

World  
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## Pakistan: Country Dossier

November 2020



**OpenDoors**

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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# Introduction

## World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

## Copyright notice

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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).
- The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

## Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

## External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

# WWL 2021 Short country profile / Pakistan

## Brief country details

<b>Pakistan: Population (2020 UN estimate)</b>	<b>Christians</b>	<b>Chr%</b>
208,362,000	4,052,000	1.9

*Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)*

<b>Pakistan: World Watch List</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>WWL Rank</b>
WWL 2021	88	5
WWL 2020	88	5
WWL 2019	87	5
WWL 2018	86	5
WWL 2017	88	4

*Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods*

## Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

Ethno-religious hostility	Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Government officials, Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, Ideological pressure groups, Violent religious groups, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Government officials, Organized crime cartels or networks, Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) , Non-Christian religious leaders, Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs

*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](#) for bomb attacks (the last large bomb attack so far having happened on 17 December 2017 in Quetta) (World Watch Monitor, 18 April 2017). Christian churches more active in outreach and youthwork face severer rights violations in society. 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. Many Christians are anyway poor and several are [victims of bonded labor](#) (World Watch Monitor, 27 June 2017). 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 given their overall percentage of population, not just the poor.

## 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

Christians are considered second-class citizens and are discriminated against in every aspect of life. 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. 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. The widely reported cases of Huma Younus and Maira Shahbaz show that Christian underage girls are abducted, forcefully converted and married and the perpetrators are dealt with impunity. The case of 13 year-old Arzoo Masih in October 2020 (outside the reporting period) shows that this is a continuing pattern.

## Specific examples of positive developments

Despite the fact that the scope and tasks of the new Minorities Commission require further discussion and cannot be considered as being completely positive, the final setting up of the "[National Commission for Minorities](#)", heeding a Supreme Court ruling from 2014, is in itself a positive development (UCA News, 6 May 2020). Three Christians are members of this commission, which was set up in May 2020.

The [first ever live broadcast](#) of a Roman Catholic Easter service on state-owned broadcaster PTV is a positive sign for the Christian minority, but arguably one not very strongly felt in every day life (UCA News, 14 April 2020).

## External Links - Short country profile

- 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: victims of bonded labor - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/pakistani-christians-mother-says-son-killed-for-asking-for-an-end-to-his-slavery/>
- 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 positive developments: National Commission for Minorities" - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-approves-minorities-commission-amid-criticism/87930>
- Specific examples of positive developments: first ever live broadcast - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-state-tv-broadcasts-easter-mass/87706>



# WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Pakistan

## Link for general background information

- [Pakistan country profile - BBC News](#)

## 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. 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. Army and government are still executing a plan allegedly targeting Islamic militants.

The army has been accused of being behind the downfall and sentencing of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif due to corruption back in the 1990s as well as of meddling in the country's most recent elections on 25 July 2018. These saw former cricket star Imran Khan as winner, although he is struggling to keep Pakistan on track as far as economic development is concerned. Due to the increasingly strained relationship with the USA, the latter refused to bail the country out as it has done before. As a result, Khan had to accept an offer from the IMF, which comes with very strong controls and expected hardships, especially for the middle class. Consequently, his first year's "[innings](#)" has been evaluated as having mixed results at best (The Diplomat, 1 August 2019).

Prime Minister Khan's second year has been overshadowed by the arrival of COVID-19, which not only brought havoc to an already struggling economy, but once again clearly showed that the government is unable and unwilling to keep radical religious groups at bay, even when gatherings are supposed to be limited or stopped for public health reasons. However, the difficult economic situation and other grievances has served to unite the opposition parties; they staged rallies in several cities and [demanded the end](#) of Imran Khan's government (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - RFE/RL, 19 October 2020). Although such a development is unlikely, since the army is still backing him, it shows how volatile the current political situation in Pakistan is.

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 every day life any easier. Christians - 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 managed to keep radical Islamic groups in check as no major attacks against Christians took place in the WWL 2021 reporting period. Nevertheless, Christians face ubiquitous discrimination and - since many rely on earning a daily wage - many are particularly suffering from the havoc caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Political and legal landscape

In Pakistan, 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". The government has a long history of trying to distinguish between "good" and "bad" jihadists. It fights the latter and courts the former. In several speeches, Prime Minister Khan has acknowledged that Pakistan does have official [links with Islamic militant groups](#) (The Diplomat, 28 September 2019). This is the first time that Pakistan's leaders have officially mentioned such links, which include the training of jihadist groups.

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 lethal, as such groups have the ability to hibernate, 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 the fourth main force in Pakistan (or fifth, if the media is counted) and is arguably the strongest one.

The government put two leaders of the TLP in protective custody and with them some 5,000 of their supporters, who had obstructed infrastructure and damaged thousands of items of private property. Such a ["crackdown"](#) was new and sent a clear warning to other Islamist groups as well (The Diplomat, 3 December 2018). In May 2019, Khadim Hussein Rizvi, the leader of the TLP and his deputy were [released from protective custody](#) (Reuters, 15 May 2019). It is too early to say whether it is correct to speak of a [downfall of the TLP](#) (The Conversation, 18 July 2019). As long as the army (and with it, the government), tries to use certain radical Islamic groups for their own purposes and labels these ones as "good", more such groups will keep emerging.

The army has been challenged on a very different front as well. Supreme Court judge, Justice Qasi Faez Isa, presented his findings of an investigation concerning an earlier blockade by the TLP in 2017 and [openly accused](#) not just the army of supporting and even orchestrating the event, but also Pakistan's untouchable Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) (The Diplomat, 4 June 2019). He called upon the military chiefs and minister of defense to take action against all

servicemen involved in political activities. Such a direct challenge is unheard of and, not surprisingly, the findings were sent back for review. However, according to the law, this review will be heard by the same judges. The fact that an accusation of corruption has been filed against Justice Isa in the meantime, is seen by many in Pakistan as an attempt to get rid of him. In February 2020, the case was still [pending](#) and, according to reports, it has been giving the government a headache (The News, 20 February 2020).

Very soon after Prime Minister Imran Khan had taken up office, he twice gave in to the demands of radical Islamic groups and parties, especially to those from the TLP. In September 2018, a member of the Ahmadi minority was [removed](#) from a top economic adviser post. As international experts have widely acknowledged, Atif Mian is one of the top experts in economic affairs in Pakistan (AP, 7 September 2018). However, he is a member of the Ahmadiyya, a Muslim sect not recognized as Muslim in Pakistan - and especially not by radical Sunni groups. The TLP succeeded in their policy of holding the country captive to their demands once more. But the most striking example yet was the countrywide blockade after the Supreme Court had acquitted Asia Bibi of charges of blasphemy. The radical Islamic groups and parties not only called for the judges and lawyers to be held to account, they also called for mutiny as they concluded - rightly - that such a verdict would not be issued without the judges having first checked with the powerful Pakistani army. The latter remained surprisingly silent, unlike Imran Khan. In his first reaction in a TV speech, he publicly challenged the radical groups, but behind the scenes his minister for religion was soon forging a compromise with them and promising to check if Asia Bibi could be put on a no-fly list, until another - extra-ordinary - appeal against her acquittal could be decided by the Supreme Court. However, the radicals' call to even attack and disobey the army was obviously a cry too far.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Khan faces enormous challenges in keeping the economy afloat, even more so with the fall-out from the COVID-19 crisis. He continues to struggle politically and there have been speculations that his days as prime minister [may be numbered](#), as some claim the army is not happy with his performance (The Diplomat, 21 April 2020). There are, however, few alternatives: Khan's own party, *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf* (Pakistan Movement for Justice, PTI), only holds 46% of seats in parliament, and partners in his coalition have either stopped working with him or have publicly announced their dissatisfaction with him. The ruling majority in parliament is thin and the situation looks unpredictable. However, the widespread talk about a '[government minus one](#)', meaning a government without PM Khan (The Diplomat, 8 August 2020), does not seem very likely at the time of writing. The fact that, during the October 2020 protests, the opposition dared to directly name the army leadership as being responsible for the country's situation (instead of blaming the government) is a [historic first](#) and may be an indication for a changing atmosphere in the country (Washington Post, 22 October 2020). It will add to the influence of the persecution engine *Dictatorial paranoia*, as driven both by the army and government.

In another surprising development, a Supreme Court decision from 28 November 2019 dared to [question the extension of the Army Chief's tenure](#) by the government and only granted a six-months-extension in order to enable the parliament to draft laws on a possible extension and to officially decide about it (Dawn, 29 November 2019). Parliament did do this and [a law](#) was introduced in January 2020 enabling the Army Chief to stay on for another three years.

All the aforementioned illustrates that Pakistan's politics is volatile and has many players and spoilers. Such volatility is bad for minorities, especially religious minorities. Christians continue to be pushed to the margins of society, they still lack proper representation in politics and although there have been no major attacks against churches in the WWL 2021 reporting period, there are almost constant attacks against individuals, making it hard for Christians to feel safe and worship freely.

The legal landscaping facing women and girls is additionally restrictive. In the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, Pakistan ranked [151](#) out of 153 surveyed countries (World Economic Forum, 2020). Whilst it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, a 2020 [periodic report](#) highlighted concerns about 'the persistence of harmful practices that discriminate against women, such as child marriage and forced marriage, and crimes committed in the name of so-called "honor" ("karo-kari")' (CEDAW, 2020, "Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Pakistan" p.7). Despite forced marriage being outlawed in 2011 (Penal Code Art 498), girls from religious minorities are [commonly targeted](#) for abduction and marriage (CEDAW, 2020, p.10). Some Pakistani states continue to permit child marriage; on 3 February 2020, the Sindh High Court in Karachi ruled that men in Pakistan may marry underage girls as long as they have had their [first period](#) (Forbes, 1 March 2020). It is estimated that [21%](#) of girls are married before the age of 18 (Girls Not Brides). 14-year old Catholic Maira Shahbaz was abducted in April 2020, forcibly converted and married to a Muslim man. The court ruled that she should stay with her husband as she had 'willingly' converted to Islam and become his wife. Myra has since escaped to her family home and is [challenging the court's decision](#), arguing that she had married and converted under duress (The Tablet, 26 November 2020). This case exemplifies the impunity granted perpetrators and why many families consider it pointless to take legal action.

Within marriages, women reportedly experience high rates of domestic violence (exacerbated by the economic strain caused by the [COVID-19](#) crisis) and marital rape is not explicitly criminalized (Deutsche Welle, 7 July 2020). Whilst there is a law against domestic violence, implementation of the legislation is weak. 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 (Human Rights Watch, Pakistan: Events of 2018).

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*, whereas a woman may file for divorce through the courts, but faces significant social [stigma](#) should she choose to do so (OECD, 2019, "Social Institutions and Gender Index, p.4). Following a divorce, women are usually granted [custody](#) of the children until they reach the age of 7 (if the court permits it), whilst guardianship remains with the father, and with it decision-making power over the child (OECD, p.3). 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 adherents	of %
Christians	4,052,000	1.9
Muslim	200,893,000	96.4
Hindu	2,720,000	1.3
Buddhist	130,000	0.1
Ethno-religionist	225,000	0.1
Jewish	900	0.0
Bahai	103,000	0.0
Atheist	9,900	0.0
Agnostic	170,000	0.1
Other	58,600	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

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).

A new census was conducted in 2017, the first for 19 years. It included religious affiliation, but the detailed results have not been published yet. The government has simply published a general number of [1.59% Christians](#) in the country (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, accessed 17 July 2020). 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.

## Economic landscape

According to [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300 onwards):

- **Gross National Income (2011 PPP \$):** 5.190
- **Poverty:** 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.
- **Remittances:** Remittances from citizens working abroad make up 6.73% of the national GDP (8% according to World Bank).

According to [World Bank's April 2020 update](#):

- Pakistan is classified as a [lower middle income country](#).
- Pakistan's GDP in 2019 shrank by 1.04%
- The poverty headcount ratio at 5.50\$ a day (2011 PPP) stands at 75%.

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 turned to look for new sources of revenue and turned like many other countries eastwards. The country now increasingly relies on China and its willingness to invest in Pakistan in its “New Silk Road” framework (“One Belt, One Road”). China is investing 57 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 by the Pakistan government for 40 years. Doubts about these dealings with China continue to be voiced since Pakistan may well end up [heavily in debt](#) and become dependent on Chinese government policy (Eurasia Review, 18 May 2017). Apart from that, Pakistan also started to discover that China is not shy in [rent-seeking and inflating real costs](#), as a report published in April 2020 revealed (The Diplomat, 18 May 2020). 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).

Pakistan has sought economic assistance (i.e. credit) from various countries after the USA refused to step in and once again support its long-term ally. In the end, the government turned back to the IMF, seeking a bail-out of 6.6 billion USD on harsh terms of domestic reform. This has led observers to question whether Pakistan will ever [be able to end the cycle](#) of repeated bail-outs (media reported widely that this is the [13th bail-out](#) from the IMF) and accept the demands for genuine reform (Tribune, 3 June 2019 and Reuters, 13 May 2019). COVID-19 derailed almost all economic activities and whichever road to recovery Pakistan may have hoped to be on. Even if debtors decide to give a respite in the program, Pakistan's economic path looks set to get more stony. Another complication has been that the government publicly [criticized](#) one of its most important sponsors, Saudi Arabia, on its silence about Kashmir (Brookings, 24 August 2020). The response was swift: Saudi Arabia demanded a one-billion-dollar loan to be paid back immediately. China was happy to step in with repayment assistance, but in the long-term, Pakistan will not be able to afford angering its largest sponsors. It is unlikely that this episode is more than a bump in the road and that Saudi money and ideology will continue to enter the country, much to the disadvantage of its minorities, including Christians.

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 CIA World Factbook's estimate is 2.07% for 2020). This is especially true for the 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 especially the youth lack any real economic perspectives. While the youth unemployment rate, as given by the UNDP, is not particularly high at 6%, the percentage of youth aged 15-24 neither being in school or in employment stands at 31%. This especially affects 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). 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.

Pakistan's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was [slow and patchy](#) and when the government finally decided to institute lockdowns, this was immediately met by strong resistance from radical religious groups who strictly opposed all restrictions on religious gatherings (Hudson Institute, May 2020). It should be noted that gatherings (carried out by all religious groups) were among the main factors for spreading the virus. An example were Tablighi Jamaat's conferences and mass gatherings in Pakistan, India, Malaysia and Indonesia. The economic consequences of the pandemic are not to be underestimated, but the ideological consequences are likewise dangerous, as the virus is used for all sorts of conspiracy theories.

A rather surprising consequence and unexpected boost for the economy came from the doubling of [remittances](#) (Reuters, 17 August 2020). While millions of migrant workers around the world lost their jobs, were sent home or isolated under 'lockdown' measures (often in dire circumstances), many Pakistani migrant workers apparently managed to stay abroad. Because they could not spend their money earned for the *haj* or *umrah*, they sent more home to their families than expected, giving the economy a much needed shot in the arm. This shows that the pandemic can have surprising consequences, too. However, few Christian families benefit from such remittances.

Christians have been particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis since the marginalization they face from society and government extends to health and emergency relief as well. Apart from being marginalized in economic life, they are also [discriminated](#) against when it comes to receiving medical treatment or emergency relief, as the Catholic "National Commission for Justice and Peace" reported in June 2020.

Economic pressures restrict the freedom of Christians, especially converts. Due to low [education rates](#) for girls (exacerbated by girls entering early marriages, impoverished communities and pressures from the Taliban who believe girls should not be educated, at least not beyond a certain level) many women do not work (Borgen Project, 6 April 2019). According to a [Georgetown report](#), 75% of men think it is unacceptable for women to have a paid job



(Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, “Women, Peace and Security Index 2019/20”) p.8).

Women and girls are further hindered by [various inheritance laws](#) that discriminate against women (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index”). 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. The loss of income for a Christian male breadwinner is something that must be reckoned with. [Business rivals accuse Christian men](#) of blasphemy as a means of destroying their business and reputation (The Times, 8 Dec 2013). Additionally, many Christian men typically occupy lower status jobs and have been referred to as "Chura," a derogatory word meaning "filthy" also reserved for road sweepers or sewage cleaners. Whilst some Christians hold higher status jobs, discrimination and social inferiority are ubiquitous.

## Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) (page 300) and [Word Factbook](#) (June 2020):

- **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)
- **Urban population:** 37.2%, with an urbanization rate of 2.53%
- **Adult literacy rate:** 57%
- **Schooling:** The average of expected years of schooling is 8.5 years, the mean years of schooling is 5.2 years
- **Employment:** 59.3% of all working people are in vulnerable employment

According to [World Bank's April 2020](#) update:

- **Population/age:** 35% of the population are below 14 years of age, 4.3% are above 65. The median age is 22.8 years.
- **Education:** The primary school completion rate stands at 64%, the last available data is from 2014, as of 2018, an estimated 6 million children dropped out of school.
- **Unemployment:** 4.5% of the population were unemployed, 55.5% were in vulnerable employment.
- **IDPs/Refugees:** In 2015, an estimated 3.6 million migrants were living in Pakistan.

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (2019):

- **HDI score:** With a score of 0.560, Pakistan ranks 152 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:** 67.1 years
- **Gender inequality:** A score of 0.547 gives Pakistan the rank 136 of in the Gender Inequality Index



- Pakistan has 9.8 physicians and 6 hospital beds per 10,000 people
- The pupil-teacher ratio in primary school is 45:1
- The youth between 15 and 24 years of age neither in school or employment is 31%

Although the issue of ethnicity is not as dominant in Pakistan as in many other countries of 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 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.

According to the [UNICEF Pakistan Annual Report](#) published in July 2019, Pakistan still has the second-highest out-of-school rate in the world, although the numbers are improving. At primary level, five million children are out of school, 60% of whom are girls. The rate grows to more than 17.7 million children out of school between age 10-16, 51% of whom are girls (UNICEF annual report 2018, p 9).

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 has also publicized a plan to [register](#) madrassas (Reuters, 19 July 2019). Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood has apparently made a deal with the madrassa umbrella organization, Wafaq-ul-madaris, which allows the madrassas to keep full responsibility for all religious instruction. In the WWL 2021 reporting period, it remained unclear how the government hopes to prevent radical Islamic teaching and its consequences from continuing, the effects of which are felt by Christians and other minorities.

As experienced across the world, the COVID-19 pandemic in Pakistan most strongly affected the poor and most vulnerable parts of society. For day laborers, the main risk has not been the virus, but the fact that they could not earn money and bring food on the table to feed their families. Many Christians belong to the poorer levels of society and are frequently excluded from aid programs or benevolence funds which religious organizations (Islamic) or the state may provide. They will continue to struggle, even if the situation does return to a "new normal" at some stage.

Pakistan is a deeply patriarchal society and heavily impressed by the Islamic religious landscape. Conversion from Islam to another religion is socially unacceptable in all areas.

## Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed June 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 32.4% penetration - survey date: June 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 15.6% penetration – survey date: December 2018

According to the [World Bank country profile](#) (2108):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 72.6 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2020](#):

- Pakistan is marked as "Not free".
- "Internet penetration registered only marginal increases during the reporting period. At the end of 2019, there were 78 million broadband connections in Pakistan, an increase of 9 million since the last report and one comparable to the rate the previous year. While access to mobile internet is growing, out of 165 million cellular subscribers, only 76 million—less than half—have third- or fourth-generation (3G or 4G) technology for mobile networks."
- "In 2020, the social media management platform Hootsuite report put internet penetration at 35 percent, amounting to 76.38 million users."
- "The digital divide between men and women in Pakistan is among the highest in the world as a result of religious, social, and cultural restrictions on women owning devices."

The World Internet Stats' estimate of 32.4% means that around 140 million people do not have Internet access. Also, Pakistan has one of the highest [gender gaps](#) in terms of mobile phone usage in the world (Tribune, 23 November 2016). In July 2020, the Supreme Court issued regulations for [social media](#) and video portals to prevent them from slandering the courts, the army and the government, and instigated a nation-wide advertising campaign requiring portals to alert the Telecommunications authority of illegal content (UCA News, 26 July 2020). Pakistan is planning to implement a very [strict internet law](#), according to which the ruling authority PTA would have the power to shutdown an entire online system, leading observers to call the plan "draconian" (Reuters, 19 November 2020).

According to a [2020 report](#), 50% of Pakistani women are mobile phone owners compared to 81% of men (GSMA, 2020, "The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2020" p.11). 19% of women are internet users, compared to 37% of men. This reflects women's' restricted access to both information and community networks.

## Security situation

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 works with 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 immense social and economic challenges for an already struggling country. Pakistan has also been instrumental in getting the intra-Afghan peace talks underway, which finally started after a long delay in September 2020 (see WWR Country Dossier Afghanistan, November 2020).

Given that several radical Islamic groups fielded candidates in the recent elections and that this led observers to claim that mainstream politics have radicalized as a result, it seems fair to say that the army is interested in extending its policy of distinguishing good and bad jihadists into national politics as well. The army does [act against](#) insurgent groups affiliated with the Islamic State group (IS) (RFE/RL, 4 January 2016) which observers say has a [growing presence](#) in Pakistan (Jamestown, 4 February 2016), as illustrated by a suicide attack on election day in July 2018. 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 Khorasan, but also Pakistan's own groups like *Lashkar-e-Taiba*, *Jaish-e-Mohammed* and others.

The simmering conflict between Pakistan and India over Punjab came briefly to the boil in February 2019, as already mentioned under "Recent History". India's decision to put Jammu and Kashmir under direct rule of Delhi in August 2019 caused a lot 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 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. However, in May 2018, the government decided to [merge](#) the FATA with neighboring [Khyber](#) Pakhtunkhwa Province (KP) (UCA News, 28 June 2018 and 23 January 2018). A regional election [took place](#) in July 2019, but it may be that this was just another ineffective attempt by the government to get a firmer grip on this unruly province (AsiaNews, 22 July 2019). It is already clear, however, that this decision was taken due to public pressure and comes [fraught with challenges](#) (ICG, 20 August 2018). 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. Its most high-profile attack was aimed at the Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi on 29 June 2020 (Jamestown, 30 July 2020).

Christians suffer from the volatile security situation and the high level of violence as does the wider society. 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, which is more interested in appeasing local strongmen and keeping peace than in implementing the law and protecting minorities. Courts - at least the higher ones - have a slightly better track record in this, however, when they are finally in a position to make a ruling, Christians have often languished for years in prison before rulings are made and it is then often too late to bring change to a situation.

Against this backdrop of extreme violence towards Christians, daily life is a challenge for both men and women. If identified, Christian convert men might be accused of blasphemy, beaten or killed. There are also reports of Christian boys being subject to sexual abuse. Women and girls too, face grave threats. According to a survey carried out by Thomson Reuters Foundation, Pakistan is the [sixth most dangerous country](#) in the world to be a woman (Thomson Reuters, “The world’s most dangerous countries for women”). The danger increases for Christian women who are known to be targeted for abduction, beatings, rape, trafficking (usually into China), [forced conversion and forced marriage](#), particularly in Punjab Province (MSP, 2014, “Forced Marriages and Forced Conversions in the Christian Community of Pakistan”). As noted in reports by [CREID](#), 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 (CREID, 2 Sep 2020, “Invisible Targets of Hatred: Socioeconomically Excluded Women from Religious Minority Background” p.55).

## Trends analysis

### 1. The government does not dare to challenge the radical groups

While the PTI government actively opposed some radical and violent groups who demonstrated against the acquittal of Asia Bibi and her finally leaving the country in May 2019, the COVID-19 crisis has once again made it clear that this was a highly exceptional action and that the default option for dealing with radical religious groups (who are able to mobilize millions for street demonstrations) is appeasement. While provinces had already announced their own lockdowns to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the federal government followed only belatedly and reluctantly. And while all around the world, religious meetings for worship were temporarily banned and moved online, Pakistan's government gave in to the pressure of Muslim leaders and did not stop religious gatherings, making the pandemic response far less effective, especially considering that large meetings (up to 5 digit numbers) were also not banned. With Prime Minister Khan also continuing to receive radical Islamic clerics in his private residence, [religious minorities](#) see a continual gap between rhetoric and reality (AP, 16 July 2020).

In 2017, the former government announced a new focus on combatting blasphemy occurring in social media blogs (World Watch Monitor - WWM, 17 March 2017). 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. However, Imran Khan publicly defended the blasphemy laws, showing where the country may be heading in the next few years. Although he has shown firmness against one particular radical Islamic group, there are countless others and even a ban will only make them re-organize, re-brand and re-emerge.

### 2. Political stability remains allusive

Instability occurred when Prime Minister Sharif was ousted in July 2017, but even more so when radical Islamic groups and parties like TLP set up their city blockades. Although not elected, they enjoy a disproportionately high influence in society and politics. (This was particularly evident in November 2020, when the TLP - by merely threatening city blockades - managed to push the

government into [boycotting](#) French products and to push parliament into discussing the expulsion of the French ambassador within three months / Reuters, 17 November 2020.) But instability is faced by the PTI government of Prime Minister Khan as well and the already difficult situation was made even more complicated by the arrival of the COVID-19 outbreak.

However, some things do not seem to change: As the latest budget plan revealed, the army is to enjoy a budget increase of more than 11%, which dwarfs the country's health budget, even when taken together with contributions from the provinces (Foreign Policy, 8 July 2020). This shows that the army is firmly in charge and that the real focus of power in Pakistan does not lie within the government. That PM Khan called Osama bin Laden a "martyr" in a televised session of parliament in June 2020 may be seen as an effort of further appeasement towards radical Islamic groups, but does not add to political stability (RFE/RL, 25 June 2020). As one observer put it: Even though the "minus one" narrative (PTI government without Khan) gains traction, the army sees a lack of alternatives and the PTI would almost certainly unravel (The Diplomat, 8 July 2020). At the same time, Pakistan feels bound by its growing economic dependence on China and tries to suppress all unfavorable reports, even when human trafficking of its own citizens is concerned (AP, 7 December 2019). It remains to be seen if the way the opposition openly blamed the army for the country's current crisis will change anything or if this was just an attempt to challenge a seemingly untouchable system. The odds seem to be against the protesters and more in favor of the government which is still backed by the security forces (Foreign Policy, 27 October 2020).

### **3. Minorities struggling for adequate representation**

Apart from all the challenges coming from the dire security situation and political instability, Christian and other minorities also struggle for adequate political and societal representation. The fact that the statistics for religious affiliation of the latest census have not yet been released, three years after the census took place, shows how sensitive these numbers are; they could support religious minorities in their fight for political representation (WWM, 24 November 2017). These numbers are highly political and even the ones already released have been strongly contested for various reasons by federal and provincial politicians, the opposition and religious groups alike. While Pakistan's newly established National Commission for Minorities sounds good at first sight, although it took the government six years to heed to a Supreme Court judgment, human rights groups have called it "a sham" (UCA News, 23 April 2020). To what extent the Senate's Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions (set up in November 2019) can do anything against this ubiquitous problem remains to be seen (The News, 28 November 2019). The fact that the chairman of the Senate-appointed fact-finding team on forced conversions claimed in October 2020 that he could find no evidence for forced conversions on the part of Hindu and Christian girls, is a reflection of the prevailing mindset, not just in politics, but also in wider society too (UCA News, 23 October 2020).

Finally, there is a further development worth noting here (reported by Dawn on 4 July 2018): The [proportion of voters from religious minorities](#) is growing faster than the proportion of Muslim voters. Hindus make up the largest minority group, but proportionally, the number of voters from the Christian community (who make up the second-largest minority group) grew

even faster - by almost one third – to 1.64 million. Even though these numbers only show registered voters and do not correspond to any growing political representation, they are still surprising. But proper political representation still has a long way to go.

## External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Pakistan country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12965779>
- Recent history: innings - <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/imran-khans-first-year-at-bat/>
- Recent history: demanded the end - <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistani-opposition-alliance-holds-rally-to-demand-khan-s-resignation/30900352.html?itflags=mailer>
- Political and legal landscape: links with Islamic militant groups - <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/why-imran-khan-acknowledged-pakistans-role-in-training-jihadists/>
- Political and legal landscape: "crackdown" - <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/can-pakistan-bring-tehreek-e-labbaik-to-justice/>
- Political and legal landscape: released from protective custody - <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-balsphemy/pakistan-opponents-of-death-row-christians-blasphemy-acquittal-get-bail-idUSKCN1SL04D>
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## WWL 2021: 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.org, 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 the strongly increasing 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	1,120,000	27.6
Protestant	2,520,000	62.2
Independent	551,000	13.6
Unaffiliated	20,500	0.5
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-159,000	-3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,052,500</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	1,000,000	24.7
Renewalist movement	900,000	22.2

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

**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, which is 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.

## External Links - Church information

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# WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Pakistan

## Reporting period

01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

## Position on the World Watch List

Pakistan: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	88	5
WWL 2020	88	5
WWL 2019	87	5
WWL 2018	86	5
WWL 2017	88	4

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

The basically unchanged very high and extremely high scores for pressure in the individual spheres of life confirm the fact that Pakistan remains 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, too. (Very few WWL countries ever achieve maximum score in this category.) Although since the Quetta attacks in December 2017, there have been no major attacks against churches or gatherings of Christians, Pakistan continues to score the maximum for killings and attacks

against church buildings. A particularly severe mob attack against Christians occurred in Mozang Nawababad in Punjab in June 2020. The country's notorious blasphemy laws continue to claim their victims as well; whoever plays even with the thought of changing those laws, plays with their life.

## Persecution engines

Pakistan: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Strong
Clan oppression	CO	Not at all
Christian Denominational protectionism	CDP	Very weak
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 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*. The Christian community feels increasingly trapped between these radical groups, the Islamic culture of Pakistani society and a government appeasing these groups. There are politicians, judges and religious leaders who are considering (or even advocating for) an amendment to the country's notorious blasphemy laws. However, all such well-meaning attempts 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.

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.

Banned radical Islamic groups do not simply dissolve into nothing; in most cases they simply re-brand and build charity fronts or [go online](#) (AP News, 11 July 2017). Or, as far as elections are concerned, they simply join other existing radical parties, if the ones they had chosen or founded are banned from participating. They 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 almost one third even below 14 years of age) and so there is a great need for the state to be able to offer this younger generation good future prospects, especially at the time of crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, which has dealt the economy a strong blow.

While life expectancy is not very high at 67.1 years, the total fertility rate stands at 2.62. Although these figures are changing 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 approximately 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.

Pakistan suffers from ethnic fragmentation, not only in society but also in the country's administration. Baluchistan 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, this engine is blended with *Islamic oppression*.

#### **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. The fact that President Nawaz Sharif was ousted and finally [sentenced to 10 years imprisonment](#) by the Supreme Court due to corruption (revealed through

the Panama Papers), shows that corruption is by no means limited to the army (BBC News, 6 July 2017). He is now one of the leaders of the opposition, based in London, but attempting to challenge the government, corruption and the army, may be over-optimistic.

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.

### 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 Pakistan politics 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. 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 July 2018; he has a track record of neglecting and ignoring the plights of (religious) minorities and of wooing certain radical groups. 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. 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 impunity.

## Drivers of persecution

Pakistan: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	STRONG	-	VERY WEAK	-	-	VERY STRONG	STRONG
Government officials	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	Strong	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Medium	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	Medium	Medium

<b>Pakistan: Drivers of Persecution</b>	<b>IO</b>	<b>RN</b>	<b>ERH</b>	<b>CO</b>	<b>CDP</b>	<b>CPCO</b>	<b>SI</b>	<b>DPA</b>	<b>OCC</b>
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	Medium	-
Ideological pressure groups	Very strong	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	-	-
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	Medium
One's own (extended) family	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	-	Medium
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	Medium	Very strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	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. 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. (Lower) courts also frequently allow forced conversions and marriages of minor girls.
- **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 in influence and are expanding due to being courted by political parties, the army and the government. Some are even forming their own political parties. The army continues to follow a policy of distinguishing between good Taliban and bad Taliban, which is copied by the government. As long as this does not change, radical Islamic groups will increase their 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). 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 better protection for minorities.
- **Extended family (Very strong):** Christians with a Muslim background are facing all these 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 (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.
- **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".

#### **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 para-military 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. 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 double vulnerability.
- **Multilateral organizations and embassies (Medium):** In 2017, then Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan called a meeting of ambassadors from Muslim country embassies in Islamabad in order to discuss and tackle the issue of blasphemy on social media as a united *ummah*. Also, Pakistan is the only nuclear powered Islamic country in the world, so other Islamic nations are keen to have good relations with the country's leaders. Indeed, the Islamization of Pakistan is as much due to external influence as internal desire. This explains why there is a move within the government to align with Saudi Arabia and Turkey, for instance, who are in opposition to each other but are happy to work with Pakistan.

#### 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. 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 para-military 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.



## Map of country



### Areas where Christians face most difficulties

While there are many political hotspots in Pakistan, particular hotspots of rights violations for 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.

### 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, but there is only a small number of them.

### Historical Christian communities:

The Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church 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.

### Converts to Christianity:

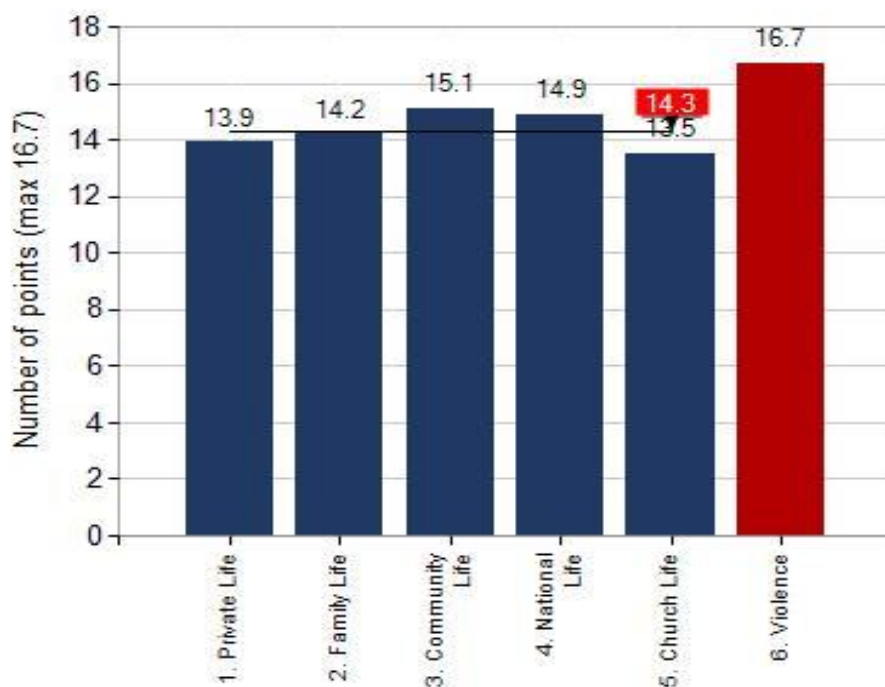
Christians with a Muslim background suffer the brunt of religious freedom violations both from radical Islamic groups (who see them as apostates) and from families, friends and neighbors who see conversion as a shameful act of betrayal to family and community. There is also a small community of converts 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.

## The Persecution pattern

WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern for Pakistan



The WWL 2021 Persecution pattern for Pakistan shows:

- Overall, the pressure on Christians in Pakistan is at an extreme level with the average pressure remaining at 14.3 points in WWL 2021 (the same as in WWL 2020).

- Pressure stayed the same in the *National sphere* (extreme level) and decreased very slightly in the *Church sphere* (very high level), 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 remains at an extreme level in the *Private, Family and Community 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, even more so with a government struggling to keep in control, not least due to the COVID-19 crisis.
- 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 attacks in the headlines, the WWL 2021 reporting period has seen killings of Christians, a large-scale attack against a Christian community in Punjab and the continuing abduction of women and girls, rape, forced marriages, evictions from homes and displacements in-country and abroad.

## 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 2021 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: <http://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 blasphemy laws. Any such discussion could attract a religiously motivated attack against them, their community and their church.

**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.). (3.75 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 internet and social media are watched by both governmental and non-governmental watchdogs and that is why many Christians avoid expressing their faith by exercising self-censorship.

**Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 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. Additionally, Christians often face damage to their personal property where they display Christian symbols, e.g. on cars etc. Reports of Christians wearing a cross being spat at and targeted aggressively in the streets, in traffic or at the work-place, are indicators that the situation is becoming more difficult.

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

While expatriate Christians can basically have 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 advertising and reaching out to Muslims, even if it is only for discussion. Books, especially with an apologetic content, can be declared anti-State and anti-Muslim and owning them punished. For converts, it is very risky to openly possess any Christian materials.

## Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

**Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (4.00 points)**

In small towns 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. 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. A detailed [report](#) about what children and youth experience was published by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in March 2019. In the WWL 2021 reporting period, the government required that schools incorporate more Sharia lessons into the curriculum.

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

At school, Christian children 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. As the IRF Report 2019 of the US State Department noted on page

24: "Religious minority community members stated public schools gave Muslim students bonus grade points for memorizing the Quran, but there were no analogous opportunities for extra academic credit available for religious minority students." Such a "*hafiz quran*" is given 20 extra points for admission into the next academic level.

**Block 2.6: Christian couples have been hindered in adopting children or serving as foster parents because of their faith. (3.50 points)**

Generally speaking, in Pakistan there is no formal adoption. There is no law regulating adoption; the only legal form is becoming someone's 'ward' which is not exactly adoption. If a couple informally adopts a child, the expectation is that the child should follow the religion of the real parents, and if that is unknown, the default is Islam. Christians can only adopt or become wards by using a Christian adoption institution which are monitored to ensure they are not giving away children of non-Christian background. The adoption of Christian children by non-Christians is still the exception, but it does occur.

**Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.50 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 in their beliefs, within certain limits and with the assistance of the church.

## 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)**

Christians are monitored by the state, but increasingly by non-state actors as well. As the monitoring is ubiquitous and institutionalized, Christians regularly inform the state authorities (e.g. the police) about their gatherings, in order to deflect attacks. This is a two-edged sword: It gives protection but adds monitoring as well and can also make Christians prone to having to pay bribes as they are seen as being connected with the West.

**Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (4.00 points)**

During the COVID-19 crisis, there was a campaign by Islamists to force conversions using food rations, which would be given to Christians who recited the Islamic creed. (Many young people did do this, while others are known to have starved to death or committed suicide.) Many videos of these conversions were used to encourage the majority to do the same. Before the pandemic, even expatriates reported that they had been called by the local '*panchayat*' (village council) to explain why they believe in Christ and to be compelled into accepting Islam. This is even more so the case for Pakistani Christians and converts.

**Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.75 points)**

Christians are associated with being unclean or "impure" and so their use of shared facilities is thought to defile Muslims, a [heritage of the caste system](#) haunting many Christians in Pakistan (WWL, 1 November 2018). Christians are discriminated against daily in many other ways too. One extreme illustration is the Christian killed by a (future) neighbor, only because he had bought a house in a Muslim neighborhood (see Violence section), the mindset, however, is found much more often and is expressed in countless every-day discriminations.

**Block 3.10: Christians have been discriminated against in public or private employment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)**

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 majority of Christians work as 'day labourers' many earning less than a dollar a day. In a (post-)pandemic economy they face almost insurmountable hurdles to make ends meet.

## 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. The current Prime Minister, Imran Khan, 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.

**Block 4.5: Christians have been discriminated against when engaging with the authorities (local administration, government, army, etc.) for faith-related reasons. (4.00 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, although Christians continue to serve in these areas.

**Block 4.8: Christians have been hindered in expressing their views or opinions in public. (4.00 points)**

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. As the US State Department's IRF 2019 Report stated on pages 27/28: "According to several human rights activists, the most notable area of inaction was the continued failure to establish an empowered National Commission for Minorities. Officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony and the Ministry of Human Rights stated they were committed to establishing such a commission as directed by the Supreme Court. Some civil society groups attributed lack of progress to a belief within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony that such a commission was not necessary due to the existence of its own interfaith harmony commission." In the WWL 2021 reporting period, the Commission was finally set up in May 2020 (after a delay of after six years). It includes three members from the Christian minority. However, its tasks and influence are unclear and one of its arguably most important fields of work - helping to keep girls from religious minorities safe from abductions and forced conversion/marriage - is seen by many politicians as being unnecessary, as the quote of the Pakistani senator referred to above shows. Overall, Christians have been hindered in expressing their views, and where they have been able to speak out, their views have been widely ignored.

**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. The cases in 2020 of Asif Pervaiz and [David Masih](#) show that accusations and sentences for alleged blasphemy continue (USCIRF, David Masih, accessed 26 November 2020). According to a lawyer in the country, there are currently 25 Christian defendants in 22 blasphemy cases at various levels in the judicial process in Pakistan. Occasionally, there have been acquittals as well, as in the case of Sawan Masih (although this was after the reporting period of WWL 2021).

## 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 no religion).



**Block 5.8: Christian preaching, teaching and/or published materials have been monitored. (4.00 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 acting as guards, they also listen, monitor and report. All materials are checked by churches for content which could be perceived as blasphemous, many churches are forced to only share books and literature internally. Bibles are not provided by churches to the general public. The government of Punjab passed a bill in July 2020 called "Punjab Tahafuz Bunyad e Islam bill" by which all local, national, and international publications would be monitored and religious books and literature could be more easily banned.

**Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (4.00 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 persecution, discrimination and intolerance realize very well that harming a church leader means harming the church 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, pastoral care and health care.

**Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)**

Advocacy for the oppressed minorities is highly dangerous as it challenges the government's narrative of bringing 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.

**Block 5.5: Churches have been hindered from organizing Christian activities outside church buildings. (3.75 points)**

In most cases, churches simply do not dare to organize activities outside their secure church compounds, especially as almost all such activity could be perceived as outreach. Getting permission for any event outside is a very difficult and long process. Church activities are regularly watched. Security is provided for many churches by the authorities, but these very security personnel monitor what is going on in the churches and make regular detailed reports. It is suspected that such intelligence is being passed on to radical Islamic organizations and militants. Cases have been reported in the past of security personnel turning militant and



attacking local church leaders. Church buildings frequently resemble fortresses with high walls and narrow gates. Despite the fact that the state has promised to protect churches, over the years there have been several church attacks with dozens of victims, although the last major suicide attack against a church was in 2017.

## 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. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure. The symbol “x” denotes a known number which cannot be published due to security considerations.*

<b>Pakistan: Violence Block question</b>	<b>WWL 2021</b>	<b>WWL 2020</b>
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	307	20
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	68	58
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	100	14
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?	62	57
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	100	100
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	100	31
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	1000	100

Pakistan: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	1000	1000
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	100
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	100
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100	220
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	20	70

The score for violence against Christians in Pakistan has been the maximum possible since WWL 2016. This may be surprising as there were no high-profile 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.

- **Christians killed:** A widely reported killing has been the one of Nadeem Joseph, who was killed because he bought a house in a Muslim neighborhood in Peshawar (Fides, 2 July 2020), but there have been several other killings. The COVID-19 crisis has brought with it a much broader pattern. This is what one country expert stated:

"This year the numbers were very hard to come by. They do not include the 8 families reported to have committed suicide when they were refused rations in the height of the COVID-19 supply-chain breakdown in which people across the country faced starvation. These families made it known that their suicide would be because they were ignored in food ration distributions. They also do not include the (approximately) 120 incidents reported in which Christians were killed on their way to the quarantine centers as the centers were under-resourced and Christians were considered 'dispensable' and a 'burden'. The numbers also do not include the 100s of families who refused to report an infected family member for fear of being killed by the center authorities. These family members died and passed on the virus to others, infecting and putting at risk other lives. These figures also do not account for the more than 200 reported Christian nurses who contracted COVID-19 (with severe symptoms) and died as a result of having been assigned to COVID wards. 'Christian nurses are being assigned the death wards as we call them' said one nurse. 'We are dispensable' she said."

- **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 are [Huma Younus](#) (Asia News, 17 January 2020) and [Maira Shahbaz](#) (UK Parliament, 23 September 2020) and - outside the reporting period - [Arzoo Raja](#) (Dawn, 13 November 2020).
- **Christians arrested:** Christians are more frequently arrested and charged than acquitted and although not all situations are linked with blasphemy accusations, the examples given under 4.13 above give a clear picture.
- **Churches attacked:** Attacks on churches take place frequently, although the buildings are not always destroyed or have to be closed. However, according to interviews with many pastors, there have been frequent fires laid, windows broken, property damaged and other minor harassments such as power-cuts and water restrictions targeting churches. Although there have been no major (bomb) attacks against church buildings, these smaller "every day attacks" against churches and cemeteries are frequent.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** In blasphemy cases, the homes of Christians are frequently attacked, forcing them and their families to go into hiding. There has also been an attack against the Christian village of Mozang Nawababad on 7 June 2020, destroying the whole village and evicting more than 100 Christians.

## 5 Year trends

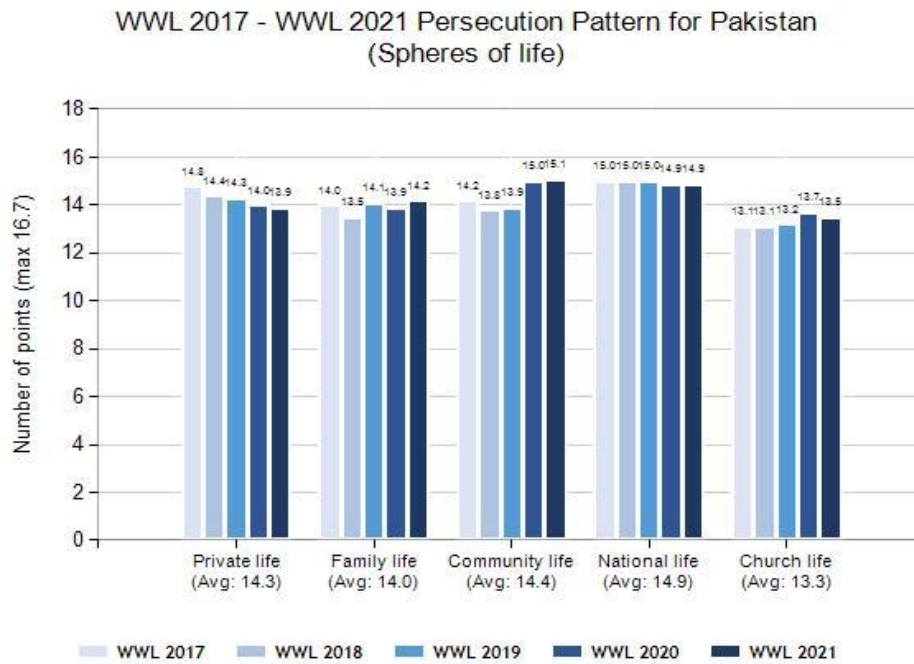
The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

### 5 Year trends: Average pressure

Pakistan: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	14.3
2020	14.3
2019	14.1
2018	14.0
2017	14.2

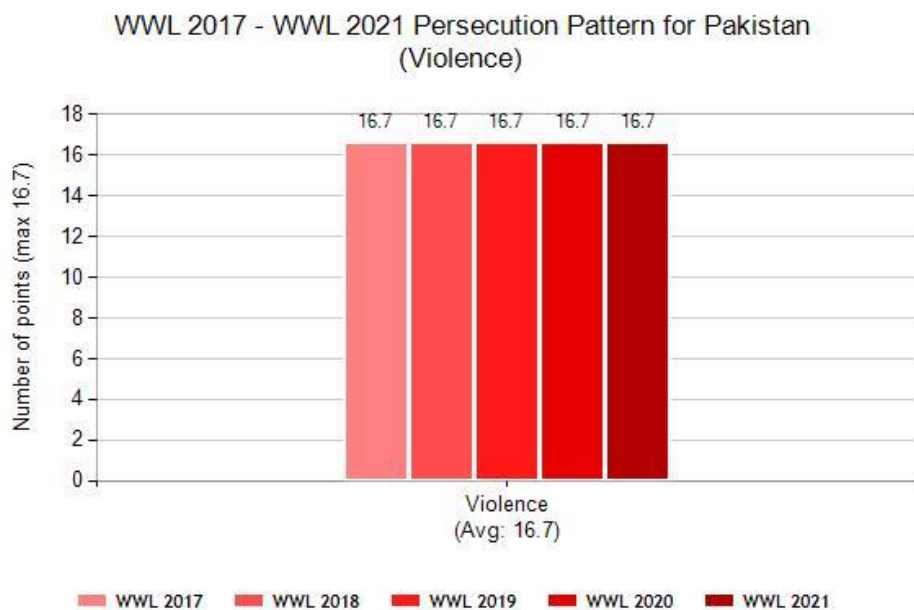
The average pressure on Christians in Pakistan is at an extreme level and has reached more than 14 points for five years in a row.

## 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.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Forced marriage
Targeted Seduction
Trafficking
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

Christian (and Hindu) girls and young women are particularly vulnerable in Pakistan. Christians report that their girls are often abducted, raped, forced to ‘marry’ their abductor, and converted by force. The ‘marriage’ is then used as a legal shelter acting as an exemption with regard to the young person’s status as a minor. In addition, such ‘marriages’ and ‘conversions’ are used to place the underage girls beyond other means of legal recourse available to their parents. This is a widely utilized and strategically targeted Pressure Point against minority faith communities. According to an expert the goal is: “to dishonor the Christian community, the Christian individual and to weaken the Church.” In addition to abduction, reports indicate that Christian girls have been seduced as a means of converting them to Islam.

According to a [report](#) by the Movement for Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan, at least 1,000 girls belonging to Christian and Hindu communities are forced to marry Muslim men every year (Human Rights Watch, Pakistan: Events of 2018). Victims are normally between the ages of 12 and 15, such as recent victims [Maira](#) (Zenit, 30 July 2020) and – outside the WWL 2021 reporting period - [Arzoo](#) (BBC News, 3 November 2020).

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, and the authorities do not take any action. This is particularly the case for young Christian girls in Punjab province. Consequently, parents of victimized women and girls face fierce legal battles, and many feel it is pointless to take legal action. Even when a case comes to the courts, girls may be forced to testify that they converted voluntarily and face threats against them and their families. Further setting the stage for impunity of violence against Christian women is that, in general, a woman's testimony in court does not carry the same weight as a man's.

Once married, a woman has little protection against those who would punish her for maintaining her chosen religion. She may be physically beaten or even the victim of so-called 'honor killings.' There have also been reports of the targeted trafficking of Christian girls for both bonded labor, where they are chained to their workplace, and a 'prostitution ring' smuggling Christian girls into China.

Being part of a Christian family does not protect women from religious freedom violations, either. She may be subject to false charges for breaking blasphemy laws, beaten and/or sexually harassed.

## Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Abduction
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Economic harassment via fines
False charges
Imprisonment by government
Trafficking
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological

Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

Christian men face many forms of violence in Pakistan. Blasphemy laws continue to provide the structure for much of the rights violations of Christian men in Pakistan. There are hundreds of cases against them purporting blasphemy that all too often have their foundation in a tenancy or work dispute, or even a cricket match rivalry. Christian men live in constant fear of blasphemy allegations, false charges, destruction of their property, arrest, imprisonment, beatings, torture and execution. Exemplifying the dangers, in early 2020 a young Christian man died following a severe beating after his Muslim landowner accused him of polluting the water of his tube well. As an expert shares, these types of violations come from a culture of 'Christo-phobia' where men pay the price simply for being Christian in an Islamic world.

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, including young Christians.

Christian men and boys are often compelled to take lower status jobs and are considered impure. They are often referred to as "*Chura*", a derogatory word meaning "filthy" and which is used for road sweepers or sewage cleaners. Whereas there is also a Christian middle class and not all hold lower status jobs, 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 Christian men and boys who are trapped in cycles of bonded labor, such as in brick-kiln factories.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

According to the [US State Department's IRF 2019 report](#) (pages 72-79):

- "The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion and requires all provisions of the law to be consistent with Islam. The constitution states, 'Subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion.' It also states, 'A person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis), is a non-Muslim.' ... Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders continued to state they were affected by discriminatory and ambiguous legislation and court judgments that denied them basic rights, including a 2018 Islamabad High Court judgment that some government agencies used to deny national identification cards to Ahmadi Muslims. Throughout the year, some government officials and politicians engaged in anti-Ahmadi rhetoric and attended events that Ahmadi Muslims said incited violence against members of their community."



- “Armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government as extremist, as well as groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments, continued to stage attacks targeting Shia Muslims, including the predominantly Shia Hazara community. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), however, the number of sectarian attacks and killings by armed groups decreased compared with previous years, corresponding with a continued overall decline in terrorist attacks. On April 12, a bomb attack in Quetta, Balochistan, targeting Shia Hazaras killed 21 persons, including eight Hazaras. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and the Islamic State (ISIS) each claimed responsibility. On May 7, terrorists affiliated with Hizbul Ahrar, a splinter group of TTP, attacked police stationed outside the Data Darbar Shrine in Lahore, the largest Sufi shrine in South Asia, killing nine and wounding 24.”
- “Throughout the year, unidentified individuals targeted and killed Shia Muslims, including ethnic Hazaras, who are largely Shia, and Ahmadi Muslims in attacks believed to be religiously motivated. The attackers’ relationship to organized terrorist groups was often unclear.”
- “NGOs expressed concern about what they stated was an increasing frequency of attempts to kidnap, forcibly convert, and forcibly marry young women from religious minority communities, especially young Hindu and Christian women. There also continued to be reports of attacks on holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols of Hindu, Christian, and Ahmadiyya minorities.”

Further information:

The situation of other religious minorities did not improve since Imran Khan took over as Prime Minister in 2018, as attacks, killings and blasphemy cases [continued unabated](#) (The Diplomat, 16 March 2020). Indeed, Humans Rights Watch (HRW) reported a [surge in targeted killings of Ahmadis](#) since July 2020 (HRW, 26 November 2020). In October and November 2020 (outside the reporting period of WWL 2021), three [Hindu temples](#) have also been attacked (UCA News, 4 November 2020).

The 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.

As stated in the US State Department's IRF 2019 Report on page 9: "The constitution prohibits discriminatory admission based on religious affiliation to any governmental educational institution. According to regulations, the only factors affecting admission to government schools are students' grades and home provinces; however, students must declare their religious affiliation on application forms. This declaration is also required for private educational institutions, including universities. Students who identify themselves as Muslims must declare

in writing they believe the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet. Non-Muslims are required to have the head of their local religious communities verify their religious affiliation. There is no provision in the law for atheists."

A [report](#) published in June 2019 by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) highlighted again that not just Christian girls and women suffer from abductions and forced conversions, following the lack of interest by authorities and courts, but Hindu girls as well (HRCP, 7 August 2019). And while a lot about these abductions, forced conversions and marriages is still in the dark and has to be uncovered, not being helped by the fact that Pakistani courts are [often complicit](#) in these cases, it becomes increasingly clear that these are not just isolated incidents (Forbes, 27 September 2020).

On a more positive note, Pakistan had opened the [corridor of Kartarpur](#), paving the way for pilgrimages from India to one of the most important holy sites of the Sikh minority (Indian Express, 16 September 2019). 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](#) 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:**

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". This competition is beginning to affect politics too, especially as some extremist groups are being wooed by politicians. This will most likely increase as the intra-Afghan peace talks proceed, in which Pakistan is strongly involved and interested. The Taliban (co-)governing Afghanistan will most likely give the group additional weight, credibility and funds and may add to their importance for Pakistan's politics as well.

Striving for a purer Islamic identity (as carried out by radical Islamic groups) includes more violations for Christians and the removal of as many of their rights as possible at a time when the government is not particularly interested in granting rights to minorities, as can be seen in the rather limited powers of the new National Minorities Council and the findings of the Commission on Forced Conversions. This in turn fits well into wider society's negative attitude towards Christians. *Islamic oppression* will thus most likely remain strong in Pakistan.

### **Organized corruption and crime:**

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

### Dictatorial paranoia:

Whereas the old political parties are no longer in power and the influential political families find themselves in the opposition role, this Persecution engine will not become weaker, especially not after the opposition challenged the government and the army more or less directly. Pakistan's politicians have a track record for clinging to power and causing religious minorities to suffer and be used as scapegoats. Prime Minister Imran Khan does not seem to be an exception, when he sees himself under pressure from opposition parties.

Additionally, there are external challenges. The fact that Gilgit-Baltistan will be granted [provincial status](#) seems to be aimed against arch-nemesis India and points to increased internal and external challenges (Geo TV, 1 November 2020). This in turn is fertile ground for even more *Dictatorial paranoia*. It will be especially interesting how the army (as one of the main drivers of this engine) reacts to being openly challenged by the opposition.

### External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines description: go online - <https://www.apnews.com/8ef62cab253941ec8169427bdac62886/Many-organizations-banned-in-Pakistan-thrive-online>
- Persecution engines description: sentenced to 10 years imprisonment - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-44737793>
- Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere: report - <http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/9422-2/>
- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: heritage of the caste system - <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/11/untouchable-caste-identity-haunts-pakistani-christians-like-asia-bibi/>
- Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere: David Masih - <https://www.uscirf.gov/david-masih>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Huma Younus - <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/A-chorus-of-voices-call-for-the-liberation-of-Huma-Younus,-abducted-three-months-ago-49060.html>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: report - <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/pakistan>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Arzoo - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-54789714>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Maira - <https://zenit.org/2020/07/30/breakthrough-in-case-of-abducted-pakistani-girl/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department's IRF 2019 report - <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2019USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: continued unabated - <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/religious-minorities-in-naya-pakistan/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: surge in targeted killings of Ahmadis - <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/26/pakistan-surge-targeted-killings-ahmadis>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: Hindu temples - <https://www.ucanews.com/news/third-hindu-temple-vandalized-in-pakistan-in-three-weeks/90142>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: report - [http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ALARM\\_Final-report.pdf](http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ALARM_Final-report.pdf)
- Persecution of other religious minorities: often complicit - <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2020/09/27/the-disappearing-religious-minority-women-and-girls-in-pakistan/#3007f36820f2>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: corridor of Kartarpur - <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/kartarpur-corridor-to-open-for-indian-pilgrims-on-november-9-pakistan-6000558/>

- Persecution of other religious minorities: criminal charges - <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-rare-buddha-statue-destroyed/30734848.html>
- Future outlook: provincial status - <https://www.geo.tv/latest/316272-pm-imran-khan-announces-granting-gilgit-baltistan-interim-provincial-status>

## Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Pakistan>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Pakistan>