



PAKISTAN: Country dossier

April 2018



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

Open Doors International / World Watch Research Unit

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World Watch List 2018

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2017	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2016	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2015	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2014
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	92	92	92	90
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	89	88	81	78
3	Somalia	16.0	16.2	16.1	16.3	16.4	10.4	91	91	87	90	80
4	Sudan	14.2	14.5	14.3	15.6	16.0	12.0	87	87	84	80	73
5	Pakistan	14.4	13.5	13.8	15.0	13.1	16.7	86	88	87	79	77
6	Eritrea	15.2	14.5	15.8	16.1	15.2	9.4	86	82	89	79	72
7	Libya	15.2	15.3	14.2	15.7	15.5	10.4	86	78	79	76	71
8	Iraq	14.7	14.7	14.9	14.9	15.1	11.3	86	86	90	86	78
9	Yemen	16.7	16.6	16.4	16.5	16.7	2.6	85	85	78	73	74
10	Iran	14.0	14.1	14.5	15.8	16.4	10.0	85	85	83	80	77
11	India	12.6	12.7	13.2	14.7	12.9	14.4	81	73	68	62	55
12	Saudi Arabia	14.9	13.7	14.2	15.5	16.4	4.1	79	76	76	77	78
13	Maldives	15.2	15.5	13.5	15.8	16.7	1.1	78	76	76	78	77
14	Nigeria	11.8	11.5	13.1	12.1	12.1	16.5	77	78	78	78	70
15	Syria	14.4	14.3	14.1	14.5	14.7	3.7	76	86	87	83	79
16	Uzbekistan	15.5	12.1	13.0	13.1	16.0	3.5	73	71	70	69	68
17	Egypt	11.3	12.8	12.2	11.7	9.5	12.4	70	65	64	61	61
18	Vietnam	12.4	8.4	12.7	14.2	13.8	7.4	69	71	66	68	65
19	Turkmenistan	15.2	10.3	12.9	12.8	15.2	1.9	68	67	66	63	62
20	Laos	12.9	8.6	13.6	13.9	14.9	3.5	67	64	58	58	62
21	Jordan	13.2	13.3	11.5	10.9	13.0	4.3	66	63	59	56	56
22	Tajikistan	13.3	11.3	11.8	11.8	12.9	4.3	65	58	58	50	47
23	Malaysia	12.0	14.9	12.8	12.4	9.3	3.9	65	60	58	55	49
24	Myanmar	11.6	11.1	13.2	10.4	11.0	7.8	65	62	62	60	59
25	Nepal	12.6	11.9	10.7	11.5	12.4	4.6	64	(not in WWL)			
26	Brunei	14.3	14.2	10.7	10.2	13.5	0.9	64	64	61	58	57
27	Qatar	13.4	12.9	11.7	11.3	14.1	0.0	63	66	65	64	63
28	Kazakhstan	12.8	10.0	10.2	12.2	13.7	3.7	63	56	55	51	49
29	Ethiopia	9.8	10.0	10.8	10.9	10.5	10.4	62	64	67	61	65
30	Tunisia	11.9	13.2	10.6	10.7	12.0	3.9	62	61	58	55	55
31	Turkey	12.5	9.7	9.8	11.7	9.6	8.7	62	57	55	52	(not in WWL)
32	Kenya	12.0	10.9	10.0	7.9	11.7	9.4	62	68	68	63	48
33	Bhutan	11.9	11.6	12.4	11.4	13.1	1.1	62	61	56	56	54
34	Kuwait	13.4	12.6	11.6	10.9	12.3	0.4	61	57	56	49	50
35	Central African Republic	9.0	8.1	10.1	8.9	8.8	16.1	61	58	59	67	67
36	Palestinian Territories	12.1	12.8	10.7	10.5	12.6	1.1	60	64	62	58	53
37	Mali	11.4	9.6	11.2	8.1	9.2	9.6	59	59	55	52	54
38	Indonesia	10.3	11.0	11.5	10.0	9.3	6.9	59	55	55	50	46
39	Mexico	8.3	7.6	12.1	10.7	9.7	10.4	59	57	56	55	(not in WWL)
40	United Arab Emirates	13.6	12.2	10.0	10.4	11.8	0.2	58	55	55	49	51
41	Bangladesh	10.4	8.8	11.4	9.6	7.5	10.0	58	63	57	51	46
42	Algeria	12.3	13.1	7.5	10.4	12.4	2.0	58	58	56	55	54
43	China	9.2	7.2	8.0	10.7	13.3	9.1	57	57	57	57	51
44	Sri Lanka	11.1	7.6	10.5	11.3	10.1	6.9	57	55	(not in WWL)	51	55
45	Azerbaijan	13.1	9.1	9.3	11.1	12.4	2.4	57	(not in WWL)	57	50	(not in WWL)
46	Oman	12.1	12.2	9.9	9.4	12.6	1.1	57	53	53	55	56
47	Mauritania	11.5	11.3	11.1	12.2	11.0	0.0	57	55	(not in WWL)	50	51
48	Bahrain	12.9	13.1	10.2	9.9	10.3	0.2	57	54	54	(not in WWL)	48
49	Colombia	7.9	7.6	11.9	8.6	8.5	11.9	56	53	55	55	56
50	Djibouti	12.2	12.2	10.3	9.9	11.7	0.0	56	57	58	60	46

WWL 2018 Persecution Watch Countries¹

		1. Private Life	2. Family Life	3. Community Life	4. National Life	5. Church Life	6. Violence	TOTAL SCORE WWL 2018
51	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.4	13.9	0.4	56
52	Kyrgyzstan	11.7	9.5	10.0	8.1	11.6	2.8	54
53	Tanzania	10.1	10.3	10.1	9.5	9.0	3.9	53
54	Russian Federation	11.1	8.4	10.1	8.9	10.7	2.0	51
55	Morocco	10.4	11.5	7.6	8.8	12.0	0.6	51
56	Cuba	8.5	4.9	10.7	10.4	12.2	2.4	49
57	Uganda	10.9	8.7	9.5	8.7	4.8	3.9	46
58	Niger	9.9	9.7	9.0	7.0	7.1	2.6	45

¹ These countries reached a score of 41 points or more but did not receive enough points to be included in the WWL Top 50.

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Introduction

This country report is a collation of documents based around [Open Doors World Watch List \(WWL\)](#)¹ including statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations, and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database ([WCD](#))². Further news and analysis is supplied by [World Watch Monitor](#)³ and WWR staff.

PAKISTAN		
World Watch List	Score	Rank
WWL 2018	86	5
WWL 2017	88	4
WWL 2016	87	6
WWL 2015	79	8
WWL 2014	77	8

¹ See: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/>

² WCD website: <http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/world-christian-database>

³ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

WWL 2018: Keys to understanding PAKISTAN

Link for general background information:

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12965779>

Recent country 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 to this day. Pakistan has suffered from an unstable government system with three prolonged phases of military rule, with the last phase ending in 2008. In 2013 Nawaz Sharif became prime minister for the third time after his Muslim League party won parliamentary elections.

The attacks in December 2014 on an army school in Peshawar, leaving 141 dead, led to a hasty amendment of the constitution, re-introducing the death penalty and setting up special military courts for terrorism-linked cases, fulfilling the army's long-standing demands.

The religious landscape

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 latter are targets of persecution by a plethora of radical Islamic groups, just as the Christian and the Hindu minorities are. Attacks against these minorities occur regularly and even if an attack gets foiled (as happened with an attack against Christians at Easter 2017), the attacker is often treated leniently. This sends a message of warning to the Christian minority and intimidates them further. They are considered second-class citizens, if at all, and are discriminated against in every aspect of life.

At the time of writing (July 2017), Pakistan is conducting a new census which includes religious affiliation, and the outcome will be interesting to see. The question of religion is a highly sensitive one and it is very political. One decision connected to the census will be if and how far political representation of religious minorities will be increased at the national and state level. 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 political landscape

Pakistan has always been a very volatile country. Although the army has declared war against Islamic radicals it continues to follow a policy of trying to distinguish between "good" and "bad" jihadists. While it fights the latter, it courts the former (eg. *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, now *Jamaat-ud-Dawah*, and the *Haqqani* network) and uses them as a proxy to reach its goals in neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and India. (Another way of influencing neighboring

countries – in this case Afghanistan - is to send back hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees, who have lived in Pakistan for more than two decades, knowingly causing social and all kinds of other challenges for an already struggling country.) The army does [act against](#) insurgent groups affiliated with the Islamic State group (IS) which observers say has a [growing presence](#) in Pakistan. Christians try to stay out of the way of politics and the army alike.

The socio-economic landscape

Economically, the country increasingly relies on China and its willingness to invest in Pakistan in its “New Silk Road” framework (“One Belt, One Road”). The port city of Gwadar is one of the hubs the Chinese are using and it has been leased by the Pakistan government for 40 years in 2017, while China is investing 57 billion USD in the so called “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor” (CPEC). Recently, doubts have risen since Pakistan may well end up [heavily indebted](#) and made dependent on China by this initiative. Additionally, the [killing of two Chinese Christians](#) in Pakistan close to the construction site of CPEC illustrates how volatile and challenging the situation is.

Pakistan has a strong population growth but especially the youth lack any economic perspective. Poverty is high, leaving millions no other choice other than to work for little money, not even enough for their daily needs. This is especially affecting ethnic and religious minorities. Child labor is rampant. The whole population suffers a great deal 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.

According to a report published by UNICEF in 2014, more than nine million children in Pakistan do not receive primary or secondary education, more than in any other South Asian country, except Afghanistan. The state’s low investment in education over recent decades has led to a growth in the number of Islamic madrassahs. 11,000 of these (out of a total of roughly 35,000) follow the strict teachings of Deobandi Islam. Exact student numbers are unaccounted for. While some madrassahs may make pupils literate and teach them mathematics, many others simply offer Koran reading, Islamic Studies and nothing else. As these madrassahs are not registered and supervised, the authorities have no real idea what is going on in them.

Concluding remarks

In 2017, the government announced a new focus on combatting blasphemy occurring in [social media](#) blogs. Consequently there have been an increased number of arrests of people allegedly committing blasphemy (on Facebook etc.). This would seem to contradict government efforts to limit the devastating impact of blasphemy laws on religious minorities in particular. All in all, it is hard to find any improvements for Christians and other religious minorities so far in the WWL 2018 reporting period.

WWL 2018: Church History and Facts

How many Christians?

Pop 2017	Christians	Chr%
196,744,000	3,938,000	2.0

Source: WCD, May 2017

How did Christians get there?

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 (including 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 in 1570.⁴ 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 the strongly increasing pressure in recent years, many Christians have fled abroad to countries like Sri Lanka or Thailand. 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.

What church networks exist today? ⁵

Orthodox	Catholic	Protestant	Independent	Unaffiliated	Double-aff	Evangelical	Renewalist
-	1,072,000	2,412,000	686,000	20,500	-253,000	1,050,000	778,000

Source: WCD, May 2017

The largest group of Christians belongs to the Church of Pakistan, an umbrella Protestant group consisting of four major Protestant denominations (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian

⁴ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_missions, last accessed 31 July 2017.

⁵ **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:** Believers 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. **Evangelicals:** 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. **Renewalists:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movements.

and Lutheran) and is a member of the Anglican Communion. Other Protestant churches are various brands of Presbyterianism as well as many smaller denominations.

Religious context (selection)

Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Ethno-religionist	Jewish	Bahai	Atheist & others ⁶
3,938,000	189,583,000	2,584,000	111,000	206,000	1,000	95,900	168,300

Also to note: Sikh 48,800 Source: WCD, May 2017

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. According to the World Christian Database, more than 96% of the population is Muslim, the vast majority being Sunni Muslims. However, there is also a considerable Shiite minority of 10-15%, which suffer persecution as well.

Although the ethnic question is not as great an issue in Pakistan as in many other countries, 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 Pashtuns are one of the largest minorities worldwide without a nation state of its 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.)

Notes on the current situation

- The frequent church attacks, especially the ones in Lahore in September 2013, March 2015 and Easter 2016, underline the precarious situation Christians are in. Another attack on a church on Easter 2017 was foiled at the last minute. Instead of being taken to court, the 18 year old female suicide bomber appeared in a live TV interview instead.
- The country's notorious blasphemy laws continue to pose a significant challenge for Christians and Christian girls continue to be abducted, forcefully converted, married and raped.
- The political representation of minorities, including Christians, became one of the big topics in recent years. Connected with the census conducted in 2017, it is expected that the number of seats reserved for religious minorities will increase. This is of limited use, however, if Christians are not free in choosing to vote for whoever they want, be it due to illiteracy or to pressure exerted on defenceless minorities.

⁶ This category includes Atheists, Agnostics and New religionists.

WWL 2018: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 86 / Position: 5

WWL 2017 Points: 88 / Position: 4

WWL 2016 Points: 87 / Position: 6

Where persecution comes from

In Pakistan, radical Islamic groups do not just exist, they can flourish and expand because some of them are courted by political parties, the army and the government. Especially the army continues to follow a policy of distinguishing between good and bad Taliban, which is widely followed by the government. Until this changes, radical Islamic groups will continue to run thousands of madrassas (in which no-one knows exactly what is taught or how they are financed) and they will be able to stir up citizens (especially youth) all across the country encouraging them to act against religious minorities such as Christians. Converts face these hostile forces as well, but for them the main danger comes from their own families as conversion away from Islam is a great shame for family and community.

How Christians are suffering

Historic churches have relative freedom for worship and other activities, however, they are heavily monitored and have regularly been targeted for bomb attacks (but no bombings were successful in the WWL 2018 reporting period).⁷ Christian churches more active in outreach and youthwork face stronger persecution in society. All Christians suffer from institutionalized discrimination, illustrated by the fact that occupations seen as low, dirty and derogatory are officially reserved for Christians. Many Christians are anyway poor and several are victims of bonded labor⁸. On the other hand, there are many 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.

Examples

- A new development was the [killing of two Chinese Christians](#), working in Pakistan, 24 year-old Li Xinheng and 26 year-old Meng Lisi, in May 2017. They were killed by militants connected to the Islamic State group which accused them of proselytizing.

⁷ See report by World Watch Monitor, 18 April 2017: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/04/pakistan-prevents-another-easter-attack-christians/>.

⁸ See report by World Watch Monitor, 27 July 2017: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/pakistani-christians-mother-says-son-killed-for-asking-for-an-end-to-his-slavery/>.

- Christians continue to be killed due to blasphemy accusations, but also due to their neglected status. On 1 June 2017, a Christian sewage worker died in the hospital of Umar Kot, Sindh Province, because three Muslim doctors refused to touch him as this would have made them unclean during their Ramadan fast.⁹ Further killings were recorded in the WWL 2018 reporting period, but there was no successful major attack against a Christian church.

WWL 2018: Persecution Dynamics

Reporting period: 1 November 2016 - 31 October 2017

WWL 2018 Points: 86 / Position: 5

WWL 2017 Points: 88 / Position: 4

WWL 2016 Points: 87 / Position: 6

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Position on World Watch List (WWL)

Pakistan remains one of the countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian. The slight decrease in points in some *Spheres of life* does not indicate an overall easier situation for Christians. This is illustrated by the fact that the violence score has stayed at the maximum level (very few WWL countries ever achieve maximum score in this category), even though for the first time in three years there was no successful bomb-attack on a church at Easter; security forces foiled an attempt, see section on “Violence” below. Despite this, at least 15 Christians were killed during the reporting period, frequently in connection with the country’s notorious blasphemy laws.

⁹ See report by World Watch Monitor, 5 June 2017: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/06/pakistani-sewage-worker-dies-after-3-doctors-on-ramadan-fast-refuse-to-touch-him/>.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines in Pakistan ¹⁰	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	Very strong
Religious nationalism	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	Strong
Denominational protectionism	Weak
Communist and post-Communist oppression	Not at all
Secular intolerance	Weak
Dictatorial paranoia	Strong
Organized corruption and crime	Very strong

Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Pakistan suffers from a plethora of radical Islamic groups and witnesses an increasingly Islamizing culture. The Christian community feels increasingly trapped in the crosshairs of those groups and culture. Well-meaning politicians, judges and religious leaders, considering or even advocating for an amendment of the country's notorious blasphemy laws, are openly threatened by those who hold a radical perspective based on *Wahhabi* ideology and who continue to buy into the caliphate theology and treatment of infidels, firmly identifying themselves with supporters of the Islamic State group (IS) and the Taliban. The increasing presence of militants specifically naming Christians as their targets has worsened the situation for Christians in the region. Radical Islamic groups are flourishing - despite a continued crackdown on some of them by the army - and are used by different 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 a strong leverage for enforcing political goals.

Banned radical Islamic groups do not simply dissolve into nothing, in most cases they simply re-brand and build charity fronts or [go online](#)¹¹, wooing the general populace with social services and the youth with a perspective which it is badly lacking in the country. Given that the majority of the population is below 25 years old (and almost one third even below 14), the necessity to grant perspectives to them is a trend that will not cease quickly and brings enormous challenges with it. While life expectancy is not very high at 67.7 years, the total fertility rate stands at 2.68. If the fertility rate remains at this level, Pakistan will become the largest Muslim country in the world, overtaking Indonesia, in approximately 2030. This social structure leads to scores of young people leaving school, dreaming of a better future. As the country struggles to give a perspective even to the well-educated and the academics among the younger generation, this builds the basis for social unrest, which in turn paves the way for radical Islamic groups luring young people into their arms, giving them a feeling of worth they have never had before.

¹⁰ The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines and Drivers in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong.

¹¹ See: https://www.apnews.com/8ef62cab253941ec8169427bdac62886/Many-organizations-banned-in-Pakistan-thrive-online?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=d2519be1c5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_07_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-d2519be1c5-399904105, 11 July 2017, last accessed 25 August 2017.

Organized corruption and crime (Very strong):

Corruption is rampant in Pakistan on all levels of administration and in the army. The army is deeply entrenched into the country's economy and 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 military holds assets valued at around 10 billion USD, including around 5 million hectares of farmland. The fact that President Nawaz Sharif was ousted by a decision of the Supreme Court because of corruption discovered through the Panama Papers, shows that corruption is by no means limited to the army.

Organized crime affects Christians in particular since many of them are poor and without defense, especially in blasphemy cases. This was shown in [April 2016](#)¹² when a court granted bail to the chief suspect in a case where a Christian couple had been killed in a brick oven because of alleged blasphemy on 4 November 2014. Although five suspects were [sentenced to death](#)¹³ on 23 November 2016, the structural injustice behind this case remains untouched. The couple had been working as bonded laborers in the third generation for a brick manufacturer. 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 perspective.

Ethnic antagonism (Strong):

Pakistan suffers from ethnic fragmentation, not only in society but also in the country's administration. The Baluchistan province and 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. Jurisdiction over the federally administered tribal areas (FATA) is limited and distorted. 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. This is also shown by a report from June 2016, according to which the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is [giving funds](#)¹⁴ to a seminary widely known as the "University of Jihad".

Dictatorial paranoia (Strong):

¹² See:

https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/04/4420694?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Pakistan+court+grants+bail+to+chief+suspect+in+oven+killings+of+Christian+couple&utm_campaign=Pakistan+court+grants+bail+to+chief+suspect+in+oven+killings, last accessed 29 November 2016.

¹³ See: <http://www.ucanews.com/news/death-sentences-for-men-who-killed-pakistani-christian-couple/77713>, last accessed 29 November 2016.

¹⁴ See: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/06/22/pakistans-university-of-jihad-is-getting-millions-of-dollars-from-the-government/>, last accessed 29 November 2016.

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 and corruption charges; as a result they try everything possible to hold on to power. This was shown in the WWL 2018 reporting period once more. With the ouster of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at the end of July 2017 on corruption charges, general elections will have to take place in 2018 and the situation looks like it will become volatile again. Imran Khan (Chairman of the opposition PTI party) filed a case against Prime Minister Sharif because of the Panama leaks pointing to irregularities in the prime minister's personal financial affairs. This revelation has already made many of those campaigning for government reforms join up with the radical Islamic agenda seeking a greater Islamization of the country. If Imran Khan will now play a larger role in national politics, this does not bode well for the country's minorities since he has made it clear in many statements that they are not important to him.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of persecution in Pakistan	Level of influence
Government officials at any level from local to national	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Very strong
Christian religious leaders at any level from local to national	Medium
Violent religious groups	Very strong
Ideological pressure groups	Strong
Normal citizens (people from the general public), including mobs	Strong
Own (extended) family	Very strong
Political parties at any level from local to national	Very strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Very strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN) and embassies	Strong

In Pakistan, radical Islamic groups do not just exist, they flourish and expand because some of them are courted by political parties, the army and the government. Especially the army continues to follow a policy of distinguishing between good Taliban and bad Taliban, which is widely followed by the government. As long as this does not change, radical Islamic groups will continue to take to the streets, they will run thousands of madrassas (with no state authority knowing exactly what they are teaching or how they are financed) and they will be able to stir up citizens all across the country, especially youths, encouraging them to act against religious minorities, including Christians. Christians with a Muslim background are facing these hostile forces as well, but for them, their own families are the greatest danger since leaving Islam brings great shame to both family and community.

Ethnic leaders demand uncompromising obedience, so every deviation to another religion is seen as treason. Many Christians are prone to exploitation as they are poor and bonded labor is a fate that is reality for many of them, bringing their masters great profit. Ideological pressure groups, frequently connected with political parties and Islamic religious groups,

exercise enormous pressure and influence, most recently shown in November 2017, when a small group managed to oust Pakistan’s minister of justice (see “Future outlook”). Multilateral organizations tend to follow the country’s discriminatory way of hiring staff, thus neglecting Pakistan’s religious minorities. Christian leaders tend to be protective of their flock, trying to hinder believers from switching churches, whatever the reason.

Context

During the WWL 2018 reporting period, Pakistan has continued to be a very volatile country. Although the army continued its campaign against Islamic militants, it also continued its policy of distinguishing between “good” and “bad” jihadists. While it fights the latter, it courts the former (eg. *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, now *Jamaat-ud-Dawah*, and the *Haqqani* network) and uses these groups as a means of active intervention in neighboring countries such as Afghanistan and India. This is the policy the army has been following for decades. The army does act against insurgents adhering to Islamic State (IS), however, whose presence is reportedly growing in Pakistan. The Taliban are still alive and carrying out attacks, but IS made inroads as well, as was shown at Easter 2017 in Lahore, when a bombing against churches was only foiled by the alertness of security forces. The leader of two banned radical Islamic groups, Hafeez Muhammad Saeed, has [launched a political party](#)¹⁵ and aims to participate in the 2018 elections. However, the Milli Muslim League (MML) has yet to be recognized as a legitimate political party by Pakistan’s election commission. Whether Taliban groups are categorized as good, bad or patriotic, the result remains the same. These are all radical and violent groups which the army and/or the government are working with, and this can only result in more violence - especially against religious minorities.

Mumtaz Qadri, the murderer of Salman Taseer, Muslim governor of Punjab, who had been assassinated in 2011 for his public stand against Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, was hanged on 29 February 2016. Protestors were demanding the immediate execution of all imprisoned blasphemy offenders, especially the Catholic Christian Asia Bibi. They now turned Qadri’s grave into a shrine, which is reportedly [very popular](#)¹⁶ and visited by masses.

One of the main challenges the country faces remain the uncontrolled madrassas. A never-ending stream of madrasa-educated youth enters society. If madrasa teaching fails to be controlled, radical ideas will be planted in the younger generation’s minds. One huge topic for Pakistan’s future is therefore the control of these madrassas. An estimated 35,000 madrassas exist in the country, from which at least 11,000 follow conservative Deobandi Islam. Children and youth receive radical teaching and teachers instil hatred towards minorities. Many madrassas receive foreign funds from Middle Eastern states like Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. As even the listing and mapping of madrassas (let alone monitoring or regulating them) is seen as acting against Islam, the authorities in many cases do not know what is going on

¹⁵ See: https://jamestown.org/program/pakistans-jamaat-ud-dawa-positions-politics/?mc_cid=c8d940d141&mc_eid=800570433e, last accessed 27 November 2017.

¹⁶ See: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1302289>, 27 December 2016, last accessed 25 August 2017.

within the four walls of such buildings and hence hate-speech often goes unrecorded. However, the authorities have started to act against madrassas they deem as too radical. According to official statistics, the authorities did [shut down](#)¹⁷ more than 2,300 madrassas and registered the locations of all madrassas in the provinces Sindh and Punjab. But there is still a long way to go.

Other religious minorities like Hindus suffer from this radicalization and persecution as well. Even Muslim minority groups like Ahmadi or Shia suffer from violent persecution since they are not regarded as being true Muslims, but rather as deviating sects. For example: In February 2017 an attack on a Sufi shrine in Sindh province claimed 75 lives. Alleged atheists can become targets of the country's blasphemy laws very fast as well, as was shown when a university student in the city of Mardan [was lynched](#)¹⁸ by an enraged mob in April 2017.

Besides Christians, other religious minorities have also been victims of the blasphemy laws or attacks. The Hindu minority suffers at the hands of radical Sunni militants as do Islamic minorities like Ahmadis, Shiites and Sufis.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians:

As expatriate Christians in Pakistan have joined the other categories listed below, they are not counted as belonging to a separate WWL-category of their own.

Historical Christian communities:

The Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church are examples. They increasingly face hostilities and experience difficulties in getting permits for certain meetings. They are still able to function as Church but have to put up with strong control and monitoring.

Communities of converts to Christianity:

Christians with a Muslim background suffer the brunt of persecution 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 for family and community.

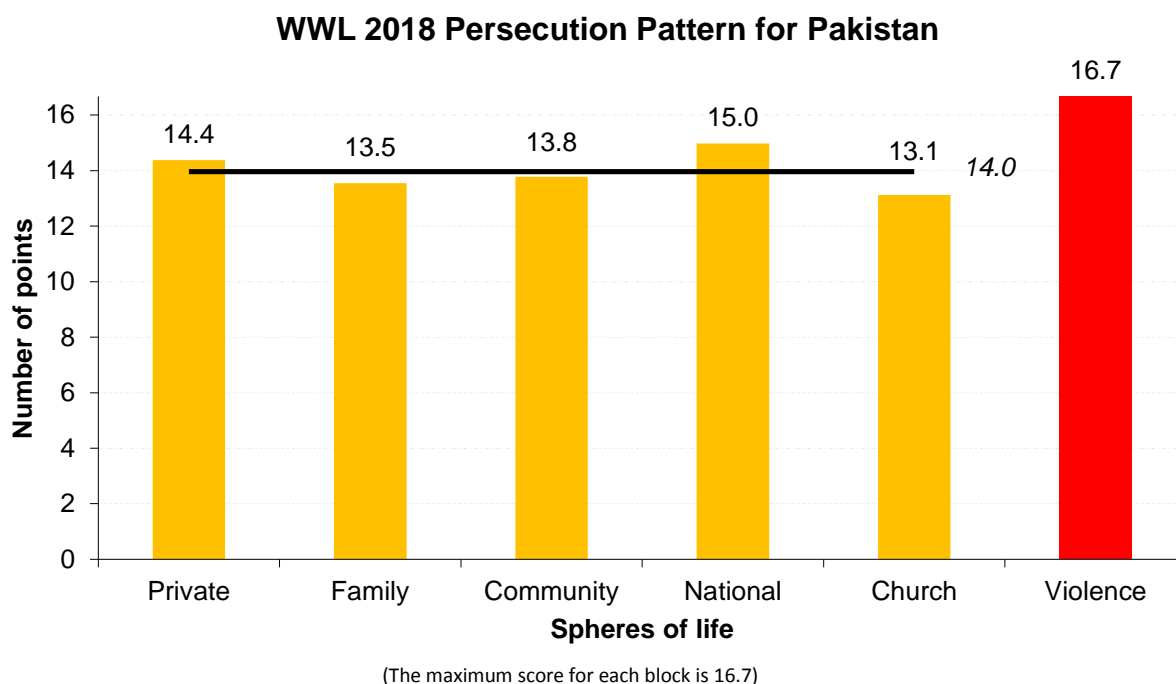
Non-traditional Christian communities:

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.

¹⁷ See: <https://www.geo.tv/latest/131542>, 18 February 2017, last accessed 25 August 2017.

¹⁸ See: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1327118/of-indifference-and-empathy>, 15 April 2017, last accessed 25 August 2017.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2018 Persecution pattern for Pakistan shows:

- Overall, pressure remains very high (and in some *Spheres of life*: extreme) for Christians in Pakistan. However, the average pressure decreased from 14.2 in WWL 2017 to 14.0.
- Pressure remained the same in the *National sphere* (extreme level) and *Church sphere* (*very high level*), reflecting among other things the continuing suffering Christians experience from the country’s blasphemy laws). Pressure remains at an extreme level in the *Private* and *Community spheres*, but is just lower than in WWL 2017. Converts are facing the strongest pressure, while for Christians in general being second-class, neglected and attacked is also a common occurrence.
- Violence against Christians reached the maximum level of 16.7 as in WWL 2017 and WWL 2016. This is remarkable since - unlike in previous WWL reporting periods - there have been no major church bombings. However, there have been many attacks against Christians: killings, abduction of women, rape, forced marriages, evictions from homes and displacements in-country and abroad.

Private sphere:

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 can be taken away by family, friends or neighbors. A case of blasphemy was brought against a boy who “liked” a cartoon on Facebook depicting a story about Islam’s founder. Social media posts are becoming increasingly dangerous for Christians to participate in. Reports of Christians being spat at and targeted aggressively in the streets, in traffic or at the work-place because of a cross being worn, are indicators that the situation is becoming more difficult. Even cars bearing stickers with crosses are more likely to be stopped by police. 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. Converts sometimes have to go into hiding as well.

Family sphere:

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. Organizing a baptism, Christian wedding or funeral can become difficult or even impossible. 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. Even if it is a Pakistani of Christian background getting baptized, there will often be guns firing from roofs and aggressive shouting against Christians, 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. In small townships and remote villages, all Christian families are forced to make their children attend Islamic teaching at the local madrassa while Christian teaching is restricted to the Sunday service once a week. The majority of Christian children face pressure to "come back" to Islam at an early age, therefore parents try to prevent their children from speaking or sharing about their faith with non-Christian peers. Pastors, who are ready to baptize converts, have also been questioned and threatened on many occasions. At school, Christian children are often not allowed to use the same water fountain as their classmates as they will "defile" the water source, and they are often bullied. Schoolbooks are teaching hatred against Christians. Christians with a Muslim background face either being physically attacked and discriminated against by the Islamic community and their own family, or they may be placed under a curse through black magic, potions, amulets and other occult practices.

Community sphere:

Christians are associated with being unclean and so their use of shared facilities is thought to defile Muslims. This is how the Asia Bibi case started. 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. Many hospitals, pharmacies and other facilities have welfare schemes, which are being increasingly denied to Christians. Christians are also often told to pay exorbitant amounts for health care. Such costs are unpayable and hence block access to medical treatment. In a horrific reflection of how Christians are discriminated against, a Christian sewage sweeper recently died when doctors refused to treat him as he was Christian and filthy with dirt. In government hospitals, Christians are not allowed to have access to the free medicines which have been supplied through *Zakat* funding. Often people in wards in hospitals do not like to share with Christians, so Christians must wait in hallways and corridors. At school, Christian children are regularly forced to participate in Islamic practices and events. They are also under constant pressure to convert to Islam, and parents are often visited to pressure them into sending their children to Islamic events and teaching them Arabic on the

pretense of bettering their grades. This confuses children and makes them vulnerable to “involuntary” conversion.

National sphere:

Pakistan is an Islamic Republic and the more 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. They were brought back to the attention of the international community when a Christian woman, known as Asia Bibi, was accused of blasphemy and sentenced to death in 2010. She was the first woman to be on death row in Pakistan. As the blasphemy laws continue to gain prominence, it becomes increasingly difficult for courts and government to deal with them as they are highly politicized and have symbolic significance for militant Islamic groups across the country.

In the WWL 2018 reporting period, the Greater Hyderabad municipal corporation advertised vacancies for sanitary workers in which they invited applications only from non-Muslims and a further condition has been added in the application form, that they must take a religious oath on their religious holy book - Gita (700 verse Hindu scripture in Sanskrit) or Bible – that they will never do anything else but work as a sanitary worker and will never refuse to carry out the work.

Church sphere:

The NGO law introduced on 1 October 2015 allows the government to monitor and close down NGOs at their wish. Any church not registered as an NGO is immediately considered illegal and faces the threat of being closed down. The law was introduced to protect the country against terrorist organizations in the guise of charities. Hence, churches are now listed alongside terrorist organizations. Church activities are regularly watched. Security is provided for many churches by the authorities, but these very security personnel make regular reports, listen, observe and watch in detail what is going on in the church. The reports are a form of intelligence and it is suspected that they are being passed on to radical organizations and militants too. Cases have been reported in the past of security personnel turning militant, attacking local priests and pastors and threatening them. Church buildings frequently resemble fortresses with high walls and narrow gates. Despite the fact that the state has promised to protect churches with guards, there have nevertheless been several church attacks with dozens of victims.

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.

While the pressure against churches reaching out to youth increases, there have been no reported cases of outright obstruction. However, pastors and Christian workers have received warnings that their activities are being watched by the authorities and pressure groups in the neighborhood. 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. In October 2016, eleven Christian TV channels of the thirteen available in the country were de-registered. Christians are also worried about a law on internet restrictions, [passed in August 2016](#)¹⁹, which has the potential to limit one of the last available ways of spreading the Christian message. In the WWL 2018 reporting period, there was a heated debate on Christian family law. Christians are being encouraged/compelled to allow divorce in more cases than purely on grounds of adultery.

Violence:

Christian rickshaw driver Shahzad Masi was killed on 8 February 2017. Noman Munir Masih was killed on 20 March 2017. On 30 August 2017, 17 year old student Sharoon Masih was [beaten to death](#)²⁰ by his fellow students after allegedly having taken a drink from the same water source that Muslim students used. But possibly the best illustration how Christians are frequently treated happened during Ramadan, on 2 June 2017, when Christian sanitary worker Irfan Masih was brought to a hospital in Umerkot, Sindh province after having inhaled toxic fumes while cleaning a foul water pipe. Doctors refused to touch his unclean body and so he [died](#)²¹ as a result. Another new development was the [killing of two Chinese Christians](#)²² working in Pakistan: 24 year-old Li Xinheng and 26 year-old Meng Lisi. They were killed by radicals connected to the Islamic State group which accused them of proselytizing.

Attacks on churches are taking place with a sickening frequency, although the buildings are not always destroyed or have to be closed. However, according to interviews with many pastors, there have been frequent fires, broken windows, damaged property and minor harassments such as power-cuts and water restrictions targeting churches. This overt violence conceals the daily violence behind the scenes against Christian girls and women who are often abducted, raped and forcefully married and converted. In blasphemy cases, the homes of Christians are frequently attacked, forcing them and their families to go into hiding. Pakistan is the only country in WWL 2018 with a maximum score for violence.

¹⁹ See: <http://www.ucanews.com/news/internet-restrictions-a-further-blow-to-church-mission-in-pakistan/77686>, last accessed 29 November 2016.

²⁰ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/pakistani-17-targeted-teacher-students-dies-beating-second-day-high-school/>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

²¹ See: <https://www.ucanews.com/news/calls-for-justice-as-christian-sanitary-worker-dies/79439>, last accessed 27 November 2017.

²² See: https://www.chinasource.org/blog/posts/mourning-two-chinese-christians-killed-in-pakistan?utm_medium=feed&utm_source=feedpress.me&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+chinesechurchvoices, last accessed 27 November 2017.

Gender profile of persecution

Female:

Horrific statistics continue to indicate that an estimated 700 Pakistani Christian girls and women are abducted each year, often raped and then forcefully married to Muslim men from the community. This involves forced conversions as well, and if a Christian family is bold enough to challenge the abduction and marriage, they often face accusations of harassing the “voluntarily converted” girl and her new family.

Male:

No data available.

Future outlook

The main challenge for Pakistan is the question of how to deal with militant Islamic groups. The immediate hope after the attack on the Peshawar Army School in December 2014 was that the army would withdraw protection from certain militant groups. This hope has not been fulfilled. The army and government are still trying to distinguish between “good” and “bad” jihadi groups, and it is the religious minorities - including Christians – who continue to pay the price for this approach. The August 2017 decision by the US government to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan and the connected stern warning to Pakistan (as a major ally) not to support radical Islamic movements, will most likely change nothing. The influence of even relatively small radical Islamic groups was shown once more in November 2017, when a group of 3,000 people managed to [block a major intersection](#)²³ of Islamabad, effectively stopping traffic in the whole capital, demanding the removal of a minister and the strict implementation of the blasphemy laws. End of November 2017, their demands were partly given in to, as the [justice minister resigned](#).²⁴

The political stability improved in the last two election cycles, just in time for the country’s 70th birthday in August 2017. This changed with the ouster of Prime Minister Sharif mentioned under “Dictatorial Paranoia” above. Another important source of unrest could be the publication of the country’s most recent census results. The authenticity of the very first and long-awaited statistics have already been [challenged](#)²⁵ by opposition politicians and certain province authorities. The fact that Pakistan’s total population of well over 200 million has increased by 60% since the last census in 1998 and [continues to grow](#)²⁶ at a rate of 2% annually, shows what challenges Pakistan is facing. If this rate continues, the country’s

²³ See: https://www.apnews.com/d0d2ecd82dc9465bb3b8ddbe29bf24b4/Islamists-rally-near-Islamabad,-demand-removal-of-minister?utm_source=Pew+Research+Center&utm_campaign=0cd2547588-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_11_10&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_3e953b9b70-0cd2547588-399904105, last accessed 27 November 2017.

²⁴ See: <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Islamabad,-Islamic-protesters'-victory:-Justice-Minister-resigns-42428.html>, last accessed 27 November 2017.

²⁵ See: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1354150/opposition-parties-suspicious-of-census-results>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

²⁶ See: <http://thediplomat.com/2017/09/pakistans-new-big-threat-a-bulging-population/>, last accessed 28 September 2017.

population could double again over the next decades. The fact that the statistics for religious affiliation have not yet been released shows how sensitive these numbers are; they could support religious minorities in their [fight for political representation](#).²⁷

Another question the country has struggled with for several years now is how to effectively limit the infamous blasphemy laws, and how this could be done without provoking an aggressive reaction from radical Islamic groups. All efforts so far have remained unsuccessful and were answered with strong opposition. In August 2017, a High Court judge proposed to make Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws tougher in the sense that wrong accusations should be punished as harshly as blasphemers. All hopes for changes to this law have so far been premature. On 14 September 2017, a court in Gujrat sentenced Christian Nadeem Masih [to death](#)²⁸ because he had allegedly sent four blasphemous messages via WhatsApp, making him the first victim of alleged online blasphemy in Pakistan and reflecting the dangerous situation especially religious minorities find themselves in.

Another challenge the country has to face is how it is going to deal with its struggling neighbor Afghanistan. Reports emerged in June 2016 that Pakistan plans to send back an estimated three million refugees to Afghanistan. This would multiply problems in Afghanistan, increase the appeal of militant groups to those with no perspective (and add to competition between rival groups) and have repercussions for Pakistan itself. However, until now, Pakistan has "only" sent back 600,000 refugees, causing enough problems already for its weak neighbor.

Competition between the Taliban and IS increases the pressure on both groups to recruit followers. Their recruitment strategy requires each group to appear closer to the heart of Islam than the other. In their efforts to appear more Islamic, one strategy has been to attack the "dhimmi" as they are most vulnerable to the ideology of "pure Islam". Striving for a stronger Islamic identity (as carried out by the radical Islamic groups) therefore includes persecuting Christians more and taking away as many of their rights as possible at a time when the government is not particularly interested in granting rights to minorities. This in turn fits well into the wider society's negative attitude towards Christians: Islamic oppression will most likely remain strong in Pakistan.

Policy considerations

- In line with its commitments under the ICCPR²⁹, the government of Pakistan should repeal the 1986 blasphemy laws which are broadly and vaguely defined, used largely to imprison religious minorities, and are frequently applied on the basis of false accusations. The government should protect the judges dealing with blasphemy cases and guarantee a fair trial.

²⁷ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/11/what-makes-pakistans-small-religious-minorities-so-significant/>, last accessed 27 November 2017.

²⁸ See: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/09/pakistan-christian-sentenced-death-whatsapp-blasphemy-despite-gaps-police-case/>, 20 September 2017, last accessed 28 September 2017.

²⁹ ICCPR = The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - an international human rights treaty adopted by the United Nations in 1966.

- Asia Bibi is still on death-row. The international community should request the immediate release of Asia Bibi and others from religious minorities imprisoned under the blasphemy laws.
- The government of Pakistan should respond to the questions of the UN Human Rights Committee on Pakistan's human rights with a concrete plan on the blasphemy laws, honor killings, and physical and sexual attacks on religious minorities which are often used for forcible conversion.
- The UN and international community should urge the government of Pakistan to grant and implement protection and rights for girls and women of religious minorities.
- The government of Pakistan should expand the National Action Plan to Combat Terrorism to include the promotion of rights for religious minorities and interfaith participation in education, business and politics as the prerequisite for peace and stability.
- Given the frequency of violent incidents at family and local community level against Christians, the government should develop measures to fully investigate attacks and end impunity.
- Given the frequency of threats, reported attacks and the fear that Christians undergo, the government should end its silence on such incidents, accept that they are happening and seek ways of changing the mind-set of those who initiate such actions.

WWR in-depth reports

There are currently no in-depth reports on Pakistan available at:
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

Open Doors article(s) from the region

There are currently no Open Doors articles on Pakistan available at:
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

World Watch Monitor news articles

Up-to-date articles on Pakistan are available at:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/pakistan/>

- [Pakistani Christian dies after being set on fire by Muslim in alleged dispute over who should convert](#)

23 April 2018

A Christian woman from north-eastern Pakistan has died from her injuries after being set on fire by a Muslim man, who claims it was an accident and followed a discussion about which of them should convert if they were to marry.

- [Pakistan court acquits 20 in case of Christian couple burnt alive](#)

26 March 2018

An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in Lahore, Pakistan, on 24 March 2018 acquitted 20 men suspected of involvement in the murder of a Christian couple burnt alive at the kiln where they worked in November 2014 – after it was alleged that they had set fire to some pages from a Quran.

- [Pakistan Christian escapes death for ‘clearly fabricated’ blasphemy](#)

22 March 2018

A Pakistani Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy nearly two years ago has been acquitted. The case against him – brought by a police officer whose protection he sought against two blackmailers – was “clearly fabricated”, his lawyer said.

- [Easter banner torn down from Pakistan church](#)

20 March 2018

Armed violence broke out in eastern Pakistan on Sunday 18 March 2018 over an Easter banner hung outside a church. The incident took place in a Christian colony in Burewala, Punjab province. Police intervened and arrested three Muslim suspects, while seven injured Christians were taken to a local hospital.

- [Pakistan Christian still on death row, five years after his ‘blasphemy’ sparked Joseph Colony attack](#)

15 March 2018

At the fifth anniversary of the arson attack on a Christian neighbourhood in the Pakistani city of Lahore, the mother of the Christian man convicted of blaspheming against Islam – and so provoking the attack – says she still prays for his release.

- [Pakistan court orders citizens to declare religion](#)

13 March 2018

Pakistan’s citizens must now declare their religion when applying for identity documents, or if they want to work in government or register to vote, Islamabad’s High Court ruled on 9 March 2018. Applicants who disguise their true religion defy the constitution and betray the state, the judge said.

- [Pakistan: Christian family attacked for helping build church wall](#)
6 March 2018
Five members of a Christian family in northeast Pakistan were attacked and injured as they helped to build a boundary wall around their church on Sunday 4 March 2018.
- [Pakistan blasphemy suspect says he jumped from fourth floor to escape forced sex act](#)
26 February 2018
A suspect in a blasphemy case in Lahore, Pakistan, claims he was tortured by police and jumped from a fourth floor window to avoid being forced by officers to perform oral sex on his cousin, who is also under investigation.
- [Pakistan: 800 Christian families flee neighbourhood after blasphemy accusation](#)
20 February 2018
Several Islamic clerics and a few Christian leaders held a press conference at a police station in Lahore on 20 February 2018 to send a message to at least 800 families who fled a Christian neighbourhood in the city after a 20-year-old Christian man was accused of posting blasphemous content on Facebook.
- [Asia Bibi central to trade deals, EU tells Pakistan](#)
16 February 2018
The EU's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Jan Figel', told Pakistani officials during a recent visit that the renewal of their export privileges to Europe depends on the release of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman on death row for blasphemy since 2010.
- [Pakistani Christian says daughter, 12, abducted, forced to convert to Islam and marry](#)
13 February 2018
A 12-year-old Pakistani Christian girl, who disappeared in November 2017, was abducted, forced to convert to Islam and marry her abductor, according to her father.
- [Pakistan: Christian cleaner dies at work, leaving wife and two children](#)
25 January 2018
A Pakistani Christian, who fell ill after inhaling poisonous gasses at work, died on 20 January 2018 after three days on a life-support machine. Shahzad Masih, 24, who leaves a wife and two young children, worked as a sewer cleaner in the Korangi area of the southern city of Karachi.
- [Pakistani Christian girl, 13, raped by fellow worker in field](#)
17 January 2018
A 13-year-old Pakistani Christian girl was raped in a rural area near the city of Gujranwala, north of Lahore, on Sunday 14 January 2018 as she worked in the fields. The girl was found by her younger cousin, and taken to hospital.

- [Could Pakistan’s place on US ‘Watch List’ create more problems for minorities?](#)
11 January 2018
The US State Department last week placed Pakistan on a ‘Special Watch List’ for “severe violations of religious freedom”. The US did not, however, go as far as adding it to its ten ‘Countries of Particular Concern’.
- [Adding insult to injury – Pakistani church leaders arrested, fined for ‘not putting security in place’](#)
22 December 2017
Pakistan intelligence agencies on 19 December 2017 put out an alert that major parks could be targeted by suicide bombers over Christmas in Lahore, capital of Punjab province – where the largest population of Christians resides. On Sunday 17 December 2017, two suicide bombers attacked Bethel Memorial Methodist Church.
- [Pakistan: mourners bury 11 killed in Quetta church suicide attack, as 50 injured](#)
17 December 2017
Pakistani Christian mourners are burying their dead only days before they should be celebrating Christ’s birth. Worshippers were lining up to take the Holy Communion when at least two men, armed and wearing suicide vests, attacked Bethel Memorial Methodist Church in western Pakistan’s city Quetta on Sunday.
- [Pakistan’s anti-blasphemy protests showcase minorities’ plight](#)
27 November 2017
Anti-blasphemy protests in Pakistan have once again highlighted the fragile position of the country’s religious minorities. Life in various parts of Pakistan virtually came to a halt on 25 November 2017 after the police, paramilitary and other law enforcement agencies clashed with rioters in the capital, Islamabad.
- [What makes Pakistan’s small religious minorities so significant?](#)
24 November 2017
Pakistan conducted its first census in 19 years in July. All the results have now been released, except those on religious minorities. The government has provided no explanation.
- [Pakistani Christian sent to prison for ‘insulting Islam’ despite mental ill-health](#)
10 November 2017
A 65 year old Christian man was arrested on the day of his son’s funeral in Pakistan last weekend, and charged with insulting Islam – blasphemy – despite being recognised as mentally ill. He is now in prison.
- [Pakistan: Christians flee village after death threats against teenager accused of blasphemy](#)
7 November 2017
Five Christian families in rural Pakistan have gone into hiding after death threats were made against an 18-year-old because of his alleged blasphemy against Islam.

- [Pakistani Christians face discrimination in prisons too](#)
1 November 2017
Pakistani Christians, often discriminated against because of their faith and standing as members of Pakistan’s lowest caste, find that discrimination follows them in prisons as well.
- [Pakistan Christian sentenced to death for WhatsApp ‘blasphemy’, despite gaps in police case](#)
20 September 2017
Six days after a Pakistani Christian was sentenced to death for blasphemy, the young man’s lawyer says there was insufficient evidence against his client and that the police failed to investigate the matter properly.
- [Pakistani, 17, targeted by teacher and students, dies after beating on second day of high school](#)
12 September 2017
The mother of a 17-year-old Christian beaten to death in his classroom, on his second day in high school, has told the police that her son was “hated because of his religion”.
- [Pakistan: illiterate Christian boy, 16, forced to confess ‘blasphemy’ to escape mob violence](#)
21 August 2017
An angry Pakistani mob almost killed a 16-year-old Christian boy – who is completely illiterate and also slightly mentally challenged – for allegedly burning the pages of a Quran. He was then apparently forced to confess to the alleged crime, and is now in custody.
- [‘Pakistan’s Mother Theresa’ honoured with state funeral](#)
18 August 2017
For the first time in the recent history of Pakistan, a Christian, who is actually a German but adopted Pakistan as her homeland, is being honoured with a state funeral. Dr Ruth Pfau, who was 87, died on 10 August.
- [70 years after Pakistan’s founding, what PM’s recent ousting means for minorities](#)
14 August 2017
Pakistan celebrates its 70th birthday on 14 August 2017. And there’s a new Prime Minister after Nawaz Sharif, founder of the largest political party, was disqualified by the apex court on 29 July on charges of not being “righteous”.

- [Pakistani Christian's mother says son killed for asking for an end to his slavery](#)
27 July 2017

The mother of a Pakistani Christian found dead last week says her son, who was 32, had to be on call 24 hours a day to serve local landlords (to reduce a big loan to his family) and was killed for expressing a desire to escape his “debt trap”.
- [Pakistani Christian boy, 16, charged with blasphemy for discussing his faith](#)
19 July 2017

A 16-year-old Pakistani Christian boy has been charged with blasphemy for talking with a colleague about his belief in Jesus, the second such incident in a month.
- [Divorce law for Pakistani Christians 'modernised'](#)
30 June 2017

Pakistan's High Court in Lahore has struck out an amendment in its Christian Divorce Act (1869), meaning Christians will now be able to divorce in a dignified way, without needing to resort to false accusations of adultery.
- [Pakistani Christian accused of blasphemy for saying he believes Jesus was final prophet](#)
22 June 2017

A Pakistani bike shop owner has been accused of blasphemy after telling one of his customers that Christians believe Jesus to have been the final prophet. Ashfaq Masih, 28, was arrested following accusations that he had “disrespected” Islam's prophet, Muhammad.
- [Pakistan expels South Korean for 'illegal preaching' after murder of Chinese 'missionaries'](#)
21 June 2017

Pakistan has ordered a South Korean man to leave the country, accusing him of involvement in “illegal preaching activities”, after two of his students at an Urdu-language school were abducted and killed by the Islamic State group, which claimed they had been secretly preaching Christianity.
- [UNHCR accused of 'negligence' after Pakistani Christian dies in Thai detention centre](#)
9 June 2017

Thailand's government and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Bangkok have been accused of “negligence” after a Pakistani Christian asylum seeker died in a detention centre last month.

- [Pakistani sewage worker dies after 3 doctors on Ramadan fast refuse to touch him](#)
5 June 2017
A Pakistani Christian sewerage cleaner has died after three doctors refused to treat him till his sludge-covered body had been washed; they said their Ramadan fast would be invalid (“makruh”) because he was “unclean” and also belonged to a low caste.
- [Pakistan: 3 months in prison for eating, drinking in public during Ramadan, \\$250 for providing food](#)
26 May 2017
As the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins, religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan have to be more careful about eating and drinking in public in the scorching heat.
- [Pakistani Christian schoolgirl told: ‘Do Islamic studies instead of Ethics, or leave this school’](#)
23 May 2017
A Christian girl studying at a state school in Pakistan has been told by her teacher that, if she refuses to take a class in Islamic Studies, then she should not be in that school.
- [Pakistan: Christian boy, 16, accused of Facebook blasphemy again refused bail](#)
17 May 2017
A Pakistani Christian boy accused of blasphemy for “liking” and “sharing” a Facebook post which “defamed and disrespected” the Kaaba in Mecca – the building at the centre of Islam’s most sacred mosque – has again been refused bail.
- [Pakistan medical superintendent ‘orders Christian staff to recite Quran’](#)
15 May 2017
The medical superintendent of a hospital in Pakistan has been accused of forcing its Christian staff to memorise Quranic verses.
- [Who speaks for Islam in Pakistan – and where does that leave non-Muslims?](#)
19 April 2017
Last week, a Muslim student was killed by a mob after posting allegedly “blasphemous” content on social media. His murder was the latest in a long line of religiously motivated attacks in Pakistan, many of which were inspired by the country’s strict blasphemy laws.
- [Pakistan prevents another Easter attack on its Christians](#)
18 April 2017
Pakistan’s security forces say they prevented a “major” terror attack on Christians in Lahore over the Easter weekend. The city of Lahore, in Pakistan’s Punjab province, was the scene of a deadly suicide bomb attack on Easter Day last year (2016), when 75 people were killed and 340 injured.

- [Why were Pakistani politicians considering giving higher marks to veiled female students?](#)
7 April 2017

The role of Islam in Pakistani public life is fiercely fought over, especially in areas that are home to non-Muslim communities. One example is Punjab province, where most Pakistani Christians, as well as much of Pakistan's Hindu minority, live.
- [Pakistani prosecutor to Christians: 'I'll acquit you if you convert to Islam'](#)
4 April 2017

The father of one of 42 Pakistanis – who are on trial for lynching two men they suspected of the double bombing of neighbouring churches in March 2015 – has confirmed that the public prosecutor offered to acquit all the suspects if they were to convert to Islam.
- [Pakistan government to Facebook, Twitter: Remove insults to Islam](#)
17 March 2017

A Pakistani government minister has requested that Facebook and Twitter remove content considered insulting to Islam or Muhammad.
- [Pakistani Christians in Thailand face renewed pressure to return home](#)
13 March 2017

World Watch Monitor has heard from reliable sources that the Thai government is planning to cancel bail for all male asylum seekers in Bangkok. The move would require them to return to detention centres straight away. This would include many of an estimated 11,500 Pakistani Christians.
- [Six years on, justice thwarted in case of Pakistan's murdered Shahbaz Bhatti](#)
3 March 2017

Six years on, justice for the murdered Pakistani Christian federal cabinet member Shahbaz Bhatti remains elusive, as does the social equality for which he gave his life. The Christian community says the Pakistani political leadership is not doing enough.
- [Pakistani Christians 'attacked' as land dispute escalates](#)
10 February 2017

More than 200 men, some armed with sticks, suddenly gathered on the morning of 8 February 2017 beside the Alba Presbyterian Church in Sankhatra, 115km north of Lahore, intent on building a boundary wall.
- [Pakistani Christian accused of blasphemy out on bail after three years in prison](#)
3 February 2017

After spending more than three years in jail, a Christian accused of blasphemy, and facing the death penalty, was granted bail by the Supreme Court in Lahore on 1 February 2017.

- [Pakistan court acquits all suspects in 2013 arson of Christian neighbourhood](#)
31 January 2017
A Pakistani anti-terrorism court on 28 January 2017 acquitted every one of the more than 100 suspects accused of ransacking, looting and then burning a Christian neighbourhood in Lahore in March 2013.
- [Pakistan PM premature in saying country will soon be 'minority-friendly'](#)
31 January 2017
Pakistan's Prime Minister has said "the day is not far off when Pakistan will internationally be known as a minority-friendly country".
- [Historic roots of treatment of Pakistan's religious minorities as 'second-class'](#)
31 January 2017
The problems for religious minorities in Pakistan date back to its formation. When the British left the Indian subcontinent, it was divided between Pakistan and India.
- [Pakistani Christian accused of blasphemy after ripped Qur'an found outside home](#)
6 January 2017
A Pakistani Christian could face 10 years in jail or even the death sentence after torn pages from a copy of the Quran were found outside his home, with his name written on them.
- [Survey of schools for Pakistan's Christian minority: 50% have no playground, 15% no notebooks](#)
25 November 2016
Anser Javed's father was a sanitary worker in Karachi; his mother was a sweeper. When his father then died in a work accident, the Pakistani Christian boy was sent to an orphanage.
- [Death sentence for killers of Christian couple burned alive in Pakistan](#)
24 November 2016
Pakistani Christians mourn the death of the couple burnt alive on 4 November 2014 for setting fire to some pages from the Qur'an. An Anti-Terrorism Court in Lahore, Pakistan on 23 November 2016 sentenced five men to death for the murder.
- [Two Pakistani Christian families escape blasphemy accusations](#)
3 November 2016
Two blasphemy cases lodged against Pakistani Christians accused of desecrating Islamic scriptures have been dropped in the past week. The cases related to alleged offences under Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws and were registered in separate incidents, hundreds of miles apart.

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Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles on Pakistan are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=PAKISTAN> (password: freedom).

- [Pakistan: The good, the bad and the ugly – which radical Islamic groups should the government work with?](#)
10 November 2017
As Jamestown reported on 12 October 2017, the leader of two banned radical Islamic groups, Hafeez Muhammad Saeed, has launched a political party.
- [Pakistan/Singapore: Islamic State group making further inroads?](#)
26 October 2017
There are signs of growing support for the Islamic State group (IS) in countries like Pakistan and Singapore.
- [Pakistan: First census results already being challenged](#)
3 October 2017
As Pakistan's main newspaper, Dawn, reported on 27 August 2017, the authenticity of the first and long-awaited results of the country's census have been challenged.
- [Pakistan: Attempts to make blasphemy laws tougher](#)
4 September 2017
Pakistan's largest newspaper Dawn reported on 12 August 2017 that a High Court judge has proposed to make Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws tougher.
- [Pakistan/China: Chinese nationals killed for allegedly working as missionaries](#)
30 June 2017
As reported by Reuters on 14 June 2017, two Chinese nationals were abducted in Quetta on 24 May 2017 and later killed. The Islamic State group claimed responsibility.
- [Pakistan: Christians shocked by release of captured suicide-bomber](#)
15 May 2017
The release of a would-be suicide bomber has shocked the Christian minority, reported UCA News on 9 May 2017.
- [Pakistan/Afghanistan: Government accused of committing refoulement with UN assistance](#)
28 February 2017
Refoulement is a term in international law denoting the forced repatriation of refugees to a country where they face persecution, torture or a risk to their lives.

- [Pakistan: Blasphemy laws revisited?](#)

30 January 2017

During a ceremony at the Katas Raj temples complex in Chakwal, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif appeared to speak out strongly against the country's notorious blasphemy laws.

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