



STATE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN PAKISTAN

Acknowledgements

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STATE OF RELIGIOUS

FREEDOM

IN PAKISTAN

ABOUT JINNAH INSTITUTE



Jinnah Institute (JI) is a non-profit public policy institute that promotes independent policy research and public advocacy that advances the causes of democratic institution building, national and human security discourse, regional peace, entitlement to fundamental rights and building public equity in a plural and inclusive national identity. To meet these objectives, Jinnah Institute engages with policy-makers, government, media, civil society, state institutions and academia.

Open Democracy Initiative

The goal of the Open Democracy Initiative is to bridge the gap between citizens and state and to articulate policy responses based on inclusive research. Jinnah Institute seeks to create awareness, expand knowledge bases and facilitate the implementation of informed recommendations for researchers and policy-makers. This program focuses on strengthening democratic practices such as transparency in public contracts, the right to religious freedom, social entitlements, right to information and the provision of social justice.

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"You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You could belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the State."

- Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Excerpt from speech to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, August 11, 1947

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent years have witnessed an escalation in the persecution of minority communities in Pakistan. The exclusion of non-Muslims from mainstream national life is only half the story. Increasingly, extremists have also targeted Muslims from the minority sects of Islam. During the period 2012-2015 at least 351 incidents of violence were carried out against minorities. Such violence and discrimination is often justified by radical sectarian clerics, many of whom have been allied with, or appeased by, the state at various points, or have conversely been at loggerheads with it at other times. Concerted political opposition to both, such clerics and the idea of state patronage to them, has grown as Pakistan's democracy has taken hold since 2008. Yet, progress in building an anti-extremist political and social consensus has been a troubled, fraught, and imperfect process, marked by setbacks and challenges. And, of course, even where sections of the political elite, civil society, media, and state administration have been theoretically resolute in opposing agents and enablers of such bigotry, discrimination, abuse, and self-censorship, dithering policy and law enforcement responses stemming from fear of extremist retaliation have ensured the injustice against minority communities going unreported and unchallenged.

Based on extensive fieldwork carried out during 2014-2015, this report documents the different dimensions of faith-based discrimination across Pakistan. Vulnerable minority groups such as Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus remain 'soft targets' for militant groups. The report also presents specific, increasingly bloody attacks perpetrated by proscribed religious militant outfits against Shia Muslims. In addition to the summary, recommendations and methodology, section four presents data

collected between 2012 and 2014 on incidents of violence perpetrated against different communities by type of violence and province. Section five provides a qualitative review of the present state of each of the communities while presenting some of the findings emanating from field research conducted for the report. Finally, section six presents a review of legislative, judicial and policy changes affecting non-Muslim and Muslim minorities.

Pakistani Christians faced intense and persistent threats, harassment and acts of violence during the reporting period from January 2012 to June 2015. Over 40 attacks of varying intensity targeted the Christian community, seven churches were damaged and 14 Christians were charged with blasphemy. Sexual assault cases; forced conversions and kidnapping were common and often went unchecked by the state. In 2013, an arson attack on a working class Christian settlement of Joseph Colony, and a suicide attack on the All Saints Church in Peshawar resulted in a heightened sense of insecurity among members of the Christian community, leading to an increase in the number of Christian citizens seeking asylum abroad. 2014 ended on a tragic note when a poor Christian couple, working in a brick-kiln, was burnt alive by a frenzied Muslim mob due to allegations of blasphemy in Punjab province. This pattern of persecution and violence continued in 2015 as two churches were bombed in Lahore's Christian neighborhood of Youhanabad. The situation led to communal rioting when a Christian mob allegedly lynched two Muslim men in the aftermath of the church attacks. In contrast to responses to attacks by Muslim extremist groups targeting religious minorities, the Punjab police displayed a noticeably higher level of commitment in investigating alleged acts of aggression by members of minority groups. Protection of minority groups remained a low priority.

Ahmadis continued to be victims of legal, institutional and social discrimination. During 2014-2015, 39 Ahmadis were killed in religiously inspired attacks; the vast majority of these target killings were carried out in Punjab and Sindh. Little improvement was noticed in the socio-cultural attitudes of mainstream Muslim sects towards Ahmadis. The latter remain marginalized under the draconian anti-Ahmadi Ordinance XX of 1984 that criminalizes the community for adopting a Muslim identity. Towards the end of 2012, unidentified assailants desecrated 100 graves in an overnight attack on an Ahmadi graveyard. Since 2012, at least six Ahmadi places of worship were attacked and vandalized. In 2014, a vicious mob attack in city of Gujranwala in Punjab led to the deaths of two minor girls and an elderly woman. Hundreds of Ahmadis have been displaced due to attacks and threats. Many have sought asylum abroad.

Forced marriages, abductions and rape of girls were the overriding concerns of Hindu community members in Pakistan during the reporting period. In some cases, Hindus reported migration to neighbouring, Hindu-majority India in the face of ongoing persecution. Despite Sindh's centuries-old tradition of being the hub of tolerant Sufi Islam, an increase in religious polarization was evident in the province. In 2014, a Hindu community center in Larkana was vandalized and valuables were looted by a religiously motivated mob. Extremist threats and support for the same provided by thousands of unregistered religious seminaries in the province have led to increasing curbs on religious freedom. Members of the Hindu community have also been regularly targeted by extortionists and kidnappers in rural and urban Sindh. Of all minority groups, Pakistani Hindus have borne the brunt of stigmatization as a consequence of biased school textbooks that paint them as 'evil', anti-state, and untrustworthy. In 2015, there were numerous incidents of forced conversions, rape and attacks on places of worship targeting members of the Hindu community.

Shia Muslims have faced the gravest consequences of religious intolerance in Pakistan in the last three years. During this period, Jinnah Institute recorded 23 attacks on Imambargahs and Shia mosques. There were 203 targeted killings and at least 1304 Shia Muslims were killed in bomb attacks. The sharp rise in murderous attacks by sectarian militant groups has also been accompanied by an increase in blasphemy cases registered against Shia community members. Sindh and Balochistan, in particular, witnessed persistent targeted killings and bomb attacks against members of the Shia community. In Balochistan, anti-Shia messaging in public spaces and in the press continued with impunity. In Punjab, extremist organizations continued to target Shias through registering cases and hate campaigns. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, target killings increased, accompanied by migration of Shia families from the tribal regions to safer locations in the province. During 2014 and 2015, sub-sects of Shia Islam - Bohras and Ismailis – also came under intense attacks. The most brutal was the May 2015 Safoora Goth attack in Karachi when a commuter bus was sprayed with bullets killing 46 Shia Muslims from the Ismaili sub-sect.

The launch of the National Action Plan (NAP) in December 2014 provided an opportunity for the state to articulate its resolve at the highest political and policy levels to tackle the crisis facing religious minorities within the broader rubric of combating terrorism and extremism.

NAP addresses the issue of religious extremists preaching and inciting violence against

religious minorities with impunity. But progress in implementing policy changes, in light of NAP, to address these issues has been slow, irregular and uneven. There have been some isolated attempts at addressing the issue as apparent in the prosecution of two cases concerning hate speech. Further, the August 2015 killing in a police encounter of Malik Ishaq, the notorious head of the LeJ – an avowedly anti-Shia organization - has weakened an outfit seen as the principal persecutor of Shias in Pakistan. Yet, attacks on Shia Muslims have continued. Similarly, while the Pakistani Taliban – TTP - has been weakened considerably since the launch of Operation Zarb-e-Azb, it has managed to kill Christians during Sunday services. Certainly, while the adoption of NAP has led to a greater recognition of the problem, progress on safeguarding minority groups and tackling discrimination and abuse in a coherent and systemic manner has remained generally elusive.

Critically, the larger issue of regulating madrassas remains unaddressed. Statements by senior government officials on regulating religious seminaries, most of which belong to the Deobandi sect, are often contradictory and, as of the time of writing, there is no coherent public plan to register and monitor these seminaries.

In interviews conducted for this study, members of minority communities expressed their fears and a widespread sense of insecurity. Many told JI they had little option but to flee Pakistan as they saw little hope of improvement in their security situation unless state protections improve and the majority community's attitudes shift.

This report also reviews the ongoing misuse of blasphemy laws that have led to the persecution of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Debate on the blasphemy laws remains muffled in the aftermath of the events of 2010-11 including the assassinations of Governor Punjab Salman Taseer and Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti. However, significant work was undertaken by progressive legislators such as Sherry Rehman, with respect to the review of blasphemy laws, prior to these events. Progress on implementation of these recommendations for review and reform has remained stalled since, despite a judicial commission report in the aftermath of the Gojra riots calling for an extensive review of the relevant blasphemy-related provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code.

However, civil society, human rights advocates and sections of the media have continued highlighting religious bigotry and attendant persecution and abuse, and some gains, though minimal, have been registered in rights protections for religious minorities. For example, the Supreme Court delivered a landmark judgment in 2014 on

minority rights, and a young Christian Rimsha Masih was acquitted of blasphemy charges in 2013. While the National Commission for Human Rights has been constituted with a retired judge as its head, it has yet to assume functional status and its powers and remit remain limited. Research conducted by the Jinnah Institute, among others, indicates that the implementation of progressive judicial orders or the government's counter-terrorism measures in NAP, particularly in relation to rights protections and safeguarding vulnerable groups, have been largely ineffective.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the status of minorities in Pakistan, Jinnah Institute recommends to the Government of Pakistan and relevant provincial governments the following:

A reliable and updated database of faith-based target killings and attacks be constituted;

Law enforcement agencies in all provinces and the federal capital and federal territories be provided training to prevent faith based violence and to hold perpetrators accountable when such violence occurs or is threatened;

Chief Ministers should seek monthly progress reports on police investigation of cases that concern attacks on religious minorities;

Curriculum reform through inclusion of messages of religious tolerance, and shunning of violent methods against non-Muslims be urgently instituted and enacted in support of relevant Supreme Court rulings on the subject;

Following the step taken by the Sindh government, all provinces should include Quaid-e-Azam's August 11 speech in school textbooks;

Effective regulation of seminaries across Pakistan, and registration of mosques be undertaken;

Education reform measures and wider access to education to be ensured in

order to prevent seminary enrollment as a substitute for education for the children from less privileged and disadvantaged sections of society;

Curricula taught in seminaries be standardized and regulated to be in conformity with the fundamental rights provisions of the constitution;

Hate speech and hate campaigns be curbed through strengthening existing legislation and through further legislation as required;

Government committees to determine what constitutes hate speech and hate-inciting literature must include human rights defenders, religious scholars and experts and not just conservative Islamic clergy of different sects;

Government job quotas for minorities and protection of businesses owned by non-Muslim groups be instituted and implemented;

A parliamentary committee should review the already proposed amendments to the blasphemy laws by making malicious intent of the accuser punishable and building safeguards against frivolous registration of such cases;

The Interior Ministry, with the support of the National Human Rights Commission and provincial police authorities, should constitute a cell to document blasphemy cases and religiously motivated cases booked under the anti-Ahmadi ordinance;

The National Commission on Minorities should be strengthened through the establishment of provincial Commissions on Minorities;

The National Commission on Minorities should be given magistracy rights to take suo motu notice of discrimination and violence against minorities, with the ability to pursue public interest litigation to protect the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Constitution.

METHODOLOGY

This report uses quantitative and qualitative methods employing primary and secondary sources to present its findings. Quantitative data collection has been carried out by Jinnah Institute staff through collation and categorization of incidents of violence against minorities reported in mainstream media. Qualitative data has been collected through field interviews carried out in Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces covering the following districts: Lahore, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Hyderabad, Karachi, Umarkot, Sukkur, Shikarpur, Khairpur, Quetta and Peshawar.

Over 100 interviews were conducted for this report. Additionally, four focus group discussions were also held in each province. This was augmented by two provincial consultations and two national consultations with parliamentarians, journalists, activists and policy stakeholders. The field work was carried out by a team comprising the lead researcher, a research assistant and two investigators. Qualitative interviews were analyzed to present the findings of this report.

INCIDENTS OF DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

This section of the report presents categorized data on incidents of discrimination and violence against Shias, Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus. The data presented in this report has been collated by Jinnah Institute researchers through newspaper reports between 2012 and 2014. Due to restrictions arising out of methodology, the data is used to gauge broad trends in the types and frequency of incidents faced by Muslim and non-Muslim minority communities. It is also used to highlight geographical hot-spots within Pakistan where specific communities face greater violence. The data does not reflect the exact number of such incidents due to challenges of non-reporting by victims and their families, as well as shortcomings in accurate reporting in leading newspapers – which do not always reflect cases registered in remote rural areas.

The types of violence faced by different minority communities are broadly categorized as follows:

Targeted Attacks: These include instances of target killings and targeted suicide bomb attacks against minority communities. However, when presenting data on violence against the Muslim Shia community, suicide bombings are presented as a separate category due to the significantly large number of bomb attacks targeting Shias between 2012 and 2014.

Damage to Worship Areas: This category includes all incidents of desecration, destruction and pillage of worship areas including Imambargahs, Mandirs, Churches, Ahmedi jamaat khanas and other religiously significant properties including shrines and community centers.

Damage to Graveyards: Desecration of burial places is used as a specific form of intimidation and harassment against non-Muslim communities. Therefore, this includes all instances where graveyards or graves have been desecrated.

Kidnappings: Women form one of the most vulnerable members of any community. It is no wonder then that amongst already marginalized minority communities, women belonging to minority communities form one of the most destitute and vulnerable subgroup within Pakistan. Due to this vulnerability, coupled with the patriarchal convention of associating women with honour and respect, kidnapping of minority women is used as an intolerable tool of intimidation, discrimination and violence by the majority.

Forced Conversions: Women continue to bear the brunt of forced conversion in Pakistan with the Hindu and Christian community severely traumatized by rising cases of forced conversion by an increasing number of religiously motivated seminaries in Sindh and Punjab that consider it their duty to convert non-Muslims to Islam. However, equally significantly, forced conversions have also been used by feudal landlords to oppress scheduled casts and claim dominance over the women folk belonging to minority communities.

Sexual Assault: As a result of pervasive bigotry within society, a small segment of the majority community continue to oppress women belonging to minority communities by targeting them for sexual assault, and in most cases rape. These instances of rape and sexual assault are of particular concern because minority women are considered “legal prey” by such men. A large number of such cases, as is the norm with rape cases across Pakistan, remain unreported because victims are afraid of social and familial humiliation, or reprisals against their families.

Accusations of blasphemy: Blasphemy laws have become one of the most powerful tools being employed by religious extremists in Pakistan. Due to the severity of punishment enshrined in the Constitution and the ease of leveling accusations against a member of a non-Muslim or Muslim minority, cases under the blasphemy law are used to harass minority groups, settle personal enmities, and create an atmosphere conducive for propagation of hate material.

Mob Attack: Specific to a new and ferocious form of communal intolerance, mob attacks involve large groups of the majority religious denomination setting on fire whole

villages or localities where minority communities are residing. Mob attacks have also included lynching of the accused by large groups of vigilantes motivated by faith-based hate speech.

Exodus: Incidents of exodus have been reported by the Hindu community in Sindh where mass migration from Pakistan has been undertaken by large groups of families due to fear of loss of life.

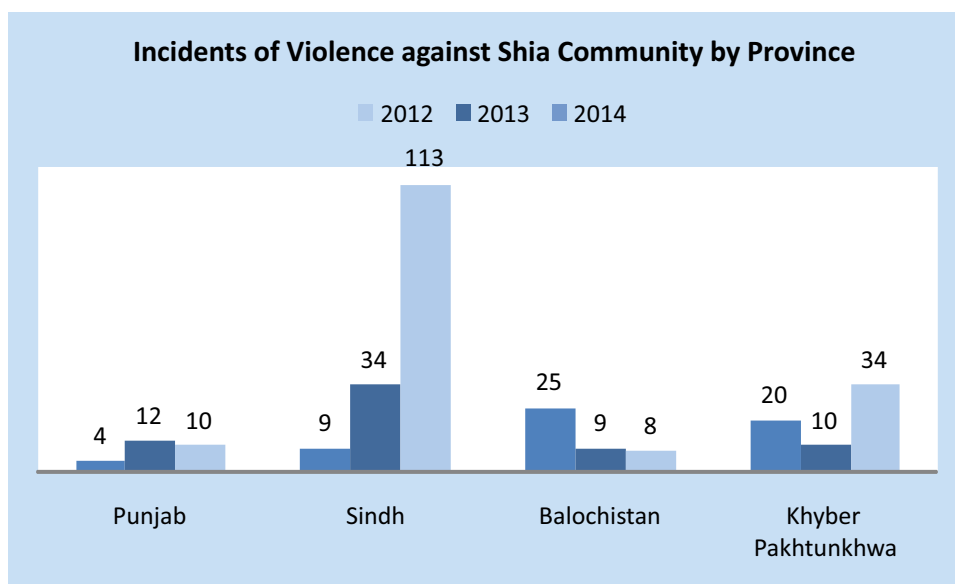
SHIAS

The Shia community in Pakistan has been under threat from extremist sectarian groups since the 1980's. However, since 2001, and the advent of large scale terrorist attacks motivated by religious extremists, sectarian terrorism has reached an unprecedented level of violence in Pakistan. While targeted attacks against prominent religious scholars, academics, government functionaries, and professionals belonging to the Shia Muslim minority sect continue since the 1990s, the up-tick in suicide bombings has transformed the ferocity of attacks borne by the community.

Table 1.0 Incidents of Violence against Shia Community by type 2012-2014

	2012	2013	2014	Total
Targeted attacks	42	40	148	230
Suicide/bomb attacks	11	16	10	37
Damage to worship areas	5	9	7	21

According to data collected by Jinnah Institute, between 2012 and 2014, 288 incidents of violence occurred across Pakistan in which Shia community members were targeted. Of these, 230 incidents involved targeted attacks against community leaders, regular citizens and religious leaders. 2014 saw a marked increase in the number of targeted attacks reported by the media in which citizens professing the Shia sect of Islam were targeted. While no discernable trend was witnessed in suicide bombings and damage to worship places, the highest number of casualties and the greatest number of incidents of terrorism were directed against the Shia community across Pakistan. It is disturbing to note that the sharp rise in the incidence of violence in 2014 coincides with reports of the presence of Daesh along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. It is also instructive to assess that despite government denunciation of the existence of Daesh in Pakistan, the number of incidents increased to 165 in 2014, compared to 65 in 2013 and 58 in 2012. This period coincided with a number of announcements in Pakistan and Afghanistan in which hardened extremist commanders pledged loyalty to Daesh – a vehemently anti-Shia sectarian organization.



A breakup of the incidents of violence against the Shia community by province shows that Sindh witnessed an exponential increase in incidents of violence. This was largely due to an extremely high number of reported targeted attacks against Shias in the province. Similarly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa too witnessed a rise in targeted killings of Shias. According to a survey carried out by the Home Ministry in Sindh, a number of new sectarian inspired Madrassahs have recently been established in the province. Alarming, concentrations of these Madrassahs coincides with localities where the highest number of sectarian killings take place. In Karachi alone, the central district houses 813 Madrassahs, whereas more than 74 percent of all sectarian killings in Karachi are reported in the same district.

Despite the small number of incidents reported from Quetta, the volume of fatalities and deaths suffered by the Hazara Shia community in the city in 2013 is widely regarded as the worst incidence of suicide attacks against the community in Pakistan. In January 2013, a series of bomb blasts in and around Alamdar Road killed 126 members of the Shia community in Quetta, while another 230 people were reported to be severely injured. As a result of the bombings, a mass sit-in against the atrocities was carried out across Pakistan in solidarity with the Hazaras. Taking notice of the mass sit-ins, where protestors refused to bury their dead, the federal government was forced to remove the provincial government for its negligence in providing security to the community. As a result of the attacks, a large number of Hazara community members have fled Quetta since 2013, with many of them applying for asylum abroad as violence against Shias increased across Pakistan.

CHRISTIANS

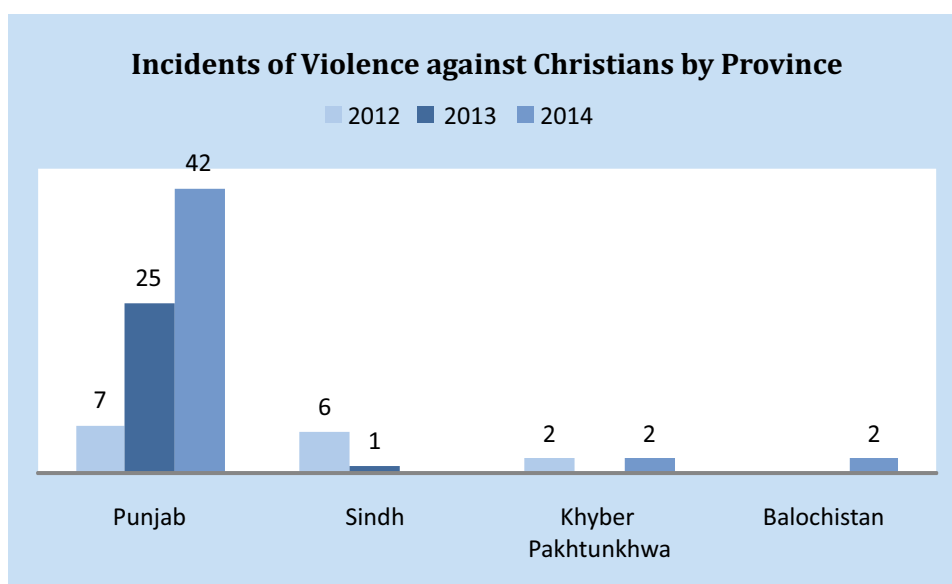
Targeted attacks against the Christian community rose in 2014. From just five reported cases of targeted attacks in 2012, the number of targeted attacks increased to 29 in 2014. This demonstrates a worrying trend in the rise of faith-based attacks against the small Christian community in the country.

Table 1.1 Incidents of Violence against Christians by type 2012 – 2014

	2012	2013	2014	Total
Targeted attacks	5	10	29	44
Sexual assault/forced conversion	6	6	8	20
Damage to worship area	4	1	2	7
Mob attack		3	2	5
Accused of blasphemy		9	3	12

Forced conversion, an issue largely thought to be associated with the Hindu community, is also being witnessed against Christians. Between 2012 and 2014, 20 cases of sexual assault and forced conversion were reported by this community. Similarly, mob violence, instigated through hate speech on accusations of blasphemy, has also resulted in the loss of life and property amongst the disenfranchised group.

2015 too witnessed a steady rise in incidents of violence against the Christian community. In March 2015, the Taliban claimed responsibility for two suicide bomb blasts at Christian churches in Lahore. A total of 15 people were reported killed in the attacks. Following the attacks, the Christian community rioted in the city and burnt alive two Muslims in Youhanabad. Unlike the Gojra riots, where police remained bystanders in the ensuing carnage against the Christian community, raids were conducted after the burning of Muslims and a large number of young Christian residents were arrested on charges of murder. The disturbing trend of mob violence, both against and by Christians, has worsened relations between the two communities. As a result, in 2015, another Christian couple in Sheikhpura was attacked by a mob on charges of defiling the Holy Quran. However, timely intervention by local police officials saved the couple from what could have been another gruesome murder.



The graph above illustrates province-wise breakup of incidents of violence against Christians between 2012 and 2014. Almost all incidents were reported in Punjab. In Sindh and Balochistan, all incidents of violence were reported in Karachi and Quetta. In Punjab, the most affected districts were Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Okara and Gujranwala.

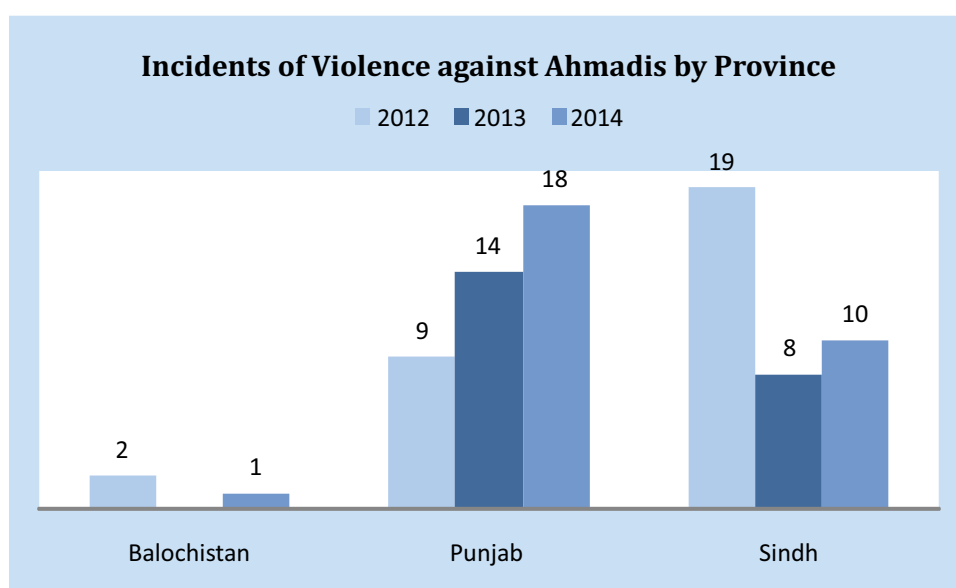
AHMADIS

Collecting data on crimes against Ahmadis remains a challenge. One of the biggest hurdles in collecting precise data is self-censorship by local and national media in reporting instances of hate crime and violence against the most disenfranchised community in the country.

Table 1.2 Incidents of Violence against Ahmadis by type 2012 – 2014

	2012	2013	2014	Total
Targeted attacks	23	6	14	43
Harassment	4			4
Kidnapping	2	2		4
Damage to worship area	1		4	5
Damage to graveyard		3	4	7
Accused of Blasphemy		6	7	13

Between 2012 and 2014, 43 targeted attacks against members of the Ahmadi community were carried out across Pakistan. Similarly, 13 members of the community were accused of blasphemy, while seven graveyards were desecrated. Targeted attacks declined in 2013 but rose again in 2014, demonstrating that no clear trends existed over the three years. However, in 2013, and 2014, the number of people accused of blasphemy increased. This is in keeping with earlier findings that religious extremists have now started using the blasphemy laws with impunity against vulnerable minority communities. Attacks against worship places and graveyards also demonstrated a pattern of defiling religious properties as a method of intimidation and harassment.



Almost all incidents of violence against the Ahmadi community occurred in Punjab and Sindh. In Punjab, a steady rise in faith-based targeted attacks and crimes increased from nine in 2012 to 18 in 2014. However, a steady decline in incidents of violence in Sindh was witnessed as reported cases decreased from 19 in 2012 to 10 in 2014.

In Punjab, the most number of incidents were reported in Lahore, Sialkot, Sargodha, Chiniot, Faisalabad, Hafizabad, and Toba Tek Singh districts. In Sindh, Karachi, Hyderabad, and Nawabshah remained the districts most affected by violence against the Ahmadi community.

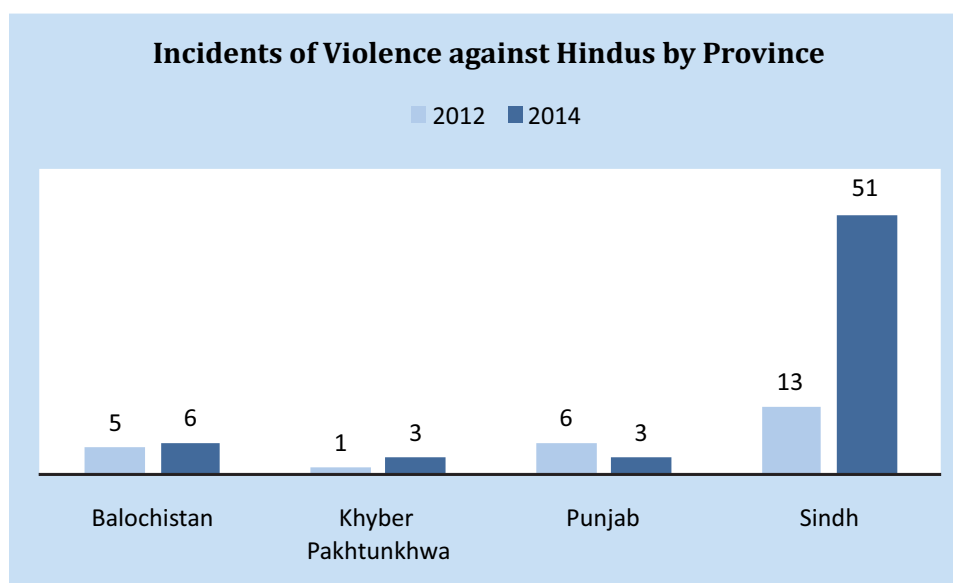
HINDUS

The Hindu community in Pakistan has long been marginalized. As a result, the small community has been affected by rising extremism and violence in the country. One of the main challenges in collating data on crimes against the community is the paucity of information channeled through local newspapers to national media.

Table 1.3 Incidents of Violence against Hindus by type 2012-2014

	2012	2013	2014	Total
Targeted attacks	4		6	10
Damage to worship areas	1		11	12
Kidnapping	10		11	21
Forced conversion	5	5	10	20
Sexual assault	5		5	10
Exodus			18	18

Between 2012 and 2014, reports of violence against the Hindu community increased. In almost all categories, a steady rise was witnessed. Targeted attacks increased to six cases in 2014 from four in 2012 while cases involving forced conversion increased to 10 in 2014 from five in both 2012 and 2013. Similarly, reports of mass migration of Hindu families from interior Sindh to other countries, especially India also increased. Significantly, threats and damages to Hindu temples increased from negligible, to 11 reported cases in 2014.



A predominant number of cases of violence reported against the Hindu community took place in Sindh. Karachi, Umerkot, Tharparkar, Ghotki, Sukkur, Hyderabad, Jacobabad, and Tando Alam were districts most affected by violence against the Hindu community in Sindh.

STATUS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS

AHMADIS: A COMMUNITY UNDER SIEGE

Approximately 3 million Pakistanis associate themselves with the Ahmadi belief system. Ahmadis were declared as non-Muslims on September 7, 1974 by parliament during the tenure of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Ahmadis subscribe to an interpretation of Islam which is radically different from traditional interpretations of the religion widely followed in Pakistan. Muslims of other sects see Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadi faith, and his professed status as a promised messiah a severe affront to the majoritarian Islamic tenet that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the last prophet of Islam. The belief in the finality of Prophet is the foundation of faith in orthodox Islam. In addition to targeted attacks and legal cases stemming from the anti-Ahmadi Ordinance of 1984, Ahmadis continue to be the victims of consistent hate campaigns.

Every year during September, the orthodox clergy commemorates the declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslim with fervor. This includes open incitement of hate and violence against the community through conferences and public addresses. While the security status of Ahmadis has worsened over the last three years, the community's representatives continue to express dismay at the complete disregard for their plight. The role of police, primarily in Punjab and Sindh, provinces with the highest population of Ahmadis in the country, also shows a pattern of appeasement of, and in some cases collusion with, religious extremists pursuing hate campaigns against the community.

After the attack on two Ahmadi places of worship in Lahore on May 28, 2010, the community has undertaken a string of self-imposed security restrictions with the help

of a volunteer security force. In addition to physical security, the community is also looking into safety and security training as an institutional mechanism to safeguard the life and property of its members, in light of the government's inability to provide Ahmadis with equal rights enshrined in the Constitution.

Facing stringent scrutiny and constant threats, a majority of the community is reluctant to disclose their identity or to discuss the impact of a string of recent targeted attacks against their members and places of religious significance. Based on a series of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary research it is evident that the Ahmadi community remains one of the most ostracized and disenfranchised minority communities in Pakistan. Ahmadis suffer severely at the hands of a well-orchestrated hate campaign bolstered by a continuous and open series of conferences throughout the country each year. These conferences, ostensibly organized to commemorate Islam, are in fact means of propagating a narrative based on “otherising” the Ahmadi as anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan. Held on behalf of politico-religious groups, these conferences are used by sectarian religious clergy to arouse public sentiment against the Ahmadis as a means of gaining political capital.

The largest and most organized religious group involved in systematic victimization of the community is the Aalimi Majlis-e-Khatm-e-Nabuwwat – The International Council for the Protection of the Finality of Prophethood.

In addition to the pervasive social paranoia generated against the Ahmadi community by religio-political groups, the community has also been disenfranchised from participating actively in the country's political system. A community that boasts Pakistan's first Foreign Minister Sir Zafarullah Khan, and the country's first Nobel Laureate and founder of the country's atomic research program Dr. Abdus Salaam, has been forced to stay away from active politics. Today, the community opposes the separate electorate, according to which Ahmadis can only cast votes as non-Muslims. The community supports a joint electorate through which they will not have to cast votes by declaring themselves non-Muslims.

TARGET KILLINGS

Punjab and Sindh were the areas where Ahmadis were most hit by targeted attacks from 2012 till mid 2015, with 2012 seeing the highest number of people (23) reportedly murdered for their faith across Pakistan. The first Ahmadi murder of 2012 was in Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in January after a Khatam-e-Nabuwwat conference in the area. Eight months later, four Ahmadis were killed within a span of 10 days in Karachi, followed by another three target killings in the port city. Two more Ahmadis were killed in Punjab; one man in Sialkot was killed over a property dispute involving an Ahmadi place of worship. Another Ahmadi teacher, Abdul Qudoos, died in police custody in Rabwah after being subjected to severe torture. Two members of the same Ahmadi family were murdered a month apart in Quetta later in the year.

Five out of the six target killings of Ahmadis in 2013 took place in Karachi, which included three men of the same family. Most of the Ahmadis killed in 2012 and 2013 were in Orangi Town and Baldia Town - the family of the deceased believe the killings were a result of incessant anti-Ahmadi campaigns in the area. The son of one of the Ahmadi victims, speaking to Jinnah Institute on condition of anonymity, said that he believed that the banned sectarian outfit, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, had been involved in his father's murder. When he shared this opinion with law enforcement agencies, he was told that such claims would only result in further risk to his family. This belief was echoed by Ahmadi leaders, who told him that pointing fingers at Lashkar-e-Jhangvi could further jeopardize the safety of the entire community.

In 2014, Punjab was home to the most targeted killings of Ahmadis, with eight out of fourteen Ahmadis being based in the country's most populous province. The other six were reported to have occurred in Sindh. In Sharaqpur, Punjab, an Ahmadi man was killed in police custody over alleged blasphemy. The agricultural town has seen consistent hate campaign against Ahmadis. The same month, Dr Qamar Ahmed Mehdi, an Ahmadi of Pakistani-American origin, who was visiting Rabwah - the largest concentration of Ahmadi population in Pakistan - and volunteering at a community-run hospital in the area, was gunned down outside the community neighborhood by unidentified gunmen. In the eyes of the community, the target killings of Ahmadis in Punjab almost never leave any scope for ambiguity with regards to the motive of the killer - a feeling shared by law enforcement officials - which fails to evoke any efforts to provide much-needed security to the community.

TESTIMONIAL

The year 2014 saw the most cold blooded mob attack on a religious minority in Pakistan. On July 27th, an angry mob in Gujranwala set fire to eight homes of local Ahmadi residents in the area of Arafat Colony. The attack was reportedly in response to an alleged case of blasphemy on a Facebook post and resulted in the deaths of two young girls and their grandmother. A pregnant woman from the same family suffered a miscarriage but escaped the incident with her life.

Months later, the victims of the attack were still visibly traumatized while speaking to Jinnah Institute. Relating the entire incident, Ruqaiyya Boota, mother of the two slain girls, said that the entire incident started when a raging mob gathered in the streets in Gujranwala vowing to kill an Ahmadi youth who had allegedly committed blasphemy in a Facebook post. The mob then started setting fire to the homes of Ahmadis of the neighbourhood. Kainat was eight years old and her sister Hira just a few months old when they succumbed to injuries during the fire.

Ruqqaiya, her mother-in-law and her two daughters Hira and Kainat, were trapped inside with other women and children of the family when their house went up in flames.

“I remember my daughter continuously asking me: 'Mama why are these men trying to hurt us, Mama what have we done?' My sister in law, her children, my kids, our mother-in-law and Mubashira continued screaming and begged the men outside to open the door and let us go. But we heard the men discussing pouring more petrol on our house. They were loudly cursing us and then a point came when we all fell unconscious,” narrated Ruqqaiya.

The mother woke up in the hospital in Gujranwala to find both her daughters and her mother-in-law dead. Mubashira Bibi, her pregnant sister-in-law, had lost her baby and their home was now a pile of ashes. Recalling that day, Ruqaiyya compared her woe to the pain of the mothers of the school kids of the Army Public School Peshawar, who were brutally killed by the Taliban on December 16, 2014. “I watched the sympathy they received from the public and the media, and kept asking myself, was I not a mother, did the loss of my children not matter?”

This feeling of being less than others is a familiar one for Ahmadis, even when compared to other religious minorities. Muhammad Boota, father of the murdered

children and son of Bashiran Bibi said, "I have been following the Chief Minister of Punjab's response to the lynching of the Christian couple [near Lahore in 2014], and I look at our case which has largely been ignored."

The incident in Gujranwala led to the displacement of at least 115 Ahmadi from Gujranwala to other parts of Pakistan - mostly Ahmadi centers of Rabwah and Chanab Nagar. Almost a year later, some families have now started making their way back to their old homes but Boota and Ruqqaiya are still staying away.

The case registered after the incident in Gujranwala has had some development with the arrest of seven of the eight nominated on charges of murder. Three of these men have received bail, while four remain in jail. However, their cases are pending in the courts without conviction.

The Ahmadi youth who alleged blasphemy had sparked the mob attack was also charged by law enforcement agencies under the infamous blasphemy laws. However, as a latent impact of the National Action Plan, he was recently acquitted of blasphemy.

FAITH-BASED COURT CASES

The most persistent method of persecuting Ahmadi in Pakistan is through registering cases against the community through anti-Ahmadi laws under PPC sections 298 A, B, C and then through the blasphemy law sections 295 A, B and C. From 2012 till June 2015, the applications for registering such cases were filed by the members and supporters of the religious group Almi Majlis Khatam-e-Nabuwat. There have been over 1070 faith-based cases against Ahmadi since promulgation of anti-Ahmadi laws in 1984, and 303 cases under the blasphemy laws.

TESTIMONIAL

In April 2013, a young Ahmadi, Khalid Ishfaq, a student of Bachelors in Commerce at a university in Lahore, was arrested by Lahore police after he was ambushed and manipulated by an anti-Ahmadi youth group while he was distributing an Ahmadi faith-based newspaper Al-Fazal in Ahmadi homes. Al-Fazal is a pre-Pakistan publication and is published and distributed among the followers of Ahmadi faith. Ishfaq and four other Ahmadi remained in jail for over 10 months under the Anti-Terrorism Act, sections of the blasphemy law and anti-Ahmadi laws. Ishfaq was followed by a group of anti-Ahmadi activists who knew his itinerary for Al-Fazal

distribution. “They were bearded men on motor bikes and they had another cohort sitting in a rickshaw nearby for support. They stopped me and said they knew I had been distributing blasphemous literature for eight months,” said Ishfaq. He replied that the publication was not blasphemous and they could check if they wanted to. Meanwhile, the leader of the anti-Ahmadi group – relative of a renowned Islamic scholar – joined them. “The leader of the group had a pistol in his hand. He told me if I did not go to the library with him, he would announce to the world that I was a blasphemer and then a general mob would set me on fire in the middle of the neighborhood,” said Ishfaq. At least 15 clerics tortured Ishfaq all night, forcing him to identify homes of other Ahmadis, which Ishfaq resisted. “The clerics then called the police, they called 15 and lied to the police (saying) that they had caught a blasphemer who needed to be arrested as there was unrest spreading in the area.” The police reached the spot in 15 minutes and forced Ishfaq to reveal members of the Al-Fazal printing press in Lahore, who were arrested too.

Due to his jail sentence, Ishfaq could not take his part one exams that year. He lived with the trauma of losing his social standing, the first two semesters of his first year and his peace of mind. Ishfaq wanted to move out of Pakistan at the time of the interview in September 2014.

DESECRATION OF WORSHIP PLACES AND GRAVEYARDS

There has been consistent documentation of the damage inflicted on the worship places of Ahmadis, the desecration of their structures and property disputes created over land ownership. In 2012, an Ahmadi worship place or prayer center in Kharian was desecrated by the Punjab Police itself to avoid agitation by a mob which had threatened to damage the building. The charge against the community was based on the minarets of the worship place, as the popular interpretation of anti-Ahmadi Ordinance xx 1984 does not allow Ahmadis to build buildings that resemble mosques. In December 2012, over a hundred graves in an Ahmadi graveyard situated in an upscale Lahore neighborhood were desecrated by unidentified men over night. The case of the desecration of graves never led to any arrests or court cases. In addition to the mentioned cases, disrespect of dead Ahmadis continues in Punjab to date, with burials denied and bodies exhumed. Respondents interviewed by the Jinnah Institute identified Faisalabad and Jaranwala, areas with a comparatively significant Ahmadi population, as locations of desecration of burial places.

HARASSMENT AT ACADEMIC INSTITUTES

Ahmadi students continue to face harassment and discrimination in academic institutes. In 2012, an Ahmadi student of BSC Chemistry in COMSATS, Lahore, had to leave university during her last year over allegations of blasphemy, after students attempted to assault her. The institute's administration did not take the responsibility of re-admitting the student because they could not guarantee her security. The female student was forced into staying at Rabwah for more than a year for security reasons. Eventually she became one of the hundreds of Ahmadis seeking asylum in Sri Lanka in the following years.

Male and female Ahmadi students reported being discriminated against and being ostracized during classes by their teachers. Academic institutes with student bodies associated with political religious organizations in Punjab and Sindh also targeted Ahmadi students systematically.

ROLE OF POLICE IN VIOLATIONS OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION

The police, often motivated by ingrained religious biases, are often bystanders when a case of violence against the Ahmadi community comes to light. Families of gunned down victims in Karachi, have reported the police's reluctance in registering cases against "unidentified" killers, and, in a few cases, the police was reported to have discouraged family members from registering complaints against militant groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. Moreover, in Punjab, respondents noted that the police have been involved in removing religious Ahmadi texts from the façade of Ahmadi homes. They have also been complicit in registering FIRs to appease radical mobs in an attempt to quell greater unrest. Similarly, in a number of cases the police have not followed-up on registered cases. The Gujranwala mob attack was one of the significant targeted attacks against Ahmadis where the police did not attempt to control the mob that had set fire to Ahmadi homes until it was too late. Police officials interviewed cited laws and socio-political conditioning of the law enforcement personnel as reasons for not defending the already marginalized Ahmadi community. Inside the prison, the police continue to discriminate against Ahmadi inmates charged with faith based allegations.

HATE SPEECH

Incidents of Ahmadi persecution get rare reportage in Urdu mainstream media, unlike English dailies that are more open to reporting such incidents. The Internet has proved

to be the most uncensored space for Ahmadis and progressive Pakistanis to discuss persecution of the said community. However growing online censorship and hate speech has sharply curtailed online freedoms for a conscientious discourse on minorities.

While there is a dearth of objective reporting on rights violation of the Ahmadis in Pakistan, coverage has also incited violence against the community also. In 2012 and in 2014, a popular televangelist, hosted two shows with Sunni clerics who spoke against Ahmadis and called them “liable to be killed”. Following the said shows, there were faith-based Ahmadi killings reported in Karachi and Gujranwala in 2012 and 2014, respectively.

Most of the Ahmadis who were interviewed had no expectations of a repeal of, or amendments to the anti-Ahmadi laws or the blasphemy laws. However, what they expect is for the government to take positive administrative action against the organized hate campaigns against them. There has been a vicious rise in the hate campaigns through unchecked publication of hate material, sometimes in book form, but usually via stickers, banners, posters and fliers, hate sermons and conferences across the country from 2012 till 2014. In specific areas where Ahmadis reside, calls for boycott of Ahmadis through proselytizing or person-to-person lobbying is commonplace. In 2015, after the government announced that strict action would be taken against hate material, most steps taken with the help of an Islamic scholar’s council board, declared Ahmadi religious literature published by the community for their own consumption as “hate material”. This has been termed by community representatives as a violation of their right to practice their religion with freedom, even as a religious minority. Meanwhile, hate literature against Ahmadis continues to be published and put up in public spaces across the country.

ECONOMIC BOYCOTT

Jinnah Institute conducted a focus group with professionals and small business owners from the Ahmadi community who were targeted and harassed through systematic hate campaigns and calls of economic boycott, primarily by local religious groups from all sects of majoritarian Islam. The interviews revealed that businessmen across all class spectrums have been victims of economic exclusion campaigns. Many had to migrate within the country due to such campaigns. Such smearing also results in Ahmadi women being denied goods in shops and even being harassed. These incidents were reported in all provincial capitals and other urban rural centers of the country.

One businessman's family migrated to Lahore from the Samundari, a town near Faisalabad in central Punjab, after target killings of Ahmadis and open death threats by Jamat-ud-Dawa in 2005. On condition of anonymity he told Jinnah Institute, "A few years after our migration, circumstances worsened for us in Lahore as clerics of Khatam-e-Nabuwwat (AMKN) began visiting our workshop frequently. They would visit us and ask if we were Ahmadis. Eventually, the visits, the ultimatums to convert and veiled threats made us move our workshop to Ichra Bazaar. However, the threats did not stop. The traders association turned against us, we were physically surveilled by the clerics and the entire bazaar was hostile towards us. Due to death threats, the landlord of our new workshop gave us notice to leave the shop and we closed down our business there entirely. I fear for my life, as I think there is a specific group of clerics which follows me everywhere."

This lobbying for hate extended to direct threats, phone calls, intimidation, harassment of family members and invitation to convert to Islam. Extremist religious groups of different sects targeted Ahmadis through a network of mutual support too. Interviewees also reported that at times the threatening individuals would gather support from outsiders, i.e. visitors from other cities or mosques which were not local. Ali Chauhdhry (not his real name), was a practicing criminal lawyer in Lahore, who received death threats against himself and his family in August 2014. "I was a regular guy; never wanted to leave Pakistan despite the treatment meted out to my fellow Ahmadis. I was excited about getting married. Just a regular lawyer – until one day I got a threat letter stamped by Jaish-e-Muhammad and phone calls telling me that my family and I will be killed if I do not leave the country. Now I do not think I can live here any longer." Eventually, Chauhdhry, the son of a respected High Court advocate, left Pakistan with his parents for the sake of his survival.

HINDUS: VICTIMS OF HISTORICAL BIASES

There are approximately 1 million Hindus residing in Pakistan, out of which 80 percent live in Sindh. While the community boasts of an economically empowered business class minority, the majority of Hindus belong to the working class, with a significant percentage being impoverished, landless farmers from the scheduled castes. The discriminatory caste system exists within the Hindu community of Pakistan, making the lower-caste Hindus one of the most marginalized sections of the society.

Historically, the most common reference for Hinduism in Pakistan is with regard to the independence movement for a separate homeland for India's Muslims. School textbooks and official public discourse, heavily influenced by historical narratives, have further reinforced biases against the community.

Since 2001, the wave of extremism that engulfed Pakistan has hit the Hindu community severely. In Sindh, where the majority of Hindus reside, a mushrooming of extremist organizations and the accompanying rise in militancy, coupled with governance bottlenecks, has left the community beleaguered. There has been a rise in cases of forced conversions, abductions, and rape of Hindu girls. The growing sense of insecurity within the community, coupled with the state's repeated failure in addressing these threats, has resulted in a rise in internal and external migration.

The systematic oppression of the Hindu community, for the most part, is ignored in national media. While mainstream Urdu press has picked up cases of illegally detained scheduled caste Hindu bonded labor by Muslim land owners, such stories are not taken up regularly.

In May 2013, Veeru Kohli, a female Hindu candidate for a general election seat from Hyderabad was threatened continuously, despite her popularity, by her opposing candidate for her belonging to a scheduled cast.

Lack of financial empowerment and opportunities also affects the Hindu community, a majority of whom live below the poverty line. The ever-degrading governance indicators in the Hindu majority areas imply that state negligence is enabling religious persecution.

FORCED CONVERSIONS

Most of the cases of Hindus converting to the majoritarian religion Islam are those of women. The last three years have seen 21 reported cases of kidnapping and 20 reported cases of forced conversion. These women, both teenagers and minors, were either raped and then converted or just converted through marriage. Human rights defenders, journalists, and lawyers from the Hindu community - or those working with them - say that the number of victims facing conversion, abduction and sexual assault are far greater than those reported.

“It is very common that girls who work in the fields are continuously vulnerable to and often become victims of sexual harassment. Due to poverty and lack of security, the girls' families hardly have any legal defense,” Ashok Kumar, a journalist with the vernacular press in Sindh, told Jinnah Institute.

Women from the scheduled castes, most of whom work as landless farm workers for Muslim landlords, often suffer from harassment and oppressive work schedules. Most parents say that their daughters are taken away and converted to Islam overnight, despite not knowing anything about the religion. An unjust conclusion to such cases is that the girls are not allowed to meet their parents at all. Hindus, already oppressed due to their economic standing in the society, cannot dare challenge such restrictions. At most, such cases are fought in courts, and usually that too only if Hindu lawyers are willing to take them up.

During a focus group discussion, Mani, a 60 year old mother of eleven said, “As soon as the evening arrives, we want to reach our homes and (we) worry mostly for our daughters. We are always scared of the Muslims, they are not fair to us.” Laxmi says harassment on her way to work and back is a regular occurrence. “Mostly we ignore the

men harassing us as we fear getting abducted. We end up concealing such incidents at home because we do not want the men in our families to react and get into trouble, as the Muslims are quite powerful.” Mena Mahrah, a 25 year old mother of four, adds, “Hindu life has no value in Pakistan. It is only the Muslims whose lives matter.”

TESTIMONY

In 2012, Lakshmi's teenage daughter Sitawas was abducted in the middle of the night from their home in an area near Samroowala, District Umar Kot, Sindh. The abductors were the local, middle-tier influential land owners, where Lakshmi and her family worked on the farm.

“We were sent some meat to eat over Eid, which we accepted and cooked thinking they were being nice to us. But that night they abducted one of my five daughters. Later when we went to the police, we were informed that our daughter had converted to Islam.”

A few days after this incident, the family found out that their daughter was in the village of Pir Sarhandi. A local religious cleric who is famous for converting Hindus of Sindh to Islam, most of whom are women, informed the family that they would find out whether their daughter had converted or not once she was presented in court. However, the abducted girl was not presented in court for a year.

“We went to the area influential who was with Pakistan People's Party, Zulfiqar Shah with a request to take up our case in his own Jirga. The father of the young man who abducted our daughter took an oath on the Quran saying he would bring our daughter back. Months went by and there was no progress. When we went to Shah again, he said he could not help as the girl had converted to Islam.”

Following this, the abductor's family began harassing Lakshmi's family even more and threatened them with torture if they did not stop protesting or reaching out to the courts. By this time, Laxmi and her clan had escaped their former abode and found home in a small village of fellow Hindus from a lower caste. Despite their meagre means, Laxmi's family intended to fight the case in court till justice was served. In a year's time, Sita managed to escape her abductors and, through the kindness of strangers, reached Mirpurkhas and called her family to pick her up.

“My daughter told us that she had never accepted Islam, but was abducted by a man who raped her repeatedly and never married her. Her abductor Sheroo had a wife and kids who lived in the same house. After this we wanted to register a case against them but the police did not pay attention to our plight; so went to the court.”

Hyderabad High Court sent Laxmi, Sita, and their clan to the Umar Kot sessions court, where, two months into the hearing, Sita was abducted once again at gunpoint.

“We were told by the Bodal Farm police station officers to take our case to Soomaro, claiming it was not their jurisdiction. We went to Soomaro, they sent us to Umerkot station to acquire a letter of permission for registering the First Information Report. Umerkot police station officers refused on account of it being a day off. Eventually we blocked one of the main area roads as a protest. Soomaro police station officer then came to ask, guaranteeing that if we unblock the road we would be given our daughter back.”

When a week passed without the police's verbal guarantee being fulfilled, Laxmi and her clan blocked the road again, but stopped their protest when the area influential Zufiqar Shah intervened and ensured the family that Sita would be back. In a few days, at a court hearing, members of the abductors' clan, called the Khaskelis, went to the court with arms.

“Sita gave a statement in favor of her abductors. She said that she had converted to Islam and married, but asked for her family's security. During a quick meeting at the court, her last words to me were that if we did not stop the fight for her recovery, we would be killed. She said, ‘please think of me as dead, mother.’”

The Hyderabad High Court ruled that Sita would be taken to the Dar-ul-Aman, and a final judgment would be given after 15 days – this was in 2014.

“Those 15 days never ended. She was never sent to the Dar-ul-Aman, we do not know where they took Sita and we have no means of finding out ever.” Laxmi and her family sold whatever they had in their attempts to get their daughter back.

Not too far away from Laxmi's village, in the larger Soomaro area, there is another family of a girl abducted at the pretext of conversion to Islam. This girl, Neela, was an 11 year old minor who was raped and forcibly kept at the house of her abductor and used as a servant.

Neela, her three brothers, and their mother Seeta, are from the poorest of the lower caste Hindus. They earned a living through menial labor and daily wages-based farm work. In 2014, Seeta and her family lived in Fort Ghulam Muhammad, an area they considered safe for themselves. While filling up water for domestic use, Neela was abducted by two men from the Khokhar clan.

“My daughter was missing for a month and a half. We found from the locals that she was at the house of Khokhars. One day, I went to their house and requested the mother of the boys who hidnapped her to let my daughter go. She permitted us to see her but said her son would marry my daughter and convert her to Islam,” Seeta said.

Upon her mother's second visit, Neela managed to escape. The abductors pursued the mother and daughter, and during a public quarrel the police intervened and took Neela into their own custody.

“The police took my little girl to the police station, kept her there for a night, recorded her statement the next day, and presented her in the court.”

Jai Pal Das, a local newspaper correspondent and Hindu rights activist, was in court that day. “Neela ran towards her mother screaming, which made the court give judgment in the family's favor. But a case of rape and abduction was not registered,” he recounted.

The Khokhar clan claimed that Neela was pregnant. “They lied about her being pregnant. She was raped but there was no pregnancy. We took Neela to the doctor, and nothing was found in the medical test, except that Neela was hurt, weak, traumatized and kept on crying,” Seeta says.

Neela and her family kept an overnight guard outside their hut made of hay, and the only support they had was from the local Hindu rights activists.

Forced conversions and enforced disappearances of Hindu girls is not limited to Sindh. Mangla Sharma, a prominent Hindu rights and political activist from Karachi says Hindu girls are converted to Islam under circumstances unknown to parents in Balochistan too -the province. The province with the second largest population of Hindus in Pakistan.

“In 2014, a Hindu girl from a well-to-do business family, out of nowhere, one day left her home and converted to Islam with the help of her class mates. Why is it so easy for Hindu girls to convert from the religion of their families here?” he asks.

The fate of many girls remains unknown after they are taken away. Human rights defenders and a few Hindu politicians have been fighting for transparency and improvement in the conversion process in Sindh.

“We want very specific and fewer seminaries to have the right to convert people to Islam, and the court to be able to work with those seminaries. We want the families to be told in advance. How can a minor be trusted to make such decisions when her legal guardians are nowhere in sight? And why does a small-time cleric just go about changing people's lives with something as big as conversion to another faith” says Sanjesh S. Dhanja, of the Hindu Seva Organization.

Local courts, if not biased, feel threatened when faced with such cases. Since most cases involve forced abduction of already oppressed social classes, the lower judiciary is pressured into giving judgements in favor of the much more religiously and socially influential abductors. Despite these challenges, the lower courts have often taken bold initiatives by returning abducted girls to their families. Even so, abduction cases are almost never registered against the perpetrators themselves.

The victims of abductions and forced conversions mostly belong to lower-caste Hindu families like Kohli, Meghwar and Bheel. Most of these families make a living working for landlords who regularly violate their rights, and in many cases, are also the perpetrators and enablers of the crime. Losing their largest source of income leaves the families incapable of seeking legal aid.

BIASES IN EDUCATION

A majority of the Pakistani Hindus consider some of the content in Pakistani textbooks as hate speech or “hate curriculum”. School curricula is viewed as the biggest cause of sustained bigotry according to the community, and an obstacle to interfaith integration.

“The curriculum of school textbooks dehumanize Hindus, and their portrayal is negative. We are called “kafir” i.e. infidels, this word has very negative connotations,” says Mangla Sharma.

All Hindu rights activists and the advocates of human rights working on curriculum hold textbook biases as one of the fundamental reasons for increasing religious polarization. The curricula dehumanizes Hindus by mentioning the community in a negative context, mostly as anti-Pakistan elements during the struggle for independence before 1947.

MIGRATING FROM PAKISTAN

There are conflicting figures on the number of Hindus who have fled Pakistan. Community members from the Hindu Seva Council say that at least four thousand Hindus leave Pakistan every year for India alone. Since 2008, the migration of Hindus from Pakistan has been steady.

Hindu community in Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh revealed in interviews that a few of the well established Hindu families have become soft targets for kidnapping for ransom and robbery crimes as they were economically well off and could be easily identified in market places. This trend has been particularly worrisome in Balochistan, where businessmen, doctors and teachers from the community have been kidnapped by insurgents and extremists to finance their operations. Many Hindu businessmen of all financial tiers sustain their businesses by paying extortion money either to the police or political influentials in the area. Concurrently, many financially stable Hindu families in Balochistan and Sindh, have migrated from Pakistan. Most of the migration from Balochistan is reported to have started after the murder of Nawab Akbar Ahmed Bugti – a former tribal chief of the influential Bugti tribe and politician - who was killed during the tenure of former President General Pervez Musharraf. The political unrest that followed the assassination of Nawab Bugti, coincided with the rise in kidnappings amongst the Hindu community.

Dr Kumar (not his real name), is from Balochistan and practices medicine in Quetta.

“The Hindu-Muslim anxiety began in Balochistan at the time of General Zia. Previously, the Hindu community of Balochistan thought of themselves as important members of the Baloch community in the province. As a result, they felt immensely safe. What General Zia sowed, grew up to be highly poisonous in the last ten years. With the simultaneous rise in the insurgency and Islamist violence, the freedom of religion of a Hindu started to diminish. Unfortunately, this trend continues today,” says Dr. Kumar. In the last year, Dr Kumar's brother and his family have moved to India due to the worsening security situation in the province.

Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankvani, a sitting member of the National Assembly from Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz, says that the number of Hindus leaving Pakistan and migrating abroad is not exaggerated. "If one family is targeted, then twenty others get scared because of that one attack, then they want to flee. So, you see that is when people plan to leave. Often, community members use religious pilgrimages to go to other countries and then decide to settle there."

DAMAGE TO WORSHIP PLACES AND FORCIBLE OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTIES

A new trend of forcibly occupying land associated with Hindu temples, and desecrating Hindu community places is on the rise. In 2014 alone, at least six Hindu temples or dharamsalas were attacked, according to the findings of Hindu community organizations in Sindh. This has coincided with an increase in the number of newly built seminaries and mosques being constructed by religio-political groups in areas with Hindu majorities.

Girdhari Lal, a local activist says, "Now we see mosques getting built in neighborhoods with a majority of Hindu residents. Why is this being allowed to go on so brazenly? This is one of the reasons that we do not celebrate our religious rituals and festivals as openly as we used to."

In Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the attacks on the Hindu community are executed by different violent extremist groups. The community opines that the new seminaries being run by Jamat-ud-Dawa and JUI-F in Sindh under the garb of proselytizing are one of the defining causes of rising anti-Hindu sentiment.

Hindu properties have also been occupied by land grabbers because the land owned by the Hindus before 1947 was never claimed by them after Pakistan's formation, assuming that the land would remain theirs despite partition. The community calls this manipulation by Muslim businessmen and landlords, who are renting Hindu properties, a form of soft land grabbing. They allege that in most instances, such land grabbing has been carried out with the tacit approval and blessing of hardline clerics, bent upon changing the Hindu majority nature of these localities.

TESTIMONIAL

In 2014, the Hindu *dharamsala* (community center) in Larkana was attacked by a mob. The attack was followed by vandalism and looting of the compound overnight. According to community members, clerics associated with a local seminary were directly involved in instigating the attack after an allegation of committing blasphemy was leveled against Sandeep Kumar, a Hindu resident of the area.

Talking to the Jinnah Institute, Advocate Kalpana Sharma - a lawyer and political activist who is one of the caretakers of the *dharamsala* - revealed; "Sandeep Kumar who was accused of committing blasphemy was mentally unstable and a drug addict. Sandeep and his sisters lived next to a Muslim washer-man, who used to harass the Hindu women of the house. The Muslim neighbour framed Sandeep to get rid of him, and threw papers with religious scriptures outside his family's residence."

A month before this incident, a Hindu doctor had been killed in Larkana, and the community had been raising its voice, calling for an impartial investigation into the murder.

"The local mosque and seminary began a campaign through text messages and word of mouth to agitate Muslim men into carrying the attack on the Hindu family's house. An armed mob surrounded the house, despite the two women and a mentally unstable man still being inside. They were inciting an arson attack, but the police arrived in time and handled the situation. The mob then moved to the *dharamsala*, calling for multiple attacks on other temples as well. After the mob had inflicted damage to another smaller temple, the police dispersed the mob," recalls Kalpana.

The temple inside the Hindu *dharamsala* was desecrated significantly. The case of the *dharamsala* attack was registered against unidentified men, but the men from an influential shrine were involved in the attack, and despite being arrested initially, they were quickly released on bail the next day.

The enraged mob also gathered outside the home of Advocate Kalpana and called for an attack on her, as she holds an important status in the community. The intervention of influential Muslim friends and the timely presence of the police controlled a potentially violent situation. However, Kalpana was advised to remain under confinement at her residence due to threats to her own security.

“Representatives from different political parties advised the Hindu community to wash off the attack site,” says Kalpana.

The Muslim mob soon reappeared in front of the dharamsala voicing anti-Hindu sentiments. The Hindu community continued to get threat letters for months. Two temples, in Ratto Dhero and Medici were also attacked as hate crimes in Sindh – one of the temple attacks included desecration of the Sikh religious scriptures. Meanwhile, the mentally unstable Sandeep Kumar remains behind bars on charges of blasphemy, while not a single perpetrator of the mob violence has been brought to justice.

After the Shikarpur Imambargah bombing in 2015, the Hindu community's temples were declared sensitive targets. Law enforcement personnel and political authorities promised the community that security surveillance infrastructure would be put in place at sensitive sites and that Hindu men would be given jobs in the police. These promises were not implemented.

CHRISTIANS: LIVING UNDER THREAT

The Christian community in Pakistan is more than 2.5 million strong, with an active role in Pakistan since its creation in 1947. Despite providing Pakistan the leadership of luminaries such as Justice AR Cornelius, Cecil Chaudhry and others, the community has become a target in the rising tide of extremist violence within Pakistan. Since 2001, in fact, attacks on the Christian community have escalated, spearheaded by a host of religio-political extremist groups including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jamaat-ud-Dawa, Sipah-e-Sahaba and local clerics involved in hate speech against the community.

As a symptom of the rise in extremism and terrorism in the country, the community has been targeted in some of the worst mob attacks against minority communities in Pakistan. In Punjab and Islamabad, entire localities where Christians live in ghettoised areas, have seen mass attacks fueled by hate speech. These attacks have led to wide spread destruction of homes and properties belonging to the community.

Similarly, the blatant application of the infamous blasphemy laws against Christians in urban cities of Pakistan has meant that a number of high profile attacks against members of the community have been witnessed where the mere accusation of blasphemy without proof or due judicial process has led to targeted killings and, in some cases, years of incarceration of the accused as they await trial.

Equally appalling has been a concentrated and targeted campaign to silence those Muslim and Christian citizens that have raised their voices against the blatant application of blasphemy laws. The brutal murder of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer,

Federal Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, activist Sabeen Mahmud and human rights lawyer Rashid Rehman in Multan, are a few instances of the campaign to intimidate civil society activists and politicians from raising their voice against the injustice being meted out to Christians.

Indeed, since the mid-2000s, religious extremists have also exploited gaps in the interpretation of the blasphemy laws to level charges of blasphemy against the small group of civically engaged plural and conscientious citizens in the country. As a result, the shrinking space for dialogue and debate on the consequences and misapplication of the law has resulted in an increasingly restricted conversation in public spaces.

The ferocity of religiously inspired attacks against the Christians has also meant that the police and administrative services of Pakistan, particularly in Punjab, have been found wanting in ensuring the safety of life and property in the face of motivated attacks. Only recently, an active senior judiciary has taken up the mantle of defending the rights of Christians by following stringent criteria in the application of blasphemy laws. The case of Rimsha Masih is one such example where the judiciary vacated the case against the girl, noting that no witness saw the accused committing blasphemy.

BOMB ATTACKS

With the rise in suicide bombings as a tool of spreading terrorism within the country, Christian churches and religious properties have been targeted in some of the most brutal bomb attacks in Pakistan. Indeed, after the beleaguered Shia community, which has borne the brunt of sectarian inspired terrorism, Christians have been the second most affected community. In March 2015, two simultaneous bomb blasts, claimed by the Taliban, shook the Youhanabad locale in Lahore. The attacks, in which at least 15 people lost their lives, targeted a Roman Catholic Church and a Christ Church during Sunday service. In September 2013, almost 75 people were killed when a suicide bomber struck the historic All Saints Church in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The attacks, which drew wide condemnation from politicians and civil society, were a rude reminder of the constant threat faced by the community.

MOB ATTACKS

The most gruesome and widely applied tool of religiously motivated extremists instilling fear within the Christian community has been vigilante mob attacks against Christian homes. These mob attacks occur after a consistent hate campaign in the area

has been undertaken against the community and a Christian has been accused of blasphemy, or in response to the publishing of hate material against Muslims in western newspapers.

In April 2011, as many as 20 people were severely wounded when a mob of Muslim protestors attacked Christian homes in Gunjranwala after allegations of blasphemy were leveled against community members. In September 2012, a mob attacked and damaged the St Paul's Lutheran Church in Mardan during protests against the film "Innocence of Muslims." Later in the year, Rimsha Masih was accused of blasphemy and a mob enraged by local clerics took to streets of Mehrabad colony in Islamabad, destroying homes of many Christian residents of the locality. In October 2012, a 16 year-old boy named Rayan was accused of blasphemy in Karachi after which an enraged mob, led by the local religious, cleric burnt his home and threatened the community with dire consequences. In March 2013, 100 Christian homes were burnt in Lahore when an angry mob attacked the community after similar allegations of blasphemy were leveled against a Christian.

In November 2014, a mob in Punjab burnt a Christian couple alive in a brick kiln after the local cleric instigated the largely Muslim community into religious frenzy by accusing the couple, both in their 20's with the wife pregnant, of blasphemy. In 2013, a well equipped mob of around 35 – 40 people attacked and burned Christian homes in Shad Bagh colony, Lahore, after accusing a resident of defiling pages of the Holy Quran. Such incidents, coupled with the brazen and uninterrupted misuse of the blasphemy laws to settle personal enmities against members of the Christian community, have become rampant in Punjab.

TESTIMONIAL

Shahbaz (the name has been changed), a father of two and a resident of Youhanabad recounts the lack of support provided by the police to Christians in Punjab. "After the twin bombings on Sunday services in Youhanabad, an enraged mob had burnt two Muslims alive. The police, which were bystanders during the 2009 Gojra riots, took strict action against the community. While the investigation of the bombings was still pending, the police started rounding up young Christians in Youhanabad. My son, who is the only breadwinner for our family, was picked up by the police. He was held in protective custody. We did not know where he was being held. I am very old and cannot earn for my family anymore. My son was tortured by the police, who wanted him to give

a false confession that he was part of the mob that burnt the two people. He was hit on his legs and his back during interrogation.”

In a chilling testament of the fragility of their existence, Shahbaz narrates that once the police were unable to establish a connection between his son and the Youhanabad mob attack, they eventually released him from protective custody. The family not only carries the scars but also lives in fear while facing continuing discrimination.

“Now my son cannot get employed again. Every time he goes to find employment he is asked about where he lives. Once prospective employers find out that he is a resident of Youhanabad, they refuse to employ him. How can we continue to subsist when we face daily discrimination in finding jobs,” he asks.

HARASSMENT AT EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The Christian community has also faced consistent harassment at academic and educational institutions across the country. Affected by pervasive biases ingrained in curricula, Christians are forced to learn Islam through the innumerable lessons in Urdu, Mathematics, History and English books that carry references to Islam and Islamic history. The societal affect of such biases can be gauged from the recent case in Faisalabad, where a Christian school girl was forbidden to use the school washroom because she was an “infidel”. The headmistress of the public school forbade the young girl from using the bathroom used by other fellow Muslim students. The case was subsequently taken up by Senator Sherry Rehman with the government, but despite assurances to the Senate, no action was taken against the teacher.

Narrating his story of harassment at education Institutions, the sole Christian parliamentarian in Sindh Assembly while talking to Jinnah Institute said, “Biases exist in our curriculum against Hindus and Christians. Young children are taught that they should not sit and eat with Hindus and Christians as they are non-Muslims. My own daughter used to go to DHA college in Defence, Karachi. About four years ago, she started facing daily harassment at college when her fellow students found out that she was Christian. They used to abuse Christians and the West on a daily basis. My daughter eventually asked me to remove her from the school because she could not bear the level of harassment she used to face in college.”

SEXUAL ASSAULT

The threat and use of sexual assault and subsequent forced conversion is fast becoming rampant against Christians in Pakistan too. For many years, cases involving sexual assault and forced conversion have been largely used as tools of violence against Hindu community members.

According to a Christian community leader in Micheal Colony, “Rape cases and sexual assault have become common place in Issa Nagri in Gulshan Town, Karachi. These cases often don't make it to the newspapers as most women avoid reporting rape due to the social stigma attached with such cases. The use of threats of sexual assault against women is also being used to intimidate the community. In my own case, we received a call from an unknown number asking for 20 lakh rupees in extortion money. My wife teaches at St Micheal's secondary school, she was receiving calls from the Taliban for money. They said that they knew my daughter was studying at Degree College and if we did not give them money that they would kidnap my daughter. I immediately picked up my daughter from her college and informed the IG police, CPLC and CID. After three days, the CID was able to trace the call and arrested two of the people involved in extortion. These cases were commonplace, but the recent operation in Karachi against extortionists and target killers has decreased their frequency considerably.”

HATE SPEECH

In 2011, The Samiul-Haq faction of the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan publicly demanded a ban on the Bible within 30 days. Maulana Abdul Raoof Farooqi of the JUP-S said that the Bible contained blasphemous passages that were an affront to Muslim sentiments. Such blatant public hate speech has long gone unnoticed in Pakistan. They have caused widespread bigotry within society and are responsible for the creeping intolerance against Muslim and non-Muslim minorities within the country. Christians, like other minority groups, have been a constant target of such hate material and speeches.

In almost all instances of mob violence and blasphemy cases, local clerics have been found to be involved in inciting hatred against the Christian community, often telling their followers that Christians accused of blasphemy are “infidels” and “can rightfully be killed.” Even mainstream media has been complicit in glorifying those who have killed alleged blasphemers. The support provided to Mumtaz Qadri, the killer of Salman Taseer, is a stark reminder of the level of pervasive bigotry that has invaded

society. Garlands and rose petals have been showered on Mumtaz Qadri at every court appearance.

Stopping hate speech and taking strict administrative action against those responsible for inciting hatred is fast becoming essential for Pakistan if it is to win its fight against terrorism. For the first time, hate crimes have been listed as a serious offence that will be dealt with severely under the National Action Plan. The government, in an attempt to quell hate speech, has banned the use of loud speakers during sermons in mosques. In July 2015, the police arrested a cleric responsible for inciting a crowd for violence against Christians in Lahore. In a welcome first, the police officer in charge of the case said that he had informed the cleric that he would not register a case under the blasphemy law as the accused had not committed blasphemy, but would register a case against the cleric and 400 others for inciting hatred.

While this bodes well for future action against unrestricted hate crimes against the Christian community in Pakistan, progress under the National Action Plan remains stymied and sporadic. A consistent and concerted effort across all administrative branches of government is required to ensure that relevant sections against hate speech and hate crimes in the PPC and CPC are applied in all such cases across the board to ensure the future safety of minority communities within the country.

SHIAS: UNDER ATTACK FOR THEIR FAITH

Shias, a minority sect of Islam, comprise more than 40 million people in Pakistan. The country now hosts the largest Shia population in the world after Iran. Shias form an integral part of the country's political, social and economic fabric. From heads of state to senior government functionaries, military officials, feudal and business elite, the Shia community has been completely mainstreamed in Pakistan. However, rising sectarian tensions in the Middle East and the resulting impact of sectarianism during the 1980s, coupled with the widespread propagation of an anti-Shia Sunni Islam in Pakistan has given rise to sectarian strife.

While sectarian violence against the Shia community has been rife since the 1980's, with the early 1990s seeing a dramatic rise in targeted killings of Shia professionals across the country, the last decade has been particularly brutal for the community. Today, the number of Shia lives lost to terrorism far outweighs the loss of any single community within Pakistan.

Since the mid-1980s a number of sectarian outfits were established in Pakistan. These organizations, such as Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhanvi, promoted hatred against the Shia community in Pakistan while the state, then under the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq, turned a blind eye to rising intolerance against Shias. Since 2001, the modus operandi of these organizations changed. No longer restricted to targeted killings of Shia religious leaders and professionals, these organizations learnt from the new wave of terrorism inspired by Al-Qaeda and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, using suicide bombings to grievous effect. Today, the Tehreek-e-Taliban, Lashkar-e-Jhanvi, Jundullah and Al-Qaeda are the leading anti-Shia organizations operating within the

country. The linkages between these organizations have grown and while they may not share strategic goals, they have banded together in attacks against Shias in Pakistan. The landscape of violence against Shias became complicated further since 2010, with the advent of Daesh in the Middle East. As sectarian conflict escalates in Syria and Iraq, its impact on Pakistan is certain. Since 2013, a number of militant commanders, previously associated with other sectarian outfits have declared their allegiance to Daesh. This promises to increase both the ferocity and volume of violence faced by the Shia community in Pakistan in the near future.

While Shias enjoy complete freedom of religion in Pakistan as a mainstream Muslim sect, with regular Moharram processions, television shows and government support, the underlying rifts of sectarianism perpetrated by a small, yet coherent cohort of violent sectarian militants has bloodied the community immeasurably. Anti-Shia violence in Pakistan is now rife across the country. However, major geographical hot-spots of violence continue to be Quetta, Karachi, Khurram Agency, Gilgit-Baltistan and Dera Ismail Khan.

The scale and magnitude of the impact of anti-Shia violence in Pakistan is nowhere as prominent as it is in Balochistan. In Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan, the minority Hazara community, easily identifiable as Shias due to their distinctive Central Asian features, have borne the brunt of discrimination, targeted killings and suicide bombings over the last decade.

HAZARA COMMUNITY

The Hazara community numbers well over 600,000 in Quetta. Once known to be the most educated and qualified citizens of Quetta involved in all aspects of administrative and public life in Balochistan, the community today has been ghettoized in two predominantly Hazara enclaves of Alamdar Road and Hazara Town.

After a decade of brazen, senseless and unrestricted killing of Hazaras in the city, the community has now migrated to other parts of the country, with a majority seeking asylum abroad as Shia violence across Pakistan continues unabated.

Ruqaiyya, a resident of Hazara Town interviewed by Jinnah Institute, recalls the start of deadly violence in the city. "We never faced such brutal violence before. Our forefathers have been living in Quetta since before Independence. Sectarian organizations first appeared in Quetta in the mid-1990s, but outright violence against Shias was not

common, one or two incidents used to occur where a teacher or a doctor were killed. In 2003, the real violence started. First police recruits were targeted in which 11 to 12 recruits embraced martyrdom. Then the same year, a Shia masjid was targeted by suicide attackers during namaz. Back then this was the biggest incident of terrorism in Pakistan. Almost 60 people lost their lives in that attack. Then in 2004, the incident on Ashura occurred. The Moharram procession was fired upon by attackers and suicide blasts occurred simultaneously. Almost 100 people lost their lives in that attack. Since then, targeted attacks and killings of Hazaras became an everyday occurrence. People would go to the market to buy household items and target killers would shoot them on Saryab Road and Spini Road. Slowly we stopped going out and Hazaras who lived outside Alamdar Road or Hazara Town started shifting inside. Many of our relatives and friends migrated outside Quetta. Then, a new trend started. People who used to go to Iran for pilgrimage on buses were targeted in Mastung. Militants would stop the bus, ask everyone to come out, identify Shias and then shoot them.”

A growing spiral of violence has now literally crippled the day to day lives of Hazaras in Quetta. Many families have been torn apart as family members have moved to safer parts of the world. The Hazaras who continue to live in Quetta live their daily lives in constant fear. They no longer go out to parks or for recreation. They strictly monitor their travel and never venture out of Hazara areas unless absolutely necessary.

Another woman living in Baruri describes the changes anti-Shia violence has brought in her life. “When the Peshawar attack happened in December, 2014, the Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi took out rallies condemning the attacks. I saw one such rally on my way home from work. They were shouting “*Shia Kafir Shia Wajibul-Katal*” (Shia infidel, Shia should be killed) and I thought to myself what has become of Pakistan. We are mourning the loss of innocent children and these people continue to spread hatred against Shias. The rally was even given Frontier Corps and police protection, I think because they don't want any disturbance. But no one was stopping them. Even today, these groups shout anti-Shia slogans right outside the entrance to Alamdar Road.”

Describing the change in family economic and social conditions, the respondent said, “My husband used to have a shop near the Cantonment in Quetta. Once the target killings started we had to shift to Baruri. My husband sold his shop at a very cheap price and bought a smaller one in our area. We used to go to parks for recreation, now we can't imagine strolling in a park. My life is now like a prison with a routine. I only go between Baruri and Mariabad and back.”

CONSTRAINED OPPORTUNITIES

The violence faced by Hazaras has even affected the educational work opportunities available to young educated university students. While the traumatized community may well have established a self-sustaining ecosystem to meet their daily needs within their localities, Hazara youth are no longer able to access the vast array of education, business and work opportunities across Balochistan.

In a focused group discussion with youth from the community, these challenges were amply highlighted. "Once university buses that used to take us to Balochistan University started being targeted, a lot of people stopped sending their children to there. Now, most children study till grade 10 only because the local school in our area only has classes till grade 10," said one respondent.

Another participant, a young girl who did not want to be identified, said she has started work in the city, but the level of discrimination she faces is unprecedented. "You know, when I was at university, I never heard my fellow students calling me an infidel. I never imagined I was different. Ever since I started working, I have colleagues who continuously tell me why Shias are infidels, because we pray differently and because of our religious beliefs. I am shocked by the level of discrimination I am facing daily. It is very hard working each day along with people who think you are an infidel and who discuss your religious beliefs."

TARGET KILLINGS

Quetta isn't the only city affected by targeted attacks against Shias. Karachi, Pakistan's largest metropolitan city is itself a hot-bed of sectarianism since the 1990's. In an exclusive interview with Jinnah Institute, Omar bin Khattab, one of the most senior police officers in the city dealing with target killers, terrorists and sectarian organizations, highlights the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies.

"Sectarian killings in Karachi involve both sides. If Lashkar-e-Jhangvi kills doctors, the Shias retaliate and kill doctors. If they kill a religious leader, the Shias retaliate and kill one of their religious leaders. These people are highly trained. The people who motivate them take young kids to training camps while they are 18 to 20 years old. In Karachi, their masterminds are aged between 35 and 40 years, but many of the foot soldiers are in the mid-20's and highly motivated and brainwashed. The difference

between Shia and Sunni sectarian militants is that once we capture a Shia target killer, and for some reason we are unable to bring a case against him, he becomes dormant. But Lashka-e-Jhangvi target killers keep on doing the same things. Qasim Rasheed has been arrested three times for sectarian killings.”

Describing the advent of sectarian killings in Karachi, Khattab says that in 1994 around 11 to 12 target killers were arrested. It was then that the police established beyond doubt that Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi were involved in targeted killings of Shias. He adds that on a smaller level, Shia sectarian outfits like Sipah-e-Muhammad and Tehreek-e-Jafria were also involved in retaliatory attacks.

“Most of these young kids are motivated through smaller seminaries where the clerics are not well trained. Initially, young kids are taught Islam and when they see potential in someone they start brainwashing him into becoming a sectarian terrorist.”

Khattab says that under the Karachi operation and the National Action Plan, the city's police and intelligence services will slowly and gradually start clamping down hard on all sectarian organizations. He says that the Sindh home department had prepared a list of seminaries that are thought to be involved in motivation and training of sectarian militants.

HATE SPEECH

As in almost all cases of rising extremism and intolerance against Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in Pakistan, hate speech and hate literature form the core methods of motivation and incitement used by extremists to push their agenda. Shias have long faced hate speech and hate literature, which is now prevalent across the country, but the level of harassment and violence they face today is unprecedented. Regular rallies and speeches by leaders of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Ahle-Sunnat Wal Jammat, the reincarnation of the banned Sipah-e-Sahaba, continue with impunity. Indeed, accommodation political parties and the government has played a vital role in their promotion. During the 2013 elections, a number of sitting members of Parliament unofficially allied themselves with such banned organizations to ensure electoral victory. The level of official accommodation afforded to sectarian outfits can be gauged from the fact that since the 1990s, sectarian leaders responsible for inciting hatred and killings of hundreds of Shias in Pakistan have made it to Parliament through elections.

Under the 20-point National Action Plan, a glimmer of hope has emerged. Today, Pakistan battles its largest, existential fight against terrorism and intolerance in the country. The military and the government have repeatedly stated since December 2014, that sectarian organizations and hate speech will not be tolerated in Pakistan. Despite these proclamations, no major cohesive action against religious leaders who incite hatred has been witnessed. Indeed, a small number of convicts involved in sectarian attacks have been convicted and sentenced under the recently established military courts, but lags in prosecution continue, as does non-transparency.

One of the first concrete demonstration of the government's willingness to curb hate speech has been the arrest and conviction for 6 months imprisonment of Ahle-Sunnat Wal Jammat's former President for Rawalpindi Mufti Tanvir. The impact of hate speech was evident in the riots during a Moharram procession in Rawalpindi in November 2013. The procession, which was making its way through the narrow streets of Raja Bazaar, broke into riot when it was confronted by hate speeches being made against Shia's through a loudspeaker from an Ahle-Sunnat Wal Jammat mosque in the area. The resulting clashes resulted in several people being injured and the mosque being ransacked by the enraged mob.

Curbing hate speech and demonstrating zero tolerance for religious leaders that incite hatred must be the government's immediate priority. Failure to ensure consistent policy will only provide space for emboldened sectarian organizations that are waiting to exploits gaps in the government's current drive to stamp out terrorism in Pakistan.

LEGAL DISCRIMINATION & JUDICIAL RESPONSE: ADVANCES & CHALLENGES

In 2011, the federal government declared August 11 as National Minorities Day to remind people of the inclusive and plural vision of the country's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah. This day commemorates the vital role minorities continue to play in Pakistan and their value as equal citizens of the Pakistani nation. However, beyond symbolic commemorations and celebrations, calls by the minority community for affirmative policy action and reforms of the legal framework have fallen on deaf ears. It is on this front that less progress has been made.

JUDICIAL ACTIVISM

Despite a lack of progress on the legislative front, renewed judicial activism by the Supreme Court and High Courts has set new precedent. In November 2012, Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court, Justice Iqbal Hameed ur Rehman, acquitted Rimsha Masih who had been accused of committing blasphemy by a local cleric in a suburb of Islamabad. In his judgment, Justice Rehman emphasized that extreme caution should be exercised in leveling accusations of blasphemy by stating that “fake allegations should not be leveled against any Muslim or non-Muslim”. Justice Rehman also cleared the accused of all charges, arguing that nobody had witnessed the burning of any pages of the Holy Quran as alleged. This judgment was a powerful one. Unlike earlier occasions where judges of lower courts succumbed to pressure, the Islamabad High Court remained steadfast.

Similarly, a judicial inquiry commission constituted to probe anti-Christian riots that took place in Gojra in 2009, recommended a review of the blasphemy laws, select

clauses of Pakistan Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Code and Police Order 2002. However, the Punjab government has demonstrated an acute reluctance to implement these recommendations. The lack of administrative follow-up on judicial recommendations is also reflected in the suo moto hearing by the Supreme Court in the Joseph Colony case. Joseph Colony, a working class settlement of Christian residents, was set on fire by a Muslim mob after blasphemy allegations were leveled against a Christian resident. Explaining the negligent behavior of the provincial police in stopping the rioter, the Punjab government representative opined that the police had avoided action to halt the large scale riot because doing so “might have blown the issue out of proportion and (it would have) spread all across the country”. During the hearing, the Punjab government presented proposals for reviewing existing laws and taking steps for ensuring safety and security of minority communities and their properties. However, no concrete steps have been taken by the government to implement these proposals to date.

In June 2014, the Supreme Court in a landmark ruling ordered the federal government to constitute a 'National Council of Minorities' Rights' to monitor whether minorities were being afforded the rights provided to them by the Constitution and to prepare policy recommendations to serve these ends. Moreover, the apex court also called for the immediate formation of three task forces to formulate strategies for religious tolerance in Pakistan, curriculum reform, and a special force for guarding worship places of minorities.

In implementation of this ruling, the federal government in November 2014 announced the establishment of a National Commission for Minorities, and tasked it with reviewing existing laws and preparing an inter-faith harmony policy. In January 2015, an inter-faith harmony policy draft was referred to a three-member commission comprising members of Parliament belonging to minority communities. In May 2015, Minister of State for Religious Affairs clarified that the final draft of a policy on inter-faith harmony had been prepared and all provincial governments had been tasked with establishing active inter-faith harmony committees at the district level.

A crucial aspect of the Supreme Court decision was related to registration of marriages and deaths of members of minority communities. The National Database and Regulation Authority (NADRA), the country's citizenship registration authority, has amended its procedures and has started preparing marriage and death certificates for the Hindu minority community.

Similarly, in implementation of the Supreme Court decision of 2014, the Sindh government revised the curriculum and removed passages amounting to hate speech. Subsequently, the court directed other provinces to revise their curriculum and ensure that hate material was excluded from textbooks. However, scant progress on curricula reform has been reported from the other three provinces in this regard.

PROVINCIAL LEGISLATION

With provincial legislatures gaining new powers through devolution under the Eighteenth Amendment, pro-minority legislation is once again gaining ground. In 2013, the Sindh Assembly enacted a law safeguarding religious properties of minorities for communal use in the province and barred transfer of such properties without authorization of a committee comprising government functionaries and minority representatives. This law was enacted following a series of complaints by minority communities where communal properties in expensive localities had been sold or transferred by individuals for financial gain. In 2014, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly also followed suit and enacted similar legislation to ensure that communal properties belonging to minorities were protected.

In a first step against forced conversion, a draft of a forced conversion bill was submitted to the Deputy Speaker of the Sindh Assembly in July 2015. The bill, aims to enact safeguards against forced conversion, defined as a change of faith under threat or duress, a long standing concern amongst the Hindu community in Sindh. It calls for constituting 18 years as minimum age for voluntary conversion, followed by a time frame of 21 days between deliberation and coming to court to reach a decision. If enacted, the bill promises to alleviate a major grievance of the Hindu community.

One area where lack of progress has been evident has been amendments in personal laws applicable to minority community members, particularly Christians, Hindus and Sikhs. Until recently, Hindu marriages and deaths were not being registered within the country and while the Supreme Court directive has spurred NADRA into action, lack of progress on progressive legislation on personal laws affecting minority community members has meant that Christians seeking divorce have to convert in the absence of a Christian divorce bill. Similarly, three Hindu marriage bills have been languishing in the National Assembly and the Punjab Assembly since 2014. The bills, which seek to codify procedures for marriage and annulment, call for a change in “divorce” to annulment in keeping with the absence of divorce in Hindu tradition.

The most regressive legislative development over the last few years has been the revision of Local Government Acts in Sindh and Punjab. Unlike Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which has maintained election on minority seats through direct election under a joint electorate, the Sindh and Punjab Local Government Acts have disempowered minority communities at the grassroots by instituting a mode of selection on minority seats akin to the selection method adopted for National Assembly and Senate seats. This has meant that minority community members are no longer able to vote for their local candidates and instead have to rely on the winning candidates from the majority community to select minority representatives. Instituting selection at the local government level has met stiff resistance by minority community leaders who have called for amendments to address this anomaly.

PAKISTAN'S BLASPHEMY LAWS AND ANTI-AHMADI LAWS

In recent years, the number of people accused and convicted of blasphemy in Pakistan has been on the rise. At the same time the persecution of the Ahmadi community has continued unabated. Deadly violence against those accused of blasphemy has been widespread and even lawyers and human right activists have come under attack. Similarly, the judiciary has come under pressure to pursue cases of those accused of blasphemy. Blasphemy laws and anti-Ahmadi legislation are being misused against minorities in the country to carry out personal vendettas and settle rivalries. Till date no one has been executed for blasphemy in Pakistan, although many accused have become victims of mob violence and vigilante lynching. Despite continued violence, the government has refrained from taking corrective measures to address the increasing misuse of blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws.

BLASPHEMY LAW

Section XV, Article 295-298, of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) forms the core of the blasphemy laws, i.e. offences such as destroying a place of worship, desecrating religious text, and what constitutes apostasy in the Islamic Republic. These articles were first codified in 1860 by India's British rulers and expanded in 1927. The British government of India made it a crime to interrupt a religious gathering, encroach on designated burial places, offend religious beliefs and practices, and deliberately demolish or tarnish a place or an object of worship. The maximum punishment was 10 years of imprisonment, with or without a fine.

Pakistan inherited these laws after gaining independence in 1947 and adopted them without major changes. The government of General Zia-ul-Haq introduced amendments in these articles in an attempt to Islamize society. These amendments expanded the purview of the said articles. First, in 1980, insulting or making critical remarks against prominent personalities of Islam was made a crime, with maximum punishment of three years in jail. In 1982, another amendment made deliberate defilement of the Holy Quran an offence punishable with life imprisonment. Third, in 1986, a new clause “295-C” was inserted for proscribing abuse or critical remarks against the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), making an offence under section 295-C punishable by “death or imprisonment for life”. In October 1990, the Federal Shariat Court declared that punishment of life imprisonment for disrespecting Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was against Sharia and noted that such a crime is only punishable by 'death'. In April 1991, the law was amended to bring it in conformity with Sharia Law, as decreed by the court resulting in the awarding of capital punishment for blasphemy against Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

In October 2015, a three member bench of the Supreme Court, while upholding the death penalty awarded to Mumtaz Qadri in the Salman Taseer murder case, remarked that criticism of, and calls for reviewing blasphemy laws were not objectionable and did not constitute blasphemy. The apex court's decision to de-link calls for reviewing existing laws which have been blatantly applied in recent years to settle personal enmities will embolden civil society and progressive legislators to once again seek amendments in the law to ensure that innocent members of minority communities are not subjected to trial.

ANTI-AHMADI LAWS

In addition to a set of blasphemy regulations, successive governments in Islamabad have also enacted legislation and amendments in Section XV, Article 298, of the PPC to legally separate the Ahmadi community from the majority population of the country. First, in 1974, the progressive government of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto enacted the Second Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, and declared the Ahmadi community a constitutional minority. An amendment to Article 260 of the Constitution declared that a person who disputes finality of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the last Prophet of Islam and claims to be a Prophet, or is a follower of such a proclaimer is “not a Muslim for the purposes of the Constitution or law”.

In 1984, the military government of General Zia-ul-Haq, via a Martial Law Ordinance, added sub-clauses 298B and 298C to Section XV, Article 298A, of the PPC. Under the amended law, Ahmadis have been prohibited from proclaiming themselves as Muslims, referring to their beliefs as Islamic, preaching their faith, terming their places of worship as 'mosques', practicing their faith in non-Ahmadi worship places including public prayer areas, performing Muslim call to prayer, publicly quoting texts of the Holy Quran, and saying Muslim greetings in public, among other restrictions. These “crimes” are punishable with imprisonment of up to three years, with a fine.

Unlike other minorities in Pakistan, the selective laws applied against Ahmadi community members has meant that the community has become the most victimized and marginalized community in Pakistan. Despite a slew of recent attacks targeting the community, crimes against the Ahmadi community have largely gone unreported. Prospects for revising these laws remain bleak and the complete embargo on discussing the rights and privileges of Ahmadis as citizens of Pakistan has meant that the community is increasingly ostracized from Pakistani society, with many of the community’s most active members deciding to immigrate.

PROTECTING MINORITIES AND NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

In the aftermath of the gruesome attack on Army Public School in Peshawar on December 12, 2014, where 126 children were killed, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced a National Action Plan to counter terrorism and combat extremism in the country. Prime Minister Sharif announced that measures would be taken to protect minorities and curb hate speech.

In June 2015, Federal Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, who is responsible for maintaining internal security, asked provincial home ministries to undertake a security review of minorities in the four provinces to determine their number and to mark their places of worship and properties. The Interior Ministry has pushed provinces to devise a special security plan for providing security to minorities. The Sindh government had earlier directed provincial police to begin registration of worship places of minority communities.

The measures being pushed by the federal government include effective surveillance of worship places of the minorities by intelligence agencies, security patrolling during their religious gatherings, and issuing of licensed arms to them.

An overview of law and policy realms highlights that although the federal government and Parliament have shown a lack of political will to review the blasphemy laws and anti-Ahmadi laws, judicial and administrative measures have been taken since 2012 to ensure the safety and security of minorities in the country. The legal framework, backed by the Supreme Court ruling, is gradually pushing federal and provincial government to secure worship places of minorities and ensure protection and rights to these communities.

Faith-based discrimination and violence against non-Muslim and Muslim minorities remains under reported. Many cases of attacks against religious properties, forced conversion, kidnapping, and sexual assault are often not registered with local police stations for fear of reprisals. This is particularly true for Ahmadis, Hindus and Christians. As a result, the availability of a central database that records and captures all incidents of rights violations against minorities remains a challenge. In order to push for legislative, judicial and administrative action to ensure fundamental freedoms and protection of life and property of non-Muslim and Muslim minorities, the collection and collation of such a centralized database is essential. Only then can informed targeted advocacy for affirmative action succeed.

CONCLUSION

This report maps violence and discrimination suffered by Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, Sikhs and Shias in Pakistan. It examines the degree to which religious violence, extremism and militancy impacts the freedoms and rights of these groups. In addition to the security of the lives of repressed communities, there is hardly any element of everyday life that has not been adversely affected by a violent extremist onslaught claiming to represent a majoritarian religious ethos.

Unless the state ensures immediate and across-the-board action against all militant and sectarian outfits in Pakistan, the fight against terrorism cannot be won, nor can Muslim and non-Muslim religious minorities – the softest of soft targets available to terrorists – hope to live with any modicum of security.

The attack on Army Public School in Peshawar on December 16, 2014 is considered a watershed where the state finally decided to take an unambiguous anti-militancy and anti-extremism stance. However, progress on the National Action Plan, which emanated from that decision, has been marginal. While the military has made gains in its fight against terrorism in FATA, the equally important fight against religious intolerance and religious extremism in Pakistan's heartland has been stymied. A number of attacks in 2015 highlight the challenges ahead. Christians have faced suicide bombings and have been profiled indiscriminately by the police. A Shia imambargah was once again the target of a suicide attack in Moharram, while Ahmadis have also been killed and curbs on hate speech have been selective at best.

Moreover, the traditionally conservative mainstream press, while taking an anti-militant stance, has openly supported the government's fight against the TTP, but has fallen short on taking a position on religious freedoms as enshrined in the Constitution.

Attempts on the lives of progressive voices in the country have left an indelible impact on the religiously persecuted Pakistanis. The assassination of Governor Salman Taseer, State Minister for Religious Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, murders of human rights defenders like Rashid Rehman and Sabeen Mahmood, assassination attempts to kill journalists Hamid Mir and Raza Rumi, violent attacks on news networks and threat letters to media houses, prominent TV anchors and legislators like Sherry Rehman, have all created an environment which is further shrinking space for a more tolerant, inclusive discourse on freedom of religion.

There has been a transmission of the offline violence and hate content to the online world. This has proved detrimental to the cause of progressive Pakistani Muslim and non-Muslim citizens, and of religious minorities, who had found independent platforms on the internet through social media, blogging, web domains and online chat forums to advocate for religious freedoms for all. Internet also proved to be a medium where rights violations in the name of religion were voiced loudly without fear of censorship. Several hate speech advocates remain unblocked, while no such freedom is available to vulnerable minority groups. However, since the banning of websites of Ahmadis, Shias and primarily YouTube, the rights advocacy for the communities, their reportage of discriminatory actions against them and their freedom of expression are suppressed.

The report concludes that short term actions of merely arresting some clerics selectively, nabbing published religious literature of some sects and faiths and a few police encounters are not enough to initiate a long term sustained process of rooting out the evil of religious bigotry. These actions count as cosmetic, when compared to the oppression and discrimination running deep within society. Tactical responses will not change the game for minorities on the ground when what is required is a clear strategic intervention.

On the ground, implementation on progressive judgments by the Supreme Court of Pakistan to protect the rights of minorities in Pakistan is yet to be achieved. If Pakistan is to sustain its idea of a nation, the state must prioritize access to education, health care, employment and justice for the most vulnerable of our communities.

In Pakistan, the contours of religious extremism in each province are also shaped by local politics. Therefore it is impossible to just take broad, blanket steps. It is vital for the federal and provincial governments to find solutions which would address the key regional issues faced by persecuted communities. There is also an immense need for political integration of the religious minorities, and strengthening of the minority parliamentarians and politicians within their parties will help the larger cause of religious freedom and tolerance. The report urges the government that as long as the policy of retaining the religious right as potential pressure lobbies or proxy soldiers continues, religious extremism will only grow stronger.

END NOTES

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