

KEY FINDINGS

In 2024, religious freedom conditions in Pakistan continued to deteriorate. Religious minority communities—particularly Christians, Hindus, and Shi’a and Ahmadiyya Muslims—continued to bear the brunt of persecution and prosecutions under Pakistan’s strict blasphemy law and to suffer violence from both the police and mobs, while those responsible for such violence rarely faced legal consequences. Such conditions continued to contribute to a worsening religious and political climate of fear, intolerance, and violence.

Accusations of blasphemy and subsequent mob violence continued to severely impact religious minority communities. In May, a mob violently attacked and lynched Nasir Masih, a 70-year-old Christian man, following accusations that he desecrated a Qur’an. Following his death, authorities arrested but then swiftly released hundreds of people in connection with the lynching. Christians in Sargodha subsequently declared a day of mourning, gathering more than 500 protesters to pay their respects. In June, an antiracism court in Punjab sentenced to death a 22-year-old Christian man, Ehsan Shan, for blasphemy, accusing him of posting photos on social media that showed defaced pages of the Qur’an. Protests erupted in Karachi following the announcement of his death sentence, with individuals carrying banners criticizing the “misuse of blasphemy laws.” Shan remained imprisoned at the end of the reporting period. The same month, a mob broke into a police station in Madyan in northwestern Pakistan and lynched a tourist accused of desecrating the Qur’an. The mob also set fire to the police station.

Violent attacks and systematic harassment against Ahmadiyya Muslims also persisted throughout the year, resulting in four deaths in total. In June, police reportedly killed two members of that

community in separate attacks. In one instance, police allegedly shot and killed a 36-year-old Ahmadiyya doctor while he was in custody for blasphemy charges; in the second, police allegedly killed Syed Khan while holding him in custody on accusations of insulting the Prophet Muhammad. In July, Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa issued a significant ruling that upheld the Penal Code’s rejection of the Ahmadiyya community’s identification as Muslim but affirmed its members’ right—as non-Muslims—to practice their faith within their homes, places of worship, and institutions, as long as they do not use “Muslim terms.” This ruling sparked widespread protest and condemnation from hardline religious and political groups, including Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP), which decried the chief justice’s remarks as blasphemous. TLP leader Zaheer ul-Islam further issued a bounty of 10 million rupees (\$35,955) for Isa’s death. The Supreme Court repealed the ruling concerning Ahmadiyya Muslims in August, likely in response to that pressure.

In April, United Nations (UN) experts [expressed concern](#) about the worsening pattern of forced conversions among Pakistan’s minority Christian and Hindu women and girls. They noted that local authorities often dismiss forced marriages, in which women and girls are obliged to convert to Islam, and the court system likewise validates them. The statement highlighted the case of Roshni Shakeel, a 13-year-old Christian girl abducted from her family in March by a 28-year-old Muslim man and forcefully converted to Islam, registering her age as 18. Despite Shakeel’s subsequent escape and return to her family, reports indicate that her family continued to face harassment from police, who arrested her father, detained him for three days, and allegedly beat him to coerce him into revealing his daughter’s location.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

- Redesignate Pakistan as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Lift the existing waiver, or do not issue a waiver, releasing the administration from taking otherwise legislatively mandated action as a result of the CPC designation;
- Impose targeted sanctions on Pakistani officials and government agencies responsible for severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ assets and/or barring their entry into the United States under human rights-related financial and visa authorities, citing specific religious freedom violations; and
- Enter into a binding agreement with the Pakistani government, under Section 405(c) of IRFA, to encourage substantial steps to address violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) with benchmarks, including but not limited to:
 - Releasing blasphemy prisoners and other individuals imprisoned for their religion or beliefs;
 - Repealing blasphemy and anti-Ahmadiyya laws, and until such repeal, enacting reforms to make blasphemy a bailable offense, require evidence by accusers, conduct proper investigations by senior police officials, and allow authorities to dismiss unfounded accusations; and enforce existing Penal Code articles criminalizing perjury and false accusations; and
- Holding accountable individuals who incite or participate in vigilante violence, targeted killings, forced conversion, and other religiously based crimes.

The U.S. Congress should:

- Incorporate religious freedom concerns into its larger oversight of the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship through hearings, letters, resolutions, and congressional delegations and advocate for the release of FoRB prisoners in Pakistan.

KEY USCIRF RESOURCES & ACTIVITIES

- **Hearing:** [Navigating Challenges and Opportunities for Religious Freedom in Pakistan](#)
- **Frank R. Wolf Freedom of Religion or Belief** [Victims List](#) and [Appendix 2](#)

Background

Pakistan is an Islamic Republic under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Of the country's estimated 252 million people, 96.5 percent are Muslim (85–90 percent Sunni and 10–15 percent Shi'a) and 3.5 percent identify with other religious communities, including Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs. Pakistan's constitution establishes Islam as the state religion while including provisions designed to prohibit faith-based discrimination and guaranteeing the right to religious practices, with the exception of Ahmadiyya Muslims. A 1974 amendment to Pakistan's constitution declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims, excluding them from political representation and equal voting rights.

Blasphemy-Related Cases and Restrictions

Blasphemy allegations against religious minorities increased throughout the year, with a notable shift to online accusations. According to an October [report](#) from Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), over 700 individuals remained in prison across the country on related accusations, representing more than a 300 percent increase from 213 the previous year. According to the NCHR, the majority of these cases were registered under the Federal Investigation Agency's Cybercrime Unit, including that of [Shagufta Kiran](#), a Christian woman who was sentenced to death under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) in September. At the end of the reporting period, Kiran was awaiting appeal in solitary confinement. Authorities have held Kiran in custody since 2021, after a private citizen accused her of forwarding blasphemous content via WhatsApp in September of the prior year.

Attacks against Religious Minorities

Throughout 2024, religious minorities, including Pakistan's Shi'a and Ahmadiyya Muslim communities, were common targets of hate speech, discriminatory laws, and arbitrary arrests that contributed to a worsening climate of fear and violence. In November, unidentified gunmen in northwestern Pakistan attacked Shi'a Muslims, killing at least 40 people and wounding 20 more. In May, a gunman separately shot and killed two Ahmadiyya Muslims—Ghulam Sarwar and Rahat Ahmad Bajwa—in the Mandi Bahauddin district in Punjab. The following day, police subsequently arrested a suspect, who was a student at a nearby Islamic seminary. These attacks occurred against a backdrop of increasing terrorist attacks throughout the country.

In July, the UN [expressed](#) grave concern about increased discrimination toward the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions, and attacks on places of worship. In the leadup to Pakistan's national elections in February, religiously affiliated parties, including the TLP, flooded the media with hate speech and harmful rhetoric targeting Ahmadis. In June alone, human rights organizations documented 36 arrests or detentions of members of the Ahmadiyya community to prevent

them from participating in celebrations and sacrificing animals for Eid ul-Adha in Punjab. Several of these arrests were reportedly in response to complaints from TLP members. Also in June, the deputy commissioner in Chakwal announced orders for the preventive detention of three Ahmadiyya Muslims for 30 days, claiming that their participation in Eid celebrations would "hurt Muslim sentiment." The authorities released the three men from custody two days later—but only after they signed an affidavit pledging to refrain from performing animal sacrifices.

Places of Worship

Attacks against places of worship continued throughout the year, including against Ahmadiyya mosques and religious sites. In January, reporting indicated the desecration of as many as 80 Ahmadiyya graves across two cemeteries in Daska. In June, a mob violently attacked one such mosque in Kolti, in Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir, destroying its minarets. In May, the Council of Islamic Ideology condemned the "culture of mob vigilantism" and reiterated its call from September for the creation of a special court to try these kinds of cases; however, the government had established no such body by the end of the reporting period. Additionally, human rights organizations have claimed that the Pakistani government has continued to refuse to deliver any accountability for the previous year's violent attacks in Jaranwala, where mobs attacked and set fire to dozens of churches with impunity. Many Christians in that area continued to report their experiences of marginalization and threats from the perpetrators whom police had released from custody.

Key U.S. Policy

In 2024, the United States' bilateral relationship with Pakistan focused primarily on security and election integrity. Following Pakistan's national elections, dozens of members of the U.S. Congress expressed [concern](#) about the imprisonment of former Prime Minister Imran Khan. In March, then Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of South and Central Asia Affairs Donald Lu [testified](#) before a House Foreign Affairs Committee on the U.S.-Pakistan relationship in the context of the elections. In June, Congress passed a bipartisan [resolution](#), under the co-sponsorship of then Representative Daniel Kildee (D-MI) and Representative Richard McCormick (R-GA), that called on the Pakistani government to support and strengthen human rights, rule of law, and democratic institutions.

Additionally, U.S. government officials participated in delegations to Pakistan throughout the year. In [April](#) and [September](#), then Acting Under Secretary for Political Affairs John Bass traveled to the country to discuss "a range of regional and bilateral issues."

On December 29, 2023, the U.S. Department of State last [redesignated](#) Pakistan as a CPC for its systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations.