

World
Watch
Research

Pakistan: Full Country Dossier

January 2024



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	11	-	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 01 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Pakistan

Brief country details

Pakistan: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
233,757,000	4,195,000	1.8

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Pakistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	87	7
WWL 2023	86	7
WWL 2022	87	8
WWL 2021	88	5
WWL 2020	88	5

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

In 1947, the year of the country's independence, the situation for the Christian minority became more complicated as Pakistan officially became a Muslim state. Historical churches have relative freedom for worship and other activities, however, they are heavily monitored and have regularly been [targeted](#) in the past for bomb attacks (the most recent large bomb attack occurring almost 6 years ago in December 2017 in Quetta) (World Watch Monitor, 18 April 2017). Churches more involved in missionary activities and youthwork face severer rights violations in society, especially when these violations benefit the Muslim majority. All Christians suffer from institutionalized discrimination, illustrated by the fact that occupations seen as low, dirty and denigrating are reserved for Christians by the authorities, as can be seen, for example, in job announcements. On the other hand, there are Christians belonging to the middle class as well, but this does not save them from being marginalized or persecuted.

The country's notorious blasphemy laws target religious minorities (including Muslim minorities), but affect the Christian minority in particular - roughly a quarter of all blasphemy accusations target Christians, who only make up 1.8% of the population. The number of blasphemy cases is increasing as is the number of Christian (and other minority religion) girls being abducted, abused and forcefully converted to Islam. In 2023, the Senate passed a bill to [tighten](#) the country's notorious blasphemy law by (among other things) increasing the punishment for those charged from three to ten years' imprisonment (Dawn, 8 August 2023). The blasphemy law's high potential for violence was amply illustrated in the city of Jaranwala in

August 2023, where, after false blasphemy allegations were made against 2 Christians, up to 21 churches were burned or damaged and hundreds of Christians fled their settlement (see below: Specific examples of violation).

A draft bill on forced conversion was [rejected](#) by parliament, after religious scholars had deemed it "anti-Islamic" (Dawn, 14 October 2021).

The political tug-of-war between the government and the opposition (see below: Political and legal landscape) means that politics is becoming ever more polarized; this in turn could lead to religious minorities like Christians facing increased pressure and attacks.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

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

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

- **16 August 2023:** After false blasphemy accusations were made against two Christians, a mob [attacked](#) the Christian settlement in the city of Jaranwala, Punjab province. At least 17 (other sources reported 21) churches were attacked and partly burned, more than 100 houses of Christians were attacked and hundreds of Christians fled for their lives (AP News, 4 September 2023).
- **16 July 2023:** Despite the police taking swift action to protect them, almost half of the population of Maryam town, Sargodha city, a Christian settlement of 4,000 people, [fled](#) after a piece of paper containing blasphemous statements and drawings had been found and a mob blocked a nearby road (UCA News, 18 July 2023).

- **8 July 2023:** Zaki Masih was [arrested](#), accused of blasphemy, and was brought to prison by Sargodha police (Morning Star News, 12 July 2023).
- **6 June 2023:** Shazia Imran, a 40 year old widow in Lahore, was [killed](#) when she refused to marry a Muslim and convert to Islam (Morning Star News, 3 July 2023).
- **30 May 2023:** A court in Bahawalpur, Punjab province, handed 22 year old Noman Masih the [death sentence](#) for having committed blasphemy (Morning Star News, 31 May 2023).
- **18 May 2023:** Adil Babar and Simon Nadeem Masih, 18 and 14 years old, from Lahore, were accused of committing blasphemy by a fellow teenager and [arrested](#) (Morning Star News, 22 May 2023).
- **16 May 2023:** Two schoolgirls were [killed](#) when a school guard opened fire at a Catholic school in Sangota, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (UCA News, 17 May 2023).
- **12 April 2023:** Pervaiz Masih, a Christian sanitary worker, was [killed](#) in Turbat, Balochistan province, probably by the Baloch Liberation Army (UCA News, 14 April 2023).
- **1 April 2023:** Kashif Masih, a Christian sanitary worker, was [killed](#) with a Sikh businessman, in a gun attack in Peshawar. ISKP claimed responsibility (Voice PK, 3 April 2023).
- **6 February 2023:** Emmanuel Masih, a Catholic farm laborer, was [beaten to death](#) by his Muslim landlord for allegedly stealing oranges from an orchard in Khanewal District, Punjab Province (Morning Star News, 8 February 2023).
- **1 February 2023:** Sunita Masih, a 19 year old Christian from Karachi, became the victim of an [acid attack](#) when she refused to give in to a marriage proposal and convert to Islam (Morning Star News, 6 February 2023).
- **29 November 2023:** Ishtiaq Saleem from Islamabad was [taken into custody](#) and accused of blasphemy by sharing images in a social media group (Morning Star News, 17 January 2023).
- **Police custody:** Church leaders can get arrested if they do not abide by the authorities' wishes. This acts as a warning to the Christian minority and intimidates them further. According to a report, a disproportionate number of Christians are [dying in police custody](#), leading to calls by Christians to criminalize torture (UCA News, 27 September 2022).
- **Abductions:** Reports about abductions have decreased in frequency, however, this does not mean that they do not happen on the ground. One example is [Sitara Arif](#), a 15 year old girl from Faisalabad, who has been kidnapped on 15 December 2022 (Morning Star News, 13 February 2023). In February 2023, 24 year old [Aneeta](#) was abducted in Sindh province; she was found and freed after eight hours (Asia News, 8 March 2023).
- **Forced conversion:** The COVID-19 crisis led to an increase of aid being provided to Christian day laborers under the condition that they cite the Islamic creed and thus convert. A forced conversion bill stalled in parliament, although research showed an [increase](#) of 177% of such cases against religious minorities in 2020 (UCA News, 18 October 2021). Although the challenges of forced conversion are [recognized](#) more widely, Pakistan's politics seem impossible to change (LSE Religion and Global Society Blog, 8 December 2022). Six special rapporteurs of the United Nations wrote and published a [letter](#) to Pakistan's government on the practice of forced marriages and conversions on 26 October 2022. So far, no answer has been made public.

Specific examples of positive developments

19 August 2023: Qazi Faez Isa, the newly appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court [visited](#) the site of the mob attack in Jaranwala and publicly denounced this sort of religious persecution (Real Clear Politics, 21 October 2023).

13 May 2023: Musarrat Bibi, a Christian mother of three, and a co-accused Muslim, were granted [bail](#) after being arrested on 19 April 2023 on charges of blasphemy (UCA News, 19 May 2023). Since the granting of bail is so exceptional in Pakistan, it is mentioned in this section as a positive development.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Brief description of the persecution situation: targeted - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/04/pakistan-prevents-another-easter-attack-christians/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: tighten - <https://www.dawn.com/news/1769073>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: rejected - <https://www.dawn.com/news/1651919>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: attacked - <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-arrest-suspect-churches-attacked-5924f73ddb5b60f0d65714baeab598f6>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: fled - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-christians-fear-reprisal-after-blasphemy-allegation/102003>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: arrested - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/arrested-christian-in-pakistan-denies-sharing-facebook-post>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: killed - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/muslim-in-pakistan-confesses-to-killing-christian-woman>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: death sentence - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/christian-in-pakistan-sentenced-to-death-under-blasphemy-law>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: arrested - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/two-christians-18-and-14-accused-of-blasphemy-in-pakistan>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: killed - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/police-guard-kills-2-girl-students-in-pakistan/101337>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: killed - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/militants-claim-killing-pakistani-spy-christian/100994>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: killed - <https://voicepk.net/2023/04/daesh-lay-claim-to-target-killing-of-christian-sikh-men-in-peshawar/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: beaten to death - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/christian-farm-laborer-beaten-to-death-in-pakistan>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: acid attack - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/muslim-throws-acid-on-young-christian-woman-in-pakistan>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: taken into custody - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/christian-falsely-accused-of-blasphemy-father-says>

- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: dying in police custody - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-church-demands-criminalizing-torture/98908>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Sitara Arif - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/christian-girl-kidnapped-by-60-year-old-muslim-in-pakistan>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Aneeta - <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Sindh%2C-Christian-kidnapped-by-Muslims-freed--57913.html>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: increase - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-sees-record-leap-in-forced-conversions/94582>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: recognized - <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2022/12/the-pandemic-of-forced-conversion-and-marriages-no-girl-should-have-to-go-through-the-heartache/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: letter - <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27585>
- Specific examples of positive developments: visited - https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2023/10/21/pakistans_supreme_court_chief_justice_addresses_religious_persecution_149940.html
- Specific examples of positive developments: bail - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/blasphemy-bail-ruling-wins-praise-in-pakistan/101354>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Pakistan

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 country report – covering 156 countries	AI Pakistan 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-asia/pakistan/report-pakistan/	26 June 2023
BBC News Pakistan profile - updated 21 March 2023	BBC Pakistan profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12965779	26 June 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2022 – Pakistan	BTI Pakistan report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/PAK	26 June 2023
CIA World Factbook Pakistan - updated 20 June 2023	World Factbook Pakistan	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/pakistan/	26 June 2023
Crisis24 Pakistan report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Pakistan report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/pakistan	26 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Pakistan profile 2023	EIU Pakistan profile 2023	https://country.eiu.com/pakistan	26 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Pakistan	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	26 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index – 29 countries, Pakistan not included	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	26 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Pakistan	https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan/freedom-world/2023	26 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Pakistan	https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistan/freedom-net/2023	10 January 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Pakistan profile	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/pakistan/	26 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Pakistan report	Girls Not Brides Pakistan	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/pakistan/	26 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 Pakistan	HRW 2023 country chapter Pakistan	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/pakistan	26 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Pakistan	https://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm#pk	26 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Pakistan	https://rsf.org/en/country/pakistan	26 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Pakistan	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/pak	26 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report Pakistan	UNDP HDR 2022 Pakistan	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/PAK	26 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom report Pakistan	IRFR 2022 Pakistan	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/pakistan	26 June 2023
USCIRF Annual report 2023 Pakistan CPC – (Total: 17 CPC / 11 SWL)	USCIRF 2023 Pakistan CPC	https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Pakistan.pdf	26 June 2023
World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Pakistan - April 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Pakistan	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/5d1783db09a0e09d15bbcea8ef0ce0b-0500052021/related/mpo-pak.pdf	26 June 2023
World Bank Pakistan data 2021	World Bank Pakistan data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=PAK	26 June 2023
World Bank Pakistan overview - updated 4 April 2023	World Bank Pakistan overview	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview#1	26 June 2023

Recent history

Pakistan became an independent nation separate from India at the end of British colonial rule in 1947. In 1971 East Pakistan became the independent nation Bangladesh. The territory of Kashmir remains disputed with India to this day and in February 2019 both countries were involved in a violent skirmish across the unofficial (but in practice accepted) "Line of Control".

The conflict flared up, when Pakistani militants from the group *Jaish-e-Mohammed*, which claimed immediate responsibility, attacked an Indian military convoy on 14 February 2019 and killed 40 people (Pulwama incident). India retaliated, but both sides avoided letting the conflict escalate further. However, in August 2019, the Indian government revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, stripping them off their status as Indian states and making them Union territories under the direct rule of Delhi instead. This step angered and provoked Pakistan, but so far, no action has been taken.

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

A strain on relations with the USA has been caused by the Taliban government take-over in neighboring Afghanistan, which was [supported](#) by groups based in Pakistan (Gandhara, 21 June 2021). The army is still pulling the strings of politics behind the scenes. Army leaders had been content with Prime Minister Imran Khan in office taking the blame for the dire economic situation, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but their patience came to an end when Khan tried to [influence and delay](#) military appointments, such as the Chief of Army Intelligence (ISI) (Reuters, 26 October 2021). On 11 April 2022, a no-confidence motion against Imran Khan passed and Shehbaz Sharif became the new Prime Minister (PM), immediately facing a barrage of challenges. A new army leader was announced at the end of November 2022: [Syed Asim Munir](#), a former chief of the military intelligence ISI, who had been ousted by former PM Imran Khan (Crisis Group, 27 December 2022). On 7 August 2023, Ex-PM Khan was [sentenced](#) to three years in prison on charges of corruption (Reuters, 7 August 2023). Although a caretaker government took over in August to prepare the upcoming elections (originally scheduled for November 2023 at the latest), voting has been [postponed](#) several months until 8 February 2024. The government announced it intended to include the results of a new census, which made it constitutionally mandatory for new constituency boundaries to be drawn up (Reuters, 5 August 2023).

While Christians were encouraged by the final decision to acquit Asia Bibi and allow her to finally leave the country in May 2019, this ruling has not made their everyday life any easier. Christians face ubiquitous discrimination. They - like other religious minorities (and even Muslim minorities) - continue to be accused, arrested and tried for blasphemy. Young girls from the Christian and other minorities continue to be abducted, forcefully converted and married off. The government has by-and-large managed to keep violent Islamic groups in check, and has continued its appeasement policy towards certain radical Islamic groups. However, the fact that Muslim mobs [vandalized](#) churches and Christian homes in the Jaranwala District, Faisalabad, after a Christian was accused of blasphemy (Dawn, 16 August 2023) shows that it is not sufficient to simply try to control Islamic militants, when anti-minority and anti-Christian sentiments are deeply rooted in wider society. The list of specific examples of violations of rights provided above is far from exhaustive and illustrates the levels of hostility that Christians are facing.

Political and legal landscape

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

Ousted former PM Khan resorted to the conspiracy theory that the no-confidence vote was the work of the USA acting behind the scenes and called his supporters to stage demonstrations. This narrative resonates well with his supporters. He is also known to be close to Islamist circles. While joining his anti-government convoy in Eastern Pakistan, Imran Khan was [shot at](#), receiving a leg-wound. His supporters saw this as an assassination attempt and blamed the government (Reuters, 4 November 2022). Just days earlier, Pakistan's election commission had ruled to [disqualify](#) him from holding public office for five years (CNN, 21 October 2022). A first [attempt at arresting](#) Kahn (now serving as opposition leader) in March 2023 failed and left several of his supporters and police wounded (Reuters, 15 March 2023). However, on 9 May 2023, he was successfully [arrested](#) on corruption charges, resulting in countrywide clashes between his supporters and security forces (Reuters, 9 May 2023). Just a few days after the arrest, the Supreme Court ruled that the arrest had been [unlawful](#), and consequently, Khan was set free and could return to his home in Lahore (Channel News Asia, 12 May 2023). At least for the time-being, he moderated his demands as the authorities continued [legal action against his party](#), weakening it considerably in the process (The Diplomat, 25 May 2023). With Imran Khan meanwhile in prison and his party considerably weakened, it remains to be seen how the elections scheduled for 8 February 2024 will turn out. Nawaz Sharif recently [returned from exile](#) and will be a more visible factor in politics again (CNN, 21 October 2023). It seems, however, safe to say that there will be little to no improvement for the Christian minority in the country.

Islam plays a dominant role in every aspect of life. For example, according to the Constitution, every citizen has the right of free speech, which is, however, subject to the restrictions necessary in the interest of "the glory of Islam". Government and army alike have a long history of trying to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' jihadists. It fights the latter and courts the former.

Since the introduction of the blasphemy laws in 1986, Christians have come under increasing pressure and are victims of roughly a quarter of all blasphemy accusations. In the protests against the acquittal of Asia Bibi in November 2018, the radical Islamic groups (headed by the *Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan* party -TLP) made a mistake (although it turned out not to be a fatal mistake, since such groups have the ability to lie low, re-structure and re-emerge after a while): They would have been forgiven for just calling for the downfall of the government and the killing

of the judges. However, they also called for an uprising against the army and its chief as well. The army is regarded as one of the main pillars of power in Pakistan and is arguably the strongest one.

After 2022, it was hard to imagine that Pakistan's politics could become more volatile than they already were, but events in 2023 have shown that it is indeed possible. Such volatility affects minorities seriously, especially religious minorities. Christians continue to be pushed to the margins of society; they still lack proper representation in politics and the Jaranwala mob attack in August 2023 has been a chilling reminder how vulnerable Christians are. Additionally, there are almost constant attacks against individuals, making it hard for Christians to feel safe and worship freely.

Gender perspective

The '[Global Gender Gap Report 2022](#)' published by the World Economic Forum revealed that Pakistan has shown a dismal performance in regards to gender parity. Pakistan's gender gap had broadened by 0.7 percentage points in the past year to 55.6 percent, but marginally increased to 56.4% in 2022; only Afghanistan fared worse. While it ratified the CEDAW convention in 1996, a [2020 CEDAW periodic report](#) (p.7) highlighted concerns about ongoing harmful practices, such as child marriage, forced marriage (often linked to cases of [forced conversion](#)) and so-called 'honor' crimes (ACN, 17 March 2023). Some Pakistani states continue to permit child marriage; in 2020, the Sindh High Court in Karachi ruled that Pakistani men may marry underage girls as long as they have had their first period ([Forbes, 1 March 2020](#)). Whilst rates are slowly declining, as of 2022, an estimated 18% of girls are married by the age of 18 according to Girls Not Brides Pakistan.

[Bride trafficking](#) along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a big problem (Brookings Institution, March 2022). The Brookings report highlights cultural and religious differences between China and Pakistan and touches upon the concept of family honor in Pakistan. The report then goes on to state: "Offsetting this was the fact that many of the victims belonged to the Christian community of Pakistan — less surrounded by society's notions of honor, and less protected because they are marginalized. ... That most of the victims belonged to the poor and marginalized Christian community of Pakistan sadly made it easier for Pakistan to divert attention away from the issue without an ensuing public outcry." Thus, due to a lack of interest in the plight of the Christian minority, the whole issue has been quietly ignored by most government officials.

Although there is a law against domestic violence, implementation of the legislation is weak and marital rape is not criminalized. Similarly, whilst laws against honor killings were tightened in 2016 following the murder of Qandeel Baloch ([The Guardian, 17 May 2019](#)), an estimated 1,000 honor killings take place each year (HRW 2023 Pakistan country chapter). Divorce laws prevent women and girls from escaping an abusive situation. Under Sharia law, a man has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq* – a husband's right to dissolve the marriage by simply voicing his repudiation of her – whereas a woman may file for divorce through the courts. Following a divorce, women are usually granted custody of the children until they reach the age of 7, whilst guardianship remains with the father, and with it, decision-making power over the child. If the

case is made that the child should be raised a Muslim however, it is likely that custody of the children will be given to the Muslim parent regardless of the child's age.

Religious landscape

Pakistan: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	4,195,000	1.8
Muslim	225,899,000	96.6
Hindu	2,915,000	1.2
Buddhist	133,000	0.1
Ethno-religionist	235,000	0.1
Jewish	900	0.0
Bahai	115,000	0.0
Atheist	10,700	0.0
Agnostic	191,000	0.1
Other	63,700	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

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

The World Christian Database (accessed March 2023), uses government censuses as one source among others and gives the current percentage of Christians in Pakistan as 1.8%. A new nationwide census was conducted in 2017, the first for 19 years. It included religious affiliation, and in June 2021, the government finally released the [religious statistics](#) (Pakistan Daily Times, 7 June 2021). The census shows a drop in the population's percentage of Christians compared to 1998. According to the 2017 census, 1.27% of all Pakistani citizens were Christian, down from 1.59% in the 1998 census. (In comparison, the census shows that the Hindu minority grew in the same time from 1.6% to 1.73%.) These results come as a disappointment to the Christian minority and have caused several questions to be raised. The most obvious question is: Why did it take the Bureau of Statistics more than three years to publish results for a census that was held in 2017? It has also been questioned how well the census enumerators were trained in explaining the census and the religious affiliation section to the respondents. It should be noted that many Christians are poor and illiterate and many may well have been completely left out of the census. Many of these Christians do not see a reason for obtaining a National Identity Card or for registering their children. Finally, it is also possible that the percentage has been kept low

for political reasons as has been seen happening to Christians in other Asian countries such as Myanmar. On the other hand, there is currently a wave of emigration by better educated Christians, thus reducing the number of Christians in Pakistan.

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

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

The seventh national population and housing census, which started in March 2023, has already faced [accusations](#) of being biased and of undercounting religious minorities for the reasons mentioned above, especially Christians (UCA News, 25 April 2023). It is, therefore, very unlikely that its results will shed any light on the real numbers on the ground.

Economic landscape

According to the UNDP Human Development Report Pakistan:

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

According to World Bank Pakistan data:

- Pakistan is classified as a lower middle income country.
- **GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2017 international USD):** 5.452
- **GDP growth rate:** 4.2%
- **Poverty gap at 6.85 USD a day (2017 PPP):** 36% (2018).

Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, Pakistan was already struggling to keep its economy afloat, not least because the long-term political friendship with the USA had cooled off. As this process was already tangible for some time, Pakistan looked for new sources of revenue and turned like many other countries eastwards. For a number of years, the country had seemingly begun to

rely increasingly on China and the latter's willingness to invest in Pakistan in its “New Silk Road” framework (“One Belt, One Road”). China is investing up to 65 billion USD in the so called “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor” (CPEC) and the port city of Gwadar is one of the hubs the Chinese are building; in 2017 it was leased from the Pakistan government for 40 years. However, Pakistan's [cancellation](#) of a planned oil refinery in Gwadar, an investment of an estimated 10 billion USD and sometimes called the “crown jewel”, may indicate second thoughts and a re-orientation of Pakistan politics, not just in the economy (Eurasia Review, 20 June 2021). Additionally, the [killing of two Chinese Christians](#) in Pakistan in May 2017 (close to the CPEC construction site) illustrates how challenging the situation is, as well as highlighting some of the opportunities and risks Christians face (China Aid, 29 June 2017). The same is true for the Taliban suicide-bombing of the [Serena Hotel](#) in Quetta in April 2021, which was allegedly targeting the Chinese ambassador (BBC News, 22 April 2021). After another attack killing nine Chinese nationals in July 2021, China demanded better [counter-terrorism coordination](#) from Pakistan and Taliban-led Afghanistan (Jamestown Foundation, 7 September 2021). This pressure increased when [three Chinese teachers were killed](#) at the Confucius Institute of the University of Karachi (BBC News, 27 April 2022). China is reportedly considering deploying its own security forces to protect Chinese nationals - a request strongly opposed and [declined](#) in polite terms by Pakistan's government (Jamestown, 14 July 2023).

Pakistan cannot afford a complete cutting of ties with the USA nor with China, since it is clear that the country cannot go it alone economically. It has sought economic assistance (i.e. credit) from various countries after the USA refused to step in once again to support its long-term ally. In the end, the government turned back to the IMF, although it has already a long history of bail-outs from the IMF ([thirteen bail-outs](#) up to 2019, Reuters, 13 May 2019) and the strict economic conditions the IMF demands are hard to sell domestically. COVID-19 derailed almost all economic activities, whichever road to recovery Pakistan may have hoped to be on. After very long negotiations, the IMF agreed to a [last minute agreement](#) providing a 3 billion USD bail-out (reportedly triggering another 3 billion USD provided by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), giving the country a fighting chance, although debt repayment seems only to be secured until April 2024 (The Diplomat, 6 July 2023).

Even before the bail-out had been negotiated, the World Bank summed up the economic and social challenges Pakistan is facing in its Pakistan overview:

- "The Government faces a difficult policy challenge in maintaining progress towards macroeconomic stabilization. The economic outlook is dependent on timely and full implementation of policy reforms, with very high downside risks. Implementing the macro-stabilization measures and structural reforms underpinned by the IMF-EFF program is necessary for unlocking much-needed external refinancing and new disbursements from regional partners. Maintaining stability and a sustained recovery will require the development, communication, and effective implementation of a bold reform strategy, including: i) adherence to a flexible market-determined exchange rate and sound fiscal-monetary policies; ii) increased domestic revenue mobilization; iii) curtailing and improving the quality of public expenditures; iv) structural reforms to improve investment, competitiveness, and productivity; and v) urgent measures to restore the financial viability of the energy sector."

However, Pakistan has more reasons than just obtaining credit for having good relations with Jeddah; another reason is that the equivalent of more than six billion USD in the form of remittances annually is sent home by migrant workers. In a rare connection of human rights and economy, the European Parliament [publicly questioned](#) the justification for Pakistan's preferential status with the bloc (so-called "GSP plus"), given its dismal handling of blasphemy accusations, explicitly naming the Christian couple who were then swiftly released in June 2021 (AP News, 1 May 2021). Although Pakistani officials were quick to stress that no international pressure had influenced this decision, this is hardly credible. While monitoring missions for the GSP plus status continue to be sent to Pakistan and thus human rights continue to play a role, the European Union reportedly proposed to extend the status for another [four years](#) (Pakistan Today, 10 July 2023).

Pakistan has a strong population growth, most recently reflected by the nation's census in 2017, which put the annual growth at 2.4% (the World Bank's estimate is 1.9% for 2022, the CIA Factbook's estimate is 1.91% for 2023). This is especially true for urban areas, illustrated by Lahore, the country's second biggest city, which grew in population by 53% within 20 years. If these rates of growth continue, the country's population could double again over the next decades. This comes with big challenges as it is the younger generation in particular that lacks any real economic perspective. While the youth unemployment rate, as listed by the UNDP, is not particularly high at 4.7%, the percentage of youth aged 15-24 neither in school or employment stands at 31%. This is especially the case for ethnic and religious minorities. Child labor is rampant, bonded labor is particularly common in the province of Sindh, although numbers are hard to establish. The NGO, Borgen Project, gives an estimated total number of [12.5 million](#), but this cannot be verified (Borgen Project, 15 May 2017). More recent in-country estimations talk about [four million](#) bonded laborers (Dawn, 8 February 2021), but to this number children would have to be added. The whole population suffers greatly from these poor conditions, but minority groups (such as Christians) even more so. Many of them are day-laborers (for example in brick kilns) with treatment from employers often being arbitrary and violent. Women and children are especially vulnerable groups.

Gender perspective

Women are typically more economically vulnerable than men in Pakistan. Due to low [education rates](#) for girls (exacerbated by girls entering early marriages, impoverished communities and pressure from Taliban groups against girls receiving education beyond a certain level) many women do not work (Borgen Project, 2019). According to Georgetown (GIWPS 2021 Pakistan profile) nearly 75% of Pakistani men think it is unacceptable for women to have a paid job. Making it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence, various inheritance laws discriminate against women. Considering these economic vulnerabilities, Christian women depend heavily on their husbands and families. Should this support be lost, they will likely fall into destitution, and converts may be forcibly married to a Muslim man. Divorcees are also economically vulnerable as there are no legal provisions for the division of matrimonial property and have very limited financial protection ([The Express Tribune](#), 20 February 2020).

Social and cultural landscape

According to UNDP HDR Pakistan and World Factbook Pakistan:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Punjabi (44.7%), Pashtun (15.4%), Sindhi (14.1%), Saraiki (8.4%), Muhajirs (7.6%), Balochi (3.6%), other (6.3%)
- **Main languages:** Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Saraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashto (alternate name, Pashtu) 8%, Urdu (official) 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, English (as the second official language)
- **Urbanization:** 38%, rate of urbanization 2.1%
- **Literacy rate:** 58% (age 15 and above)
- **Mean years of schooling:** 5.2 (3.8 for girls and 6.3 for boys).
- **Health and education indicators:** Per 10,000 people, Pakistan has 11.2 physicians and 6 hospital beds. The pupil teacher ratio in elementary school is 44:1.

According to the World Bank Pakistan data:

- **Population/age:** 36.6% of the population are below 14 years of age, 4.2% are above 65 (2021).
- **Education:** The completion rate for primary education is 73.3% (2019), as of 2018, an estimated 6 million children dropped out of school.
- **Unemployment:** 6.4%, the rate of vulnerable employment is 54.1% (modeled ILO estimate).
- **IDPs/Refugees:** In 2015, an estimated 4 million migrants were living in Pakistan. In 2017, an estimated 6 million Pakistanis worked abroad, according to the [IOM](#) (IOM, Pakistan - Migration snapshot, August 2019). According to the [ILO](#), as of December 2019 even 11 million Pakistanis have been gone abroad as migrant workers. While the number of undocumented Afghan migrants returning to their country tripled from 2021 to 2022, the total number was still around [75,000 people](#) (IOM Flow Monitoring Summary Report 2022, 8 March 2023).

According to UNDP's HDR Pakistan:

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

Although the issue of ethnicity is not as dominant in Pakistan as in many other countries in the region, it should not be ignored. This becomes immediately clear when Pakistan is seen together with Afghanistan: The Pashtun minority in particular covers large areas on both sides of the border. The decision by the Pakistani authorities to [fence off](#) the more than 2,500 kilometer long border with Afghanistan has strongly affected Pashtuns on both sides of the border, as family ties and trading patterns from both sides have been cut off (Gandhara, 17 May 2021). The governments of Pakistan and Iran have announced that they intend to force the [repatriation of millions](#) of Afghan refugees, regardless of whether they have been officially registered or not (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 29 September 2023). In a first step, this would affect 1.7 million people. The announcement alone, but also the implementation of the policy shows that Pakistan's government has become less enthusiastic about the Taliban ruling neighboring Afghanistan than initially.

The Pashtuns are one of the largest minorities worldwide without a nation state of their own. (It is frequently stated that the Kurdish people - numbering under 40 million - are the largest people without a nation. Pashtuns however number around 45 million.) Their strong reaction to the Indian decision to strip the Indian state Jammu and Kashmir of its statehood indicates that ethnic and religious motives are always part of such political decisions. Another minority coming to the limelight are the country's Balochs. An independency movement has grown in strength and the April 2022 attack against the Chinese teachers was reportedly carried out by a Baloch [insurgency group](#) (Jamestown Foundation, 1 July 2022). The killing of a Christian sanitary worker in April 2023 (see: Specific examples of violations) was allegedly carried out by the Baloch Liberation Army, however, so far the group does not have a history of targeting minorities.

According to a report by [UNICEF](#), Pakistan still has the second-highest out-of-school rate in the world, with 22.8 million aged 5-16 not attending school, representing a staggering 44% of all children in this age group (UNICEF, undated, accessed 12 July 2023). At primary level, five million children are out of school, 60% of whom are girls. Disparities are based on gender, socio-economic status and geography, as can be seen for example in Balochistan, where 78% of all girls do not attend school. It should be noted that efforts to improve the poverty situation in Pakistan did not include minorities such as Christians, a prime example of this is the [Poverty Alleviation Fund](#) set up by the World Bank (UCA News, 28 October 2022). In World Bank's Pakistan overview, it is stated:

- "Pakistan is experiencing severe economic challenges reflecting long-standing structural weaknesses. Pakistan made significant progress towards reducing poverty between 2001 and 2018 when the expansion of off-farm economic opportunities and increased inflow of remittances allowed over 47 million Pakistanis to rise out of poverty. However, this rapid poverty reduction has not fully translated into improved socio-economic conditions, as human capital outcomes have remained poor and stagnant, with high levels of stunting at 38 percent and learning poverty at 75 percent."

The nation's low investment in education over recent decades has led to a growth in the number of Islamic madrassas. An estimated 11,000 of these (out of a total of roughly 35,000) follow the strict teachings of Deobandi Islam. Exact student numbers are unknown. While some madrassas may make pupils literate and teach them mathematics, many others simply offer Quran reading,

Islamic Studies and nothing else. As these madrassas are not registered and supervised, the authorities have no real idea what is going on in them. Various governments have tried to at least register them in the past but encountered fierce opposition. The Khan government was [Islamizing state schools](#) by introducing changes in the curriculum according to which all students were required to read the entire Quran with translation, learn Islamic prayers and hadith. It further stipulated that every school has to employ a Hafiz (a person who has memorized the Quran) and a Qari (a Quran reciter) to teach these subjects (DW, 24 May 2021). This is also a way to open a career path for graduates from madrassas and pour their ideology into mainstream schooling.

Reflecting on the widening gap between rich and poor in Pakistan, one [observer](#) stated: "Such is the disparity that at a time when Aida Girma-Melaku, Unicef's representative, reported that Pakistan confronts a triple burden of malnutrition affecting young children, adolescents, and pregnant and lactating women, with 40 per cent of children under the age of five being stunted, Pakistan spent \$1.2 billion on imports of luxury cars and electric vehicles for its rich and powerful in the last half of 2022." (South Asia Monitor, 13 June 2023).

Beginning in June 2022, Pakistan experienced [unusual strong monsoon weather](#), which saw precipitation 67% above normal levels for June. As of September 2022, 72 districts across Pakistan were declared "calamity hit". More than 1700 people were killed and more than 2.1 million people were temporarily or permanently displaced. Rescue and rebuilding efforts took place with international support (UN, 2 September 2022).

Gender perspective

Pakistan is heavily influenced by the Islamic religious landscape and is particularly discriminatory towards for women and girls of minority religions ([HRWF, 12 March 2023](#)). Christian women are at risk of kidnappings, forced conversions, and forced marriages ([ACN, 17 March 2023](#)). Within marriages, women reportedly experience high rates of domestic violence (exacerbated by the economic strain caused by the COVID-19 crisis) ([Deutsche Welle, 7 July 2020](#)). Few women choose to file for divorce due to the high levels of social stigma attached.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023 Pakistan):

- **Internet usage:** 50.9% penetration – survey date: July 2022
- **Facebook usage:** 25.1% penetration – survey date: July 2022

According to [Napoleon Cat \(June 2023\)](#), 77% of Facebook users are male and just 23% are female. This reflects women's restricted access to information and community networks.

According to the World Bank profile:

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 82 per 100 people

According to a 2023 Gender Gap [report](#), 52% of Pakistani women are mobile phone owners compared to 81% of men (GSMA, 2023, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2023" p.17).

According to Freedom on the Net 2023 Pakistan:

- Pakistan is designated "Not free".
- "Internet freedom remained constricted during the coverage period as the Pakistani government imposed digital controls amid an escalating confrontation between former prime minister Imran Khan and the powerful military establishment. Authorities routinely use internet shutdowns, platform blocking, and arrests and harsh convictions to suppress unwanted online speech, both under the former *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf* (PTI)-led government and under the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), the coalition that immediately succeeded it in office. Online activists, dissidents, and journalists are often subjected to harassment by supporters of the PDM coalition and the PTI, including some cases of physical assault and enforced disappearances."
- "Internet penetration in Pakistan has increased at a steady rate. As of April 2023, internet penetration stood at 53.8 percent, compared to 53.1 percent in May 2022, according to data from the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA). Mobile internet penetration rates stood at 52.47 percent as of April 2023, compared to 51.73 percent in the previous coverage period."
- "Low literacy, difficult economic conditions, and conservative cultural norms have also created inequalities in how Pakistanis access the internet. The digital divide between men and women in Pakistan is among the highest in the world; religious, social, and cultural norms discourage women from owning devices. According to the GSMA, women were 33 percent less likely than men to own a mobile device and 38 percent less likely to use the internet as of June 2022. The PTA reports that out of 114.4 million mobile internet subscribers, only 26.4 million are women. A 2021 report by Media Matters for Democracy found that six of every 10 Pakistani women are likely to have their internet usage restricted, monitored, or controlled by family members. Women who are active online report high levels of harassment that discourage greater use of ICTs."

The World Internet Stats' estimate of 50.9% means that well over 100 million people do not have Internet access. Pakistan announced the implementation of a very [strict Internet law](#), according to which the government's Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) would have the power to shutdown an entire online system, leading observers to call the plan "draconian" (Reuters, 19 November 2020). Google, Facebook and Twitter [threatened to leave](#) Pakistan if this law is strictly implemented (Associated Press, 20 November 2020). The authorities reacted by announcing that the legislation would be [reviewed](#) (Al-Jazeera, 26 January 2021). However, as of 2023, no changes could be observed and the aforementioned companies were still operating in Pakistan, complying with government demands of censorship to varying degrees.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony claimed that 400,000 social media accounts in Pakistan [spread blasphemy](#) (Bitter Winter, 18 July 2023), illustrating the importance the topic has in politics and society. In a strong reminder that pressure and censorship are daily challenges in the offline world as well, one of the most prominent TV presenters, Hamid Mir, was [banned from TV](#) in 2021 after he gave a speech criticizing the army (Gandhara, 31 May 2021). After he and his family received death threats he apologized, and was allowed to [return](#) to the screen in March 2022 (The Friday Times, 8 March 2022).

Security situation

The Security situation in Pakistan climbed to new levels of volatility in the WWL 2024 reporting period due, to a large degree, to the Taliban being in power in neighboring Afghanistan. The number of suicide attacks in Pakistan since the Kabul take-over [surged](#); these attacks were not just carried out by violent Islamic groups such as TTP and Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) (Jamestown Foundation, 6 May 2022). It was an attack on 30 January 2023 which shocked the country and the security establishment alike: A suicide bomber, wearing a police uniform, entered a mosque in a police compound in Peshawar and [killed more than 100 people](#) (Reuters, 2 February 2023). Attacks against the [police](#) in urban areas seem to become more frequent (Jamestown Foundation, 14 April 2023). Although the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) officially denied responsibility, it is believed that a faction of the TTP called *Jamat-ul-Ahrar* was behind the attack. (This group is probably best known for the bomb-blast at All Saint's church in Peshawar in September 2013, which killed at least 127 Christians.) As already mentioned above, although the army and the government have declared war against some Islamic radicals, they continue to follow a policy of trying to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' jihadists. While it fights the latter, it works with the former (eg. *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, now *Jamaat-ud-Dawah*, and the Haqqani network, which is prominently represented with several members in the new Afghan Taliban government) and uses them as a proxy to reach its goals in neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and India.

Pakistan is having to cope with a [delicate balancing act](#) (International Crisis Group - ICG, 4 February 2022): Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban in Afghanistan may have become less smooth than it appeared at first sight and the Pakistan government and army have found themselves challenged by emboldened Islamic insurgents since 2022. This is also true for the TTP, which has become stronger and has added what one observer called "[strategic depth](#)" (CTC Sentinel, May 2023). It remains to be seen if authorities will now be willing and able to become active [taking on the threat](#), realizing that the TTP can neither be controlled nor co-opted (USIP, 14 February 2023). This in turn may lead to vulnerable religious minorities becoming easy targets. One way of influencing Afghanistan is to send back hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees, who have lived in Pakistan for more than two decades, knowingly causing immense social and economic challenges for an already struggling country. On the other hand, tens and maybe hundreds of thousands are currently trying to leave Afghanistan and are looking to neighboring Pakistan as a possibility for doing so.

Afghanistan holds other major challenges for Pakistan as well: The [assassination](#) of a high-ranking TTP member in the Afghan province of Nangarhar on 9 January 2022 suddenly made the Pakistan Taliban unsure whether they can rely on having a safe haven in Afghanistan (Jamestown Foundation, 28 January 2022). No-one claimed responsibility for the targeted killing. Another [assassination](#) of three high-ranking TTP members took place in August 2022 (Gandhara, 7 August 2022). Even before the January 2023 attack, in April 2021, the TTP was able to stage a [major attack](#) against a heavily secured luxury hotel in Quetta (Long War Journal, 22 April 2021), showing their strength, regardless of whether the Chinese ambassador was the actual target or not. The Afghan Taliban also [complained](#) that Pakistan had allowed the USA to use its airspace for drone strikes against targets in Afghanistan, showing growing discontent within the movement towards the government (Gandhara, 30 September 2022).

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

It is not only the TTP staging high-profile attacks against Chinese nationals (as in the 2021 bus attack which killed nine Chinese). On 26 April 2022, a female suicide bomber and student at Karachi University, [killed three](#) Chinese language teachers and their driver working for the university's Confucius Institute. The ethnically motivated separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the attack (BBC News, 27 April 2022). Baloch militant attacks are increasing and have reached the [highest level](#) since 2018 (Jamestown Foundation, 23 September 2022). Another attack in April 2023 killed a Christian sanitation worker whom the BLA accused of being a government spy. The way TTP called on the "disillusioned people" of Balochistan to launch an [anti-state jihad war](#) shows that the terrorist threat is growing and terror groups may consolidate their forces (Jamestown, 21 August 2023).

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

Christians in Pakistan suffer from the volatile security situation and the high level of violence as does society in general. However, as a religious minority, they do not have the necessary channels for seeking protection: They have no connections to politicians, strongmen or other influential people with the power to give protection and relief. Additionally, Christians and other religious minorities not only face social hostility, but also a security apparatus, especially the police force, which is more interested in appeasing local strongmen and keeping things calm than in implementing the law and protecting minorities. Courts - at least the higher ones - have a slightly better track-record in this respect. However, when they are finally in a position to judge a case, Christians have often languished in prison for years before any ruling is made and it is then often too late to bring change to a situation.

Gender perspective

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

As noted in a report by [CREID \(2020, p.55\)](#) ideologically targeted sexual abuse is directed specifically at religious minorities, both for sexual predation but also as a ‘conquest’ to win the girl over to the majority religion. There have been several reports of cases where the court ruled that the victim should live with her abductor, on the basis that she had ‘willingly’ converted to Islam ([CLAAS, June 2021; Church in Chains, March 2022](#)). These cases exemplify the impunity granted perpetrators and why many families consider it pointless to take legal action. Pakistan’s Commission on Implementation of Minority Rights has set out a plan to deal with the concerning rate of forced marriages and conversions ([David Alton, 10 March 2021](#)). Linked to this issue, the trafficking of Christian girls (usually into China) also remains an ongoing concern ([Brookings Institution, March 2022](#)).

Trends analysis

1) The government is facing enormous challenges

With the bail-out agreement with the IMF, the government of Shehbaz Sharif received a short pause for breath as Pakistan continues to face the immediate challenge of a contracting and struggling economy. The Sharif government will be held responsible for all the hardships citizens are facing (caused in part by the conditions of the IMF bail-out conditions). As already mentioned under "Economic landscape", experts say that this relief may end as soon as April 2024, if debts cannot be paid back. With the still developing challenge of ex-PM Imran Khan bringing even more volatility to the political situation and elections due in February 2024, Pakistan will not see a quick end to the multiple problems the country is experiencing. Imran Khan is facing a host of charges, at least three of them related to ‘terrorism’. In all political developments, the [army and judiciary](#) are the two entities that have to be watched closely (USIP, 11 May 2023). Khan accused a high-ranking member of the armed forces of conspiring against him. It is hard to see how elections in 2024 could be free and fair under such circumstances. This political crisis has been building up over several years, but it comes at a time where the country is in serious economic trouble and the livelihoods of many in society are severely affected.

2) Dealing with Islamic radicals - at home and abroad

While successive governments have actively opposed some radical and violent groups, they have also tried to co-opt others and use them for (foreign) political means. Such groups are innumerable and even a ban will only make them re-organize, re-brand and re-emerge. The default option for dealing with radical Islamic movements (who are able to mobilize millions for street demonstrations) is appeasement and even accommodation, as could be seen by the introduction of the new "Singular National Curriculum" in 2021. The Pakistani Taliban (TTP)

gained new strength after the Taliban take-over in neighboring Afghanistan. If the Taliban in Afghanistan tacitly support (or at least do not hinder) TTP growth, the army's long-standing policy of trying to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' Taliban groups in Pakistan may have run its course. One observer summed up the situation aptly: "[Pakistan reaps what it sowed](#)" (Foreign Affairs, 23 May 2022). The increasing number and sophistication of attacks against army and police installations are testing the [strategic alliance](#) between the Pakistani state, armed forces and the Taliban: "Pakistani leaders ... welcomed the Afghan Taliban takeover in 2021, apparently believing that a friendly regime in Kabul would promote Pakistan's security interests." That has now been proven wrong (Crisis Group, 29 March 2023). Continued attacks against Chinese interests may also bring Pakistan's good relationship with China under additional strain, although it seems that authorities gave way to Chinese pressure for additional and better protection for Chinese citizens and interests. A failure to hedge in Islamic radical groups also spells danger for vulnerable marginalized groups such as Christians.

3) The Christian minority is particularly vulnerable

Pakistan faces what one observer called the "[convergence](#) of a collapsing economy and surging terrorism" (Foreign Affairs, 28 February 2023). While the economic situation may witness a short respite due to the IMF bail-out agreement, the austerity measures tied to it will be difficult to bear and may embolden radical and violent Islamic groups. At the same time, they may lead to election results strengthening extremist views as well. As the TTP is emboldened and has been carrying out more frequent and larger attacks over the WWL 2024 reporting period, it would need to be opposed by a united political and military response. As this seems currently out of the question, Pakistan risks – as another observer wrote – 'descending into [total anarchy](#)' (The Diplomat, 16 May 2023).

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

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

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

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- Security situation: CLAAS, June 2021; - <https://www.claas.org.uk/2021/06/03/pakistani-court-send-minor-christian-girl-with-her-abductor/>

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- Security situation: Brookings Institution - https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FP_20220317_bride_trafficking_afzal.pdf
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- Trends analysis: convergence - <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/pakistan/pakistans-twin-crises>
- Trends analysis: total anarchy - <https://thediplomat.com/2023/05/pakistan-in-the-eye-of-the-political-storm/>
- Trends analysis: summarizes - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/2022%20Pakistan%20Country%20Update.pdf>

WWL 2024: Church information / Pakistan

Christian origins

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

Church spectrum today

Pakistan: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	0	0.0
Catholic	1,125,000	26.8
Protestant	2,541,000	60.6
Independent	657,000	15.7
Unaffiliated	21,400	0.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-150,000	-3.6
Total <i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>	4,194,400	100.0

Pakistan: Church movements	Christians	%
Evangelical movement	1,059,000	25.2
Renewalist movement	930,000	22.2

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

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

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

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

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

Christian communities and how they are affected

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

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

Converts to Christianity: As one country expert put it: "The rejection of Islam is a crime punishable by death." Christians with a Muslim background suffer the brunt of religious freedom violations both from radical Islamic groups (who see them as apostates) and from families,

friends and neighbors who see conversion as a shameful act of betrayal to family and community. There is also a small community of converts from a Hindu background.

Non-traditional Christian communities: Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal groups have come under closer scrutiny and are frequently harassed and attacked, especially when they are active in outreach among Muslims, although most of their growth comes from Christians transferring from the historical churches. They have fewer resources at their disposal than historical churches.

External Links - Church information

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

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Pakistan

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Pakistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	87	7
WWL 2023	86	7
WWL 2022	87	8
WWL 2021	88	5
WWL 2020	88	5

The very high and extremely high scores for pressure in the individual spheres of life virtually stayed unchanged. This confirms the fact that Pakistan continues to be one of the countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian. The violence score has stayed at the maximum level for many years now. The widely publicized attacks against the Christian community in Jaranwala in August 2023 illustrate that violence against Christians is ever present, although not always as focused and easily visible as in this case. Pakistan has continued to score the maximum for killings and for attacks against church buildings. The country’s notorious blasphemy laws, which have been expanded in scope and punishment in the WWL 2024 reporting period, have continued to be like a Sword of Damocles hanging over the heads of Christians. Christian girls continued to be abducted and forcefully converted and married on a frequent basis.

Persecution engines

Pakistan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Weak
Clan oppression	CO	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Strong

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

Islamic oppression (Very strong), blended with Ethno-religious hostility (Strong)

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

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

While life expectancy is not very high at 67.3 years, the total fertility rate stands at 3.5. Although these figures are decreasing very slowly, they illustrate huge social challenges. If the fertility rate

remains at this level, Pakistan will become the largest Muslim country in the world, overtaking Indonesia, in around 2030. This social structure means that there are huge numbers of young people leaving school, dreaming of a better future. But as the country struggles to give even well-educated youth any hope for good employment, social unrest is likely to build up which in turn paves the way for Islamic militants to lure young people into their groups, where they are given a feeling of worth that they have never had before. Radical Islamic groups and parties woo the general populace with social services and the youth with the offer of good future perspectives (which are otherwise badly lacking in the country). The majority of the population are below 25 years old (and 37% even below 14 years of age) and so there is a great need for the state to be able to provide genuine future prospects for this younger generation. Religious sentiments and resulting mob violence are easily stirred up and are targeted against religious minorities, especially Christians, as the August 2023 example of Jaranwala shows.

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

Dictatorial paranoia (Very strong)

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

Imran Khan (Chairman of the PTI party and not linked to any of the big families) had filed a case against Prime Minister Sharif because of the leaked Panama Papers pointing to irregularities in the prime minister's personal financial affairs. Imran Khan then became prime minister in August 2018 until April 2022; he has a track record of neglecting and ignoring the plight of (religious) minorities and of wooing certain radical groups and even though he is currently imprisoned and banned from any elected office, this does not mean he is no longer a significant factor in politics. Another important driver behind this engine is the army, which will go to great lengths to protect its steering power over politics as well as their economic influence. They, too, have become more Islamic over the years, although it is not clear how much of this is a calculated strategy. As elections are approaching, scheduled for February 2024, the government and political parties are trying to win over voters and stay in or even extend power by all means necessary. In any case, Christians as a minority in Pakistan cannot expect any protection; on the contrary, if it matches political goals, neglecting and even attacking them will be justified and occur with im-

punity.

Organized corruption and crime (Strong)

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

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

A country expert explained: "There is a triangle of persecution that is exacerbated by the addition of Criminal gangs and corruption. Government (civil service including police), the local mullah (religious leader of the local mosque) and criminal gangs work together to oppress and abuse the Christian minority. Beatings are sometimes authorized and supported by the Mullah, using local criminal gangs, and the police refuses to protect the community as they are in tacit agreement or they are too afraid to say anything. This is especially true with regards to the land mafia - the criminal gangs with the support of the local police and land offices in the government steal the land with the support of the mullah who gets a percentage of the land sale."

Drivers of persecution

Pakistan: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			STRONG				VERY STRONG	STRONG
Government officials	Very strong			Strong				Strong	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium			Medium					
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong			Strong				Medium	Medium
Violent religious groups	Very strong			Strong				Medium	Very weak
Ideological pressure groups	Very strong			Strong					

Pakistan: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG			STRONG				VERY STRONG	STRONG
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Very strong			Strong					Medium
One's own (extended) family	Very strong			Medium					
Political parties	Very strong			Strong				Strong	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Very strong			Strong				Medium	Strong
Organized crime cartels or networks and embassies	Weak			Very weak				Very weak	Medium

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

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

- Government officials (Very strong):** In Pakistan the situation of law and order from local to national level is poor, especially where Christians are concerned. Empty and false promises are often made and Christians feel particularly vulnerable. In 2019, the Supreme Court's acquittal of Asia Bibi despite pressure from radical Islamic groups had been seen as a ray of hope. Unfortunately, the number of blasphemy cases has not decreased since then. (Lower) courts also frequently allow forced conversions and marriages of minor girls. All parliamentary efforts to protect religious minorities from forced conversions have failed.
- Non-Christian religious leaders, violent religious groups and revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Very strong):** In Pakistan, several radical Islamic groups under various and at times changing names are gaining influence through being courted by political parties, the army and the government. Some are even forming their own political parties, although with limited success thus far. The army continues to follow a policy of distinguishing between 'good' Taliban and 'bad' Taliban, which is copied by the government, although there is considerable frustration with the Taliban ruling in Kabul. All radical Islamic groups received a boost of confidence when the Taliban took over full control of Afghanistan. As long as the policy of distinguishing does not change, radical Islamic groups will increase in influence, not least by running thousands of madrassas (with no state authority knowing exactly how many there are, what they are teaching or how they are financed). The new 'Single National Curriculum' is expanding the influence of religious leaders and pressure groups (see above: *Social and cultural landscape*). Likewise, some religious leaders are helping men to kidnap, rape and forcibly convert young girls below the age of consent by providing 'marriage certificates'. Increasingly, new quasi-government 'advisory bodies' to the state are completely made up of religious (Islamic) scholars who can direct and influence the government and laws.

- **Political parties and ideological pressure groups (Very strong):** Ideological pressure groups, frequently connected with political parties and Islamic religious groups, exercise enormous pressure and continue to gain influence. There are many pressure groups organized and developed to support and protect the honor of Islam. They see themselves as 'defenders of the faith' (which is also claimed by many political parties) and in doing so are willing to unleash all their energy to silence any group that they see as a threat. This includes the Church, secular forces and any person or organization seeking to change society or bring in better protection for minorities. One country expert summed it up as follows: "All political parties work in partnership with extremist organizations. There is tacit support for their activities in areas of Islamization and economic oppression. This is due to the large voting block they represent at the general elections. There are entire political parties that feed off the political power of these organizations and espouse their beliefs in order to attract them to their party."
- **Extended family (Very strong):** Christians with a Muslim background are facing all the hostile forces mentioned above, but for them, their own families are the greatest danger, since leaving Islam brings great shame to both family and community. Sometimes, even fleeing abroad does not keep the converts safe.
- **Normal citizens (Very strong):** Radical Islamic groups are able to mobilize citizens all across the country, especially the youth, encouraging them to demonstrate against government decisions and stirring them up to act in hate and anger against religious minorities, including Christians. Moderate voices are increasingly being drowned out.
- **Ethnic leaders (Medium):** Persecution, discrimination and intolerance is normally related to religious identity but ethnicity can play a role as well. Even though most Christians and Muslims in Pakistan come from the same ethnicities, many Islamic ethnic leaders and their supporters regard Christians as being 'impure' and 'alien'. This can be seen as a heritage of colonial times with its underlying caste system.

Drivers of Organized corruption and crime

- **Government officials (Very strong):** As a small and weak group in society, Christians face double vulnerability when it comes to *Organized corruption and crime*. Thousands of Christians are still living in conditions of bonded labor without having any perspective that this could ever end. Many Christians are prone to exploitation as they are poor and bonded labor is a fate that is a reality for many of them, bringing their masters great profit. Rich landlords collude with politicians and local dignitaries (both from religious and political circles), benefitting greatly from this system. A second way government officials can be a driver of this engine is by assisting and rubber-stamping land-grabbing.
- **Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Very strong):** Organized crime is frequently connected to violent Islamic militancy and impacts the electoral and political process in Pakistan and affects the life of Christians. The Haqqani Network, ISKP, *Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan*, *Jamaatul Ahrar* (TTP-JA), *Lashkar E Jhangvi*, *Lashkar-e-Taiba* (LeT), *Jaish-e-Mohammed* (JeM), al-Qaeda (among others) can be named in this context. All of these groups were impressed by the swift take-over of government by the Taliban in Afghanistan and at least some may be receiving (tacit) support from groups in the neighboring country. Local organized crime is a big problem in urban parts of Pakistan and in the tribal areas. In

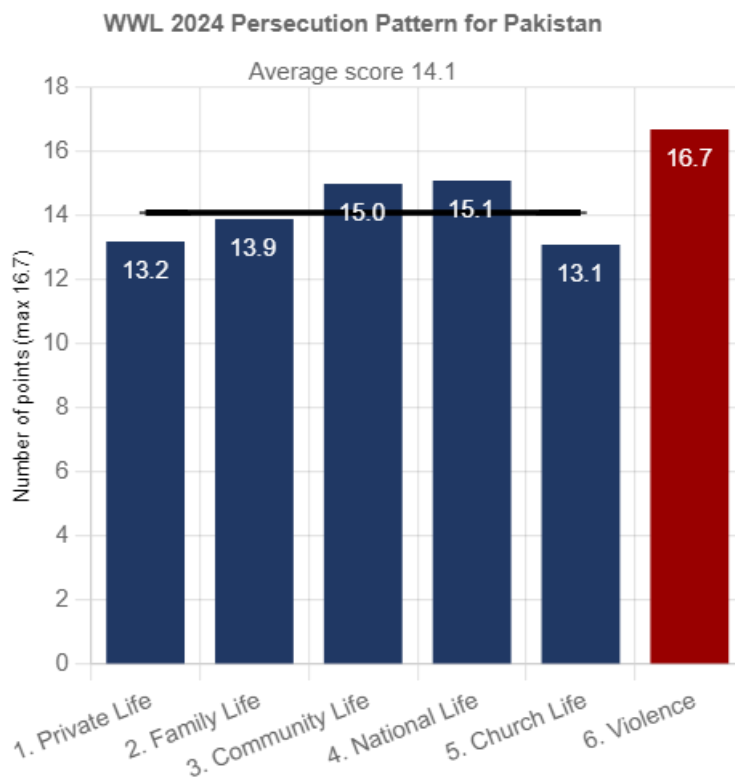
Karachi, gangs, extortionists and mafia groups are all part of the landscape. These organizations also have political connections and therefore political patronage. Massive corruption, especially in terms of patron-client relationship, is also rampant in Pakistan and permeates almost every segment of society including the police, courts and politicians.

- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):** Pakistan has a long history of corruption; it is partly driven by the army but has multiple other drivers. Churches are not only attacked and squeezed for political gain, but also out of financial motives. Especially the historical churches often own property in strategic areas like city centers, making them prone to attacks from developers using criminal gangs. Additionally, the continued destruction of church property means that churches are forced to sell property to cover damage expenses. Another way crime cartels act as drivers is in human trafficking, e.g. Christian girls and young women being taken to China.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders, political parties, normal citizens (Medium):** As described above, Pakistan suffers from a closely-knit web of corruption, in which its benefactors help one another, while the weakest pay the price. The weakest are normal citizens, including Christians in particular due to their extra vulnerability.

Drivers of Dictatorial paranoia

- **Government officials and political parties (Strong):** As already stated above, for many years politics in Pakistan has been family business, a trend which was only recently broken and is again back on track. However, whoever is in power in Pakistan tends to cling to it and will do whatever is needed to gain enough support. One strong driver in this is a political player which seldom operates openly: The army. The way the army courts some radical Islamic groups to use them as a tool leads to Christians being targeted by such groups as well. Although the targeting of Christians is not army policy, it is considered as necessary collateral damage.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders, violent religious groups and revolutionaries or paramilitary groups (Medium):** Insofar as religious leaders and groups are courted by the government, political parties and the army, they will support them in their struggle to stay in power. If they consider it necessary to act against the Christian minority - or simply continue to discriminate against them - they will do so. Christians quickly become scapegoats or are simply used as a bargaining chip in the political system.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 Persecution pattern for Pakistan shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Pakistan is at an extreme level with the average pressure reaching 14.1 points in WWL 2024 (0.1 points more than in WWL 2023).
- Pressure increased slightly over all spheres of life, reflecting among other things how Christians continue to suffer from the country's blasphemy laws and from the increasing control of churches and meetings. Pressure is at an extreme level in the *Community* and *Family spheres*. Converts are facing the strongest pressure but Christians in general are regarded as second-class citizens and as 'impure'. They face attacks and have their rights ignored on a regular basis. The blasphemy laws and the Islamist groups 'defending' them remain a major threat to all Christians.
- Violence against Christians continues to be at the maximum level of 16.7 points as has been the case consistently since WWL 2016. Although there have been no major bomb attacks against Christians since 2017, the mob attacks of August 2023 in Jaranwala, the continuing abduction of women and girls, rape, forced marriages, evictions from homes and displacements in-country and abroad have to be mentioned here.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

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

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

It is dangerous when the written content is seen as opposing or challenging the established teachings and values of Islam. All personal statements - for instance on Facebook - can also be used (and tampered with) in cases concerning the blasphemy law. The authorities are watching the Internet and social media closely, especially for blasphemous content (see above: *Technological landscape*), so do religious institutions and radical Islamic groups. Because of the fear of misinterpretation and attacks, whether virtual or physical, many Christians avoid expressing their faith by exercising self-censorship. Consequently, one country expert said: "All Pakistani Christians must be very careful what they share and speak about on social media. The main threat here is not the government per se but the general population."

Block 1.3: It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials. (3.25 points)

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

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)

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

spat at and targeted aggressively in the streets, in traffic or at the workplace, are indicators that the situation is becoming more difficult. In the small Christian majority areas, displaying Christian symbols is possible and comes with less risks.

Block 1: Additional information

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

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (4.00 points)

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

A [hafiz quran](#) is given 20 extra points for admission to the next academic level. This rule is currently under scrutiny by the Supreme Court (UCA News, 11 January 2022), but there are no updates on the case yet.

Christian girls (and to a lesser extent boys) are also frequent targets of physical and sexual abuse, as are children from the Hindu minority.

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

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

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

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

A country expert added: "The system of teaching is based on the new curriculum that was enacted during the previous government, many of the books and teaching materials insult Christians and associate them with people without honor or dignity. Recognizing this bias the federal government has tried to produce books which are for minority students and share the values of minority faiths in Pakistan. However, these will only be provided to minority students who study in schools run by the federal government not the provincial govt. schools, or non-Christians."

Block 2.5: Burials of Christians have been hindered or coercively performed with non-Christian rites. (3.25 points)

A country expert explained: "A rising level of concern for the Christian population is the increasing pressure on Christian access to graveyards. Just as the building of new churches is frowned upon, the lack of space for the burial of Christians continues to be a problem. Many graveyards from colonial times remain, but those from the poor class of Christians have a harder time to access space in these graveyards because of the land grabbing that takes place. Christian graveyards are not just in disrepair due to poor maintenance but they also frequently lack security means, so they can be taken over or sold. This hinders Christians from burying family members on land that belongs officially to the church or the community. Many of the dead are being buried in old graves. The approval for Christian graveyards in the cities are slow, and sometimes there are several people buried in the same grave. Or in the space between graves."

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

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

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

Block 2: Additional information

Registering one's conversion to the Christian faith is not possible. A child will be automatically registered as "Muslim" if his or her father was registered as "Muslim", no matter if in reality the religious affiliation has changed. Once converts are discovered, they face the threat of divorce (if married) and are likely to lose their inheritance rights. The US State Department explains on page 9 of IRFR 2022 Pakistan: "Some court judgments have considered the marriage of a non-Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man dissolved if she converts to Islam, although the marriage of a non-Muslim man who converts remains recognized." A country expert points to another problem on registration: "Due to the greater process of digitalization of the records system, those who are digitally literate are now able to access their data online through an app. This leaves over 90% of Christians ignorant of their status as they're not digitally literate or informed."

Organizing a Christian wedding or funeral can be difficult or even impossible in some communities. Christians with a Muslim background face either being physically attacked and discriminated against by the surrounding Islamic community and their own family, or they may be placed under a curse through black magic, potions, amulets and other occult practices. From the moment a convert from Islam decides to be baptized, he or she is put under particular pressure since baptism is seen as the ultimate form of rejecting Islam and thus committing apostasy. Even if a Pakistani of Christian background gets baptized, gunshots from the surrounding roofs and aggressive shouting against Christians are likely to be heard, even though it is not a crime for a Pakistani of Christian background to be baptized. Baptism is simply hated as it is a visible sign of the Christian presence growing.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

As a country expert stated: "Local communities always monitor Christians which includes reporting to police in some cases and shadowing. Normally this is been done by people who are involved in Muslim organizations and radical groups. Listening to phone calls and access to emails can only be done by the security agencies of the country and happens in specific situation and cases." Another country expert elaborates on this state-driven monitoring: "Being watched is a way of life for all people. Christians in particular are more vulnerable to the continuous monitoring of activity. Due to the Chinese provision of anti-terrorist facial and vehicle recognition software - most urban centers have cameras constantly recording your movements. The mobile phone numbers are all linked to your ID card which registers the IMEI number of the phone with the government databases. All calls, even by WhatsApp, are monitored, and tracked."

Your phone can also have malware installed to switch on cameras and audio remotely. This has all meant greater surveillance of the Christian community." For converts, the family is the strongest source of control.

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

As the long list of cases provided above under *Specific examples of violations* shows, abduction and forced marriage are not just a threat, but a very sad reality across Pakistan. Christian (and Hindu) parents are getting increasingly fearful to let their daughters walk outside alone. Compared to previous years, this threat continued to worsen in the WWL 2024 reporting period, not least because perpetrators are increasingly being supported by religious leaders and enjoy de facto impunity for their actions. One country expert explained: "Abduction and sexual violence of religious minorities is endemic in Pakistan. The Movement for Solidarity and Peace calculates that every year up to 1,000 young Christian and Hindu girls and young women aged between 12 and 25 are abducted by Muslim men. Christian girls make up 70 percent of these cases. Other research suggests that the same number applies to one province alone, namely Sindh. These figures are seen as a low estimate as fear of retaliation and risk of social shame means that Christian families are reluctant to report incidents of this kind. Nor is the problem related only to women and girls."

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

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

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

A country expert described the general attitude towards Christians when doing business as follows: "Christians are discriminated against as any money paid to Christians is seen as money not given to the 'Umma'. Therefore the financial/business success of Christians continues to remain elusive and the Christian community alone is too small to sustain businesses." In 2022, another expert provided a drastic example for this mindset: "Government contracts are never been given to Christians. Christians are also totally excluded from food businesses as Muslims will not buy meat sold by Christians. In my locality one Christian man started a Chicken Meat Shop, Muslims asked to stop the shop immediately because the meat sold by Christians is "haram" (unclean to eat) for them. When he refused they attacked and killed him."

Block 3: Additional information

Many hospitals, pharmacies and other facilities have welfare schemes, which are being increasingly denied to Christians. Christians are also often told to pay exorbitant fees for health

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

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

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

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

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

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

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

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

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

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

The US State Department stated on page 30 of IRFR 2022 Pakistan: "The Commission continued to function without legislative authority and without power to resolve problems." In what could have been a positive item of news, its tasks and influence remain unclear and one of its arguably most important fields of work - helping to keep girls from religious minorities safe from abduction and forced conversion/marriage - is reportedly seen by several politicians as being unnecessary.

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

The recent process of Islamization started in the 1980s, when General Zia introduced the infamous laws on blasphemy in 1986. Blasphemy soon became one of the main issues the Christian minority had to face. According to a press report from 2010 (more recent data is not available), 801 of the 1,031 people imprisoned under blasphemy laws were Muslims (the vast majority of cases most likely affecting Islamic minorities). Of the remaining 230 prisoners, 162 were Christians (70.4%), 15 were Sikh (6.5%), 28 were Buddhist (12.2%), while 25 adhered to other religions.

The [blasphemy laws](#) are well known for being used for settling personal scores, making personal gains or for satisfying grudges one neighbor may have against another (USCIRF, Pakistan Country Update, 5 August 2022). According to a more recent statistic quoted by a country expert, out of the 1,550 people accused of blasphemy since 1986, 238 involved Christians (15%), even though

Christians are less than 2% of the population. The widening of the scope of blasphemy laws and the increase in penalties on conviction show the level of importance politics and society give this topic.

Block 4: Additional information

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

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

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

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As a country researcher states: "All NGOs have to report to the government on all activities - any money coming from outside the country will now be approved prior to the arrival of the money from a governmental intelligence department. There is no direct funding of NGOs; any donations or support from international organizations are especially scrutinized. And NGOs working with the Christian community are being closed down. Reports on compliance, staff, data gathering or any reports produced by the organization must be first approved by the government; and can never be shared internationally. These rules are new and they are being enforced by freezing bank accounts, forcing NGOs and churches into a narrow and repetitive process of compliance involving over 16 different security agencies." He adds: "Many historical churches' accounts and registrations, which have been in effect for over 150 years, are forced to re-apply to the government to register as a Trust in order to free up their frozen accounts. Many church organizations have had to re-apply, and many church hospitals have had to close down as the compliance obligations involved too high a price."

Block 5: Additional information

Advocacy for the oppressed minorities is highly dangerous as it challenges the government's narrative of providing safety and justice for everyone. It also challenges openly the overt injustice, corruption and attacks on vulnerable Christians which are carried out with impunity. Such advocacy not only irritates the government, it also angers many drivers of persecution, discrimination and intolerance in society as mentioned above. Many Christian human rights organizations and activists have been silenced, others had to flee the country and some simply disappeared. One example from the previous reporting period (WWL 2023) was the [action](#) the Interior Ministry took against the Catholic "Center for Social Justice" because of "anti-state activities". The Center had sent reports to the UN on topics such as forced conversions or the blasphemy laws (UCA News, 24 August 2022).

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

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

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

Violence

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

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

- Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.
- In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.
- If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.
- In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.

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

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

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

Pakistan: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	14	12
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	40	10
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	100 *	26
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	100 *	25
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	100 *	10 *
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	100 *	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10000 *	14
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	12
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	10
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	50
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	250

The score for violence against Christians in Pakistan has been the maximum possible since WWL 2016. This may be surprising as there were no bomb attacks against churches since 2017, but every reporting period since then, more than the number of incidents necessary to reach the maximum score of a question has been reported (and the mob attack in Jaranwalain August 2023) highlighted the strong potential for violence against Christians.

- **Christians killed:** For examples on Christians killed for their faith, refer to the *Specific examples of violations of rights* section above.
- **Christians attacked:** Overt violence tends to conceal the daily violence behind the scenes against Christian girls and women who are often abducted, raped and forcefully married and converted. Examples for this abound - see above: *Specific examples of violations of rights*.

- **Christians arrested:** Christians are more frequently arrested and charged than acquitted and although not all situations are linked with blasphemy accusations, those are the most prominent examples.
- **Churches attacked:** Attacks on churches or other public Christian properties take place frequently, although the buildings are not always destroyed or have to be closed. In one incident on 16 August 2023 alone, at least 21 churches in Jaranwala were attacked and/or destroyed.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** In blasphemy cases, the homes of Christians are frequently attacked, forcing them and their families to go into hiding. In "planning and re-structuring" cases, Christian neighborhoods are threatened with being completely demolished by the authorities or developers. And again, the mob attack on Jaranwala is a reminder that Christian neighborhoods are under constant threat of violent attacks.

5 Year trends

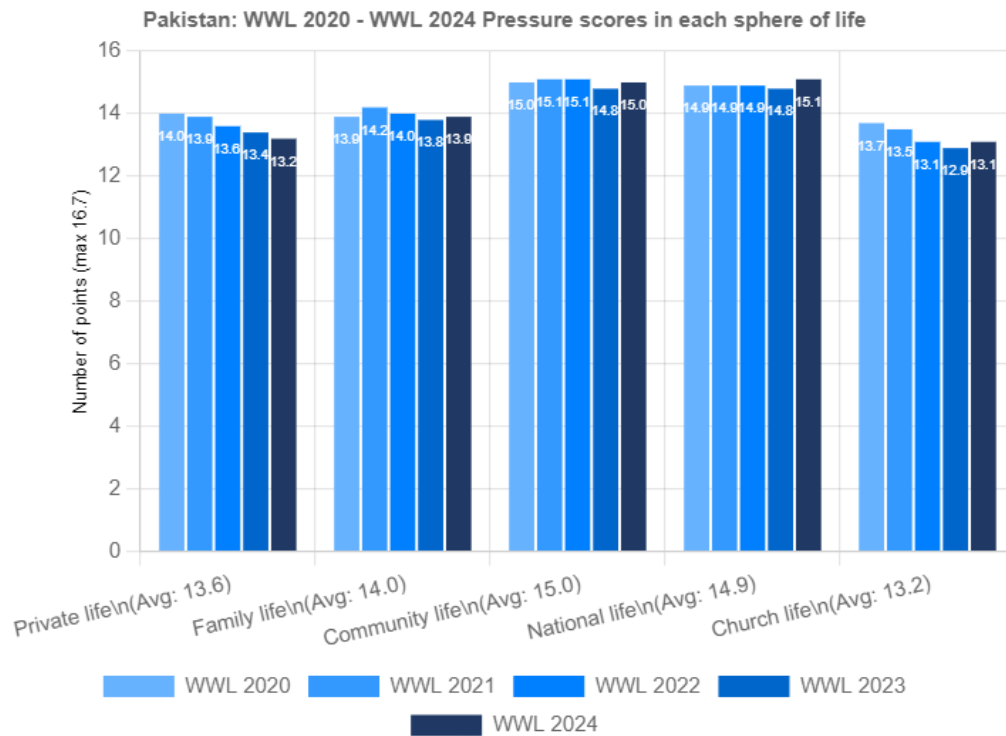
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

5 Year trends: Average pressure

Pakistan: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	14.1
2023	14.0
2022	14.1
2021	14.3
2020	14.3

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

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



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

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



Pakistan is one of the few countries in the WWL reaching the maximum score for violence and the only one reaching it every single year since WWL 2016. Although there has not been a suicide attack against a church since the WWL 2018 reporting period, each year witnessed so much violence against Christians that Pakistan has still reached the maximum score. In the WWL 2024 reporting period, the Jaranwala attack served as a major reminder of the sort of violence Christians are facing.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Denied access to social community/networks; Denied custody of children; Forced marriage; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied/restricted healthcare; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological
Technological	-

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

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

over their lives within Pakistan’s honor-based culture, with girl survivors of abduction showing higher rates of PTSD, anxiety, depression, and detachment (Jubilee Campaign, February 2023).

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

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

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

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; False charges; Forced divorce; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

Blasphemy laws, which enable the death penalty, continue to provide the structure for much of the human rights violations of Christian men in Pakistan. Christian men live in constant fear of blasphemy allegations, false charges, destruction of their property, arrest, imprisonment, beatings, torture and execution. A country expert explained that “Christian families usually worry about their men and boys being trapped in the blasphemy allegations and try to keep a low profile”. Exemplifying the dangers, murders of Christian men and boys and men are commonplace if they are seen to insult Islam. In late 2020 a Christian man was sentenced to death for having sent ‘blasphemous’ text messages to his former supervisor, having been in

custody since 2013 ([Al-Jazeera, 8 September 2020](#)). As a country expert observed: “False imprisonment is one of the biggest areas [for men and boys] especially relating to false accusations of blasphemy/apostasy, in these instances entire families and communities are impacted.”

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

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

Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Pakistan):

- "Human rights activists reported numerous instances of societal violence related to allegations of blasphemy; of efforts by individuals to coerce religious minorities to convert to Islam; and of societal harassment, discrimination, and threats of violence directed at members of religious minority communities. NGOs expressed concern about what they stated was the increasing frequency of attempts to kidnap, forcibly convert, and forcibly marry young women and girls from religious minority communities, especially Hindus and Christians." (page 3)
- "The constitution defines “Muslim” as a person who “believes in the unity and oneness of Almighty Allah, in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad... the last of the prophets, and does not believe in, or recognize as a prophet or religious reformer, any person who claimed or claims to be a prophet after Muhammad.” It also states that “a person belonging to the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, or Parsi community, a person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis), or a Baha’i, and a person belonging to any of the scheduled castes” is a “non-Muslim.”” (page 5)
- "Religious freedom activists and civil society groups continued to raise concerns regarding the limited powers of the National Commission for Minorities and the decision to exclude Ahmadi Muslims from being represented on the commission when it was formed. Ahmadi Muslim leaders said they would not join the body because it required them to identify as non-Muslims. The commission continued to function without legislative authority and without power to resolve problems. Minority religious leaders expressed their preference that the commission operate under the Ministry for Human Rights rather than under the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony. Minority religious leaders said the

Ministry of Religious Affairs was dominated by conservative clerics who had manifested biases against minorities in past public statements and actions, and that it was primarily concerned with regulating and facilitating the annual Hajj to Mecca. In contrast, they said the Ministry of Human Rights already oversaw and supported other national commissions with a similar role and mandate, including the NCHR, the National Commission on the Status of Women, and National Commission on the Rights of the Child." (page 30)

- "Civil society organizations and media outlets said that armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including the Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan and the once-banned anti-Shia group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, continued to perpetrate violence and other abuses against religious minorities. Groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments, such as ISIS, also committed violent acts. Among the targets of these attacks were Shia Muslims, particularly the predominantly Shia Hazara community." (page 39)

Further information

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

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

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

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of:

Islamic oppression, blended with Ethno-religious hostility

As long as politicians and the army continue to follow its policy to distinguish between good and bad Taliban (or other radical Islamic groups), there will almost certainly be no change in this persecution engine's strength. The Taliban governing Afghanistan turned out to be less beneficial than politicians in Pakistan had hoped: They are not simply a tool in the hands of neighboring Pakistan, but wield influence in the country and add to violence and attacks, mainly against police forces and political parties. The deteriorating relationship may have unpredictable consequences.

At the same time, the outcome of national elections in February 2024 is important. However, as long as striving for a purer Islamic identity (as carried out by the radical Islamic groups) seems to focus on Islamizing the school curriculum, thus bringing radical Islamic madrassa ideology into public schools. This is likely to go hand in hand with more violations against Christians and the removal of as many of the rights of Christians as possible at a time when the government is not particularly interested in granting rights to minorities. This can be seen in the new Commission on National Minorities' lack of effective powers and the findings of the Commission on Forced Conversions, namely the denial that such conversions happen in the first place. This in turn fits well into wider society's negative attitude towards Christians. Islamic oppression will thus most likely remain very strong in Pakistan.

Organized corruption and crime

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

Dictatorial paranoia

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

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: returned from self-exile - <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/21/asia/nawaz-sharif-returns-pakistan-intl-hnk/index.html>
- Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (4.00 points): hafiz quran - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-court-questions-extra-marks-for-reciting-quran/95679>

- Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.75 points): Islamize - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/experts-accuse-pakistan-of-ignoring-warnings-on-biased-textbooks/96064>
- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: health card - <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/pakistans-miraculous-new-health-card-scheme-provides-affordable/>
- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: vacant posts - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/elite-civil-service-jobs-a-step-too-far-for-pakistani-catholics/94410>
- Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points): briefing paper - <https://www.icj.org/pakistan-right-to-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-under-sustained-attack/>
- Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (4.00 points): ordered - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-still-failing-to-protect-religious-minorities/97715>
- Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points): number of minority seats - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistans-top-court-rejects-petition-to-increase-minority-seats/96034>
- Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.75 points): blasphemy laws - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/2022%20Pakistan%20Country%20Update.pdf>
- Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere: action - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-activists-back-under-fire-christian-group/98508>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Jubilee Campaign - <https://jubileecampaign.org/abductions-forced-faith-conversions-and-marriages-of-underaged-christian-girls-in-pakistan/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: International Christian Concern - <https://www.persecution.org/2021/07/31/another-christian-girl-raped-school-pakistan/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: fatally shot - <https://www.persecution.org/2020/12/06/christian-woman-pakistan-killed-refusing-marriage-proposal/>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Male description: Al-Jazeera, 8 September 2020 - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/8/pakistani-christian-sentenced-to-death-for-blasphemous-texts>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: destroyed - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/2022%20Pakistan%20Country%20Update.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: little to nothing - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/08/11/press/6052/article.htm>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: April 2023 - <https://mailchi.mp/morningstarnews.org/christian-widow-muslim-charged-with-blasphemy-in-pakistan>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: July 2023 - <https://bitterwinter.org/pakistan-muslim-retired-teacher-arrested-for-offending-the-prophets-companions/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Chinese national - <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-arrest-china-blasphemy-69be1ac9c22b67a1874eabb0e8a5a437>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: corridor of Kartarpur - <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1743946/pakistan>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: destroyed an ancient Buddhist statue - <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-rare-buddha-statue-destroyed/30734848.html>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

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

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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