, November 2020 - [https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15800/CREID\\_Intersections\\_Series\\_Violence\\_and\\_Discrimination\\_against\\_Women\\_of\\_Religious\\_Minority\\_Backgrounds\\_in\\_Pakistan.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y](https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15800/CREID_Intersections_Series_Violence_and_Discrimination_against_Women_of_Religious_Minority_Backgrounds_in_Pakistan.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y)
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: International Christian Concern, 31 July 2021 - <https://www.persecution.org/2021/07/31/another-christian-girl-raped-school-pakistan/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: International Christian Concern, 12 June 2020 - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/12/06/christian-woman-pakistan-killed-refusing-marriage-proposal/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Al-Jazeera, 8 September 2020 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/8/pakistani-christian-sentenced-to-death-for-blasphemous-texts>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Hindu temples - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/third-hindu-temple-vandalized-in-pakistan-in-three-weeks/90142>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Shia Muslims - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/shia-muslims-feel-the-heat-of-pakistans-blasphemy-laws/90509>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: main group - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-reports-spike-in-blasphemy-cases-in-2020/94083>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: Hindu girls - <https://gandhara.rferl.org/a/pakistan-hindu-brides-conversion-sindh/31205637.html>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Hindu temple was vandalized - <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-orders-probe-into-hindu-temple-vandalism/a-58764292>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: destroyed - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/2022%20Pakistan%20Country%20Update.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: corridor of Kartarpur - <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1743946/pakistan>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: destroyed an ancient Buddhist statue - <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-rare-buddha-statue-destroyed/30734848.html>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Pakistan>