



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

COUNTRY UPDATE: PAKISTAN

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USCIRF's Mission

*To advance international
freedom of religion or
belief, by independently
assessing and unflinchingly
confronting threats to this
fundamental right.*

Introduction

In 2025, the Pakistani government continues to commit particularly severe violations of religious freedom through its enforcement of its blasphemy law and other discriminatory regulations, including anti-Ahmadiyya laws, to restrict the rights of religious minorities. The government also tolerates egregious religious freedom violations through its lack of willingness to mitigate and punish associated mob violence.

This report highlights religious freedom conditions in Pakistan to date, including recent attacks against religious minorities, including Ahmadiyya Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. These conditions continue to merit USCIRF's 2025 [Annual Report](#) recommendation that the U.S. Department of State redesignate Pakistan as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations.

Pakistan's Blasphemy Law

As previous U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) [publications](#) on [blasphemy](#) have described, Pakistan inherited its blasphemy law—which is punishable by death—from British colonial rulers and formally adopted it into the Penal Code in 1947. The law contains three main provisions: Sections 295-A, 295-B, and 295-C, which criminalize making derogatory remarks against Muslim holy personages, defiling or desecrating the Qur'an, and insulting the Prophet Muhammad, respectively. Government authorities frequently use this blasphemy law to target religious minorities and as a means to “resolve” interpersonal disputes; mere accusations or rumors of blasphemy are often enough to incite mob violence. Offenders increasingly levy such accusations on social media or WhatsApp groups to target vulnerable communities.

How the Blasphemy Law Is Used to Entrap Individuals

Recent reporting from human rights groups demonstrates that Pakistani authorities use the blasphemy law to entrap both Muslims and non-Muslims. Pakistan's Human Rights Commission reported in January 2025 that organized groups targeted over 450 people with false blasphemy accusations, demonstrating a “calculated use of the blasphemy laws for profit.” Similarly, Human Rights Watch reports that the country's blasphemy laws have been used to target individuals in order to acquire their land. They report that blasphemy accusations against Christians and Ahmadiyya Muslims in particular have forced “entire communities to flee their homes and neighborhoods.”



Such accusations directly impact members of the Sunni Muslim majority as well: for example, 101 families filed a petition with the judiciary in September 2024, claiming that an organized criminal network falsely accused their relatives of blasphemy, most of whom were Muslims.

Following these reports, in July 2025, the Islamabad High Court ordered the federal government to establish a commission within 30 days to investigate misuse of the country's blasphemy law and to complete its work within four months. This order came during a landmark hearing on blasphemy, which alleges that a coordinated group has worked in collusion with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to entrap young Pakistanis on social media and accuse them of blasphemy. This "blasphemy gang" reportedly generates false blasphemy cases to extort money from victims. The order to establish a blasphemy commission was short-lived. On July 25, the Islamabad High Court suspended the implementation of this decision.

Notable Blasphemy Cases

According to Pakistan's Human Rights Commission, an estimated 750 people were in prison on blasphemy charges as of 2024. During the first half of 2025, however, new blasphemy cases continued to emerge. In January, a Rawalpindi court sentenced to death and life imprisonment four men—[Rana Usman](#), [Ashfaq Ali](#), [Salman Sajjad](#), and [Wajid Ali](#)—for blasphemy, accusing them of sharing "blasphemous content" via WhatsApp and social media. The same month, prosecutors charged YouTuber Rajab Butt under the blasphemy and cybercrime law, claiming that his perfume brand, "295," mocked the country's blasphemy law. That case also prompted the

leader of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a religiously affiliated political party, to file a First Instance Report (FIR) against Butt. On June 12, a sessions court granted Butt interim bail, barring police from arresting him until June 21 but directing him to cooperate with the investigation. Then in July, a sessions court issued a notice to the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) seeking registration of yet another blasphemy allegation against Butt, accusing him of using "inappropriate language" on a religious matter in a social media video.

[Junaid Hafeez](#) also remained imprisoned at the time of this report. Pakistani authorities arrested him on allegations of blasphemy in 2013 when he was a university professor in Lahore and one of his students accused him of insulting the Prophet. He was convicted of blasphemy to death and has been in solitary confinement since 2014. The Lahore High Court announced in March 2025 that it would hear his appeal, but the court reportedly removed his case from the hearing schedule just one day after the announcement.

Recent Acquittals in Blasphemy Cases

In a positive development, several victims of these corrosive blasphemy accusations have received acquittals in 2025. In June, [Anwar Kenneth](#), a 72-year Catholic Christian, was released from prison after serving 23 years for allegedly writing letters about the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad that prosecutors had deemed blasphemous. Although he received a death sentence for his 2002 conviction, reports indicate that he had a history of mental health challenges for which a medical board should have examined him prior to his trial.

That same month, an antiterrorism court acquitted Farhan Javed Masih, a 28-year old Christian, who had known mental health challenges. Authorities had imprisoned Masih for nearly five months after a local farmer accused him of uttering “blasphemous words” while walking near a field. The judge ultimately ruled that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute him. In July, a court also acquitted two Christian teens of blasphemy charges; authorities had arrested them in 2023 under Section 295-A of the Penal Code for allegedly disrespecting the Prophet Muhammad during a conversation. Despite these acquittals, longstanding precedent suggests that the victims remain at risk of mob violence and other threats.

Attacks and Systematic Harassment against Ahmadiyya Muslims

Pakistan’s Penal Code explicitly and egregiously discriminates against the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. Section 298 of the Penal Code denies recognition to Ahmadis as Muslims and prevents them from either describing themselves as such or referring to their places of worship as mosques. Anti-Ahmadi rhetoric, attacks on Ahmadiyya mosques, and mob violence toward members of that community have long contributed to a climate of fear and intolerance.

Violent Attacks and Targeted Killings of Ahmadiyya Muslims

Several violent attacks against Ahmadiyya Muslims and their places of worship have taken place in 2025. In February, for example, police and vigilantes demolished and attacked three mosques within 10 days in Punjab. In April, 400 members of the TLP gathered to lynch an Ahmadi man, Laeeq Cheema, after attacking his mosque in an attempt to prevent its congregants’ Friday prayers. Cheema had reportedly videorecorded the mob as they assembled outside the mosque and was actively pursuing a case in the local court about an attack on the same mosque in 2023. Police subsequently arrested 13 people in connection with his murder.

In March, police in Karachi arrested two Ahmadi men, Tahir Mahmood and Ijaz Hussain, after offering Friday prayers. During their court appearance in May, a mob dragged both men from the courtroom and violently assaulted them, killing Mahmood. Just days later in Sarghoda, an unidentified gunman shot and killed Sheikh Mahmood, an Ahmadi Muslim, following repeated death threats that had already reportedly forced him to relocate his job.

Systematic Harassment and Detention of Ahmadiyya Muslims

In addition to their vulnerability to persistent threats and acts of violence, Pakistan’s Ahmadiyya Muslim community has continued to face consistent, systematic attacks on their freedom of religion or belief. In January 2025, for example, the Islamabad High Court ruled that Ahmadiyya Muslims could not inherit property from their parents; in that ruling, the judge ordered that the principles of Shari’a prevent the distribution or inheritance of the property of a deceased Muslim landowner to a “non-Muslim” heir. In April, the Punjab Housing and Town Planning Agency (PHATA) published an advertisement for a residential and commercial plot auction that explicitly excluded Ahmadiyya Muslims from participating. The same month, police registered a case against 42 Ahmadiyya Muslims after receiving a complaint that they converted a house into a place of worship—invoking Section 298-C of the Penal Code, which prevents members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community from calling themselves Muslims. The petitioner claimed that they had offered regular prayers, including Jumma and Eid prayers, at the mosque.

Members of Pakistani state and society also continued to exploit Eid-al-Adha as an opportunity to punish or discriminate against the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. In June, the Lahore High Court instructed the Punjab Home Ministry to order police to physically restrain Ahmadis from gathering to celebrate Eid prayers. The High Court’s instructions described that community’s members as unlawfully presenting themselves as Muslims and portraying their “blasphemous beliefs as Islam.” Sialkot police arrested a total of 22 Ahmadiyya Muslims in response to a complaint stating that members of the community were offering prayers during Eid. Punjabi authorities issued five FIRs against Ahmadiyya Muslims for slaughtering or attempting to slaughter animals during the holiday. The same month, a Gujranwala court dismissed a post-bail petition from an Ahmadiyya Muslim man whom police had arrested and charged with blasphemy for distributing food and drinks during Muharram, thereby “posing as a Muslim.”

Attacks against Other Religious Minorities

Violence and harassment against Christians and Hindus persisted across the country throughout the first half of 2025, especially as authorities failed to provide accountability for previous attacks against them. In June, for example, an antiterrorism court in Jaranwala

acquitted 10 men of rioting and burning a church in 2023. The court claimed “insufficient evidence,” although church leaders reported that police had failed to conduct a transparent investigation. In March, the supervisor of a 22-year-old Christian, Waqas Masih, violently attacked him for refusing to convert to Islam. Masih reportedly suffered severe injuries to his throat that required his hospitalization. Reports indicate that the supervisor added insult to injury by accusing him of desecrating pages of the Qur’an. In April, a security guard shot and killed a Hindu man in Peshawar for refusing to convert to Islam. Hundreds of Hindus carried his body through the city, demanding immediate arrest of the perpetrator.

Forced Conversion of Religious Minorities

Reports also persisted during 2025 regarding cases of forced conversion in Pakistan, particularly involving the forced marriage of Christian and Hindu girls to Sunni Muslim men in Sindh and Punjab. In June, for example, the parents of three Hindu girls and their male cousin in Sindh accused a local teacher of abducting the four minors and forcibly converting them to Islam. The same month, in a separate case, a court in Shahdadpur, Sindh, ordered the parents of two minor Hindu girls to pay bonds of approximately 10 million rupees (\$35,000) as a precondition for their children’s return. The accused, Farhan Khaskheli, abducted the two Hindu girls and forced them to convert to Islam in June. Additionally, in July, the Sindh Human Rights Commission ordered an official probe into the reported abduction and forced conversion of a Hindu girl in Badin District.

In May, Pakistan’s Parliament introduced the Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Bill, which criminalizes the marriage of any person under the age of 18. While the law only applies to Islamabad, supporters regard it as one potential method to mitigate this alarming trend of forced marriage of Pakistani girls, including those belonging to religious minority communities. However, the Council of Islamic Ideology, a government body, responded to the law by declaring it “un-Islamic.”

Attacks on Places of Worship

In addition to attacks against religious minorities, places of worship have also been open to attack, particularly Ahmadiyya mosques. In February, Pakistani authorities and intolerant religious groups targeted three Ahmadiyya mosques in Punjab within the span of just 10 days. First, police demolished part of one such mosque after

members of the community refused to destroy it, then a mob of TLP members reportedly destroyed the minarets of another in Sialkot shortly thereafter. Two days later, authorities demolished part of another Ahmadiyya mosque—reportedly under pressure from the TLP. In June, police in Gujranwala also demolished a 70-year-old Ahmadiyya mosque and desecrated two graves, while a separate suicide bombing struck an Islamic seminary in northwestern Pakistan during Friday prayers, resulting in the death of six people, including the imam.

Repatriation of Afghan Refugees

Pakistani authorities have continued this year to facilitate the forced return of thousands of Afghan refugees under the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan of 2023. The government would repatriate “illegal foreigners” according to that plan, including an estimated 1.3 million Afghan refugees who cannot provide proof of registration. Many of these refugees had fled persecution from the Taliban, including religious minorities such as Hazara Muslims. In January, Minister of the Interior Mohsin Naqvi announced that the government would not permit Afghans to stay in Islamabad without a no-objection certificate (NOC). In March, his ministry launched the second phase of its repatriation plan, canceling all Afghan Citizen Cards and ordering all Afghan refugees to leave by the end of that month or face deportation. The Pakistani government ultimately pushed back its deadline until September, but authorities reportedly increased deportation efforts, including through police raids.

Conclusion

Religious freedom conditions in Pakistan remain extremely poor. Government authorities continue to use the blasphemy law to target and arbitrarily detain those who it perceives to have violated the law’s broad provisions. While the release of several blasphemy prisoners over the last year has represented a positive development, authorities continued to detain the accused for long periods of time, as they did in the case of Junaid Hafeez. Members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community continue to face systematic persecution, targeted killings, and attacks against their places of worship, and Hindus, Christians, and other religious minorities continue to face particularly severe challenges as a result of their religion or belief.



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