

WORLD WATCH LIST 2025

SITUATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR CHRISTIANS

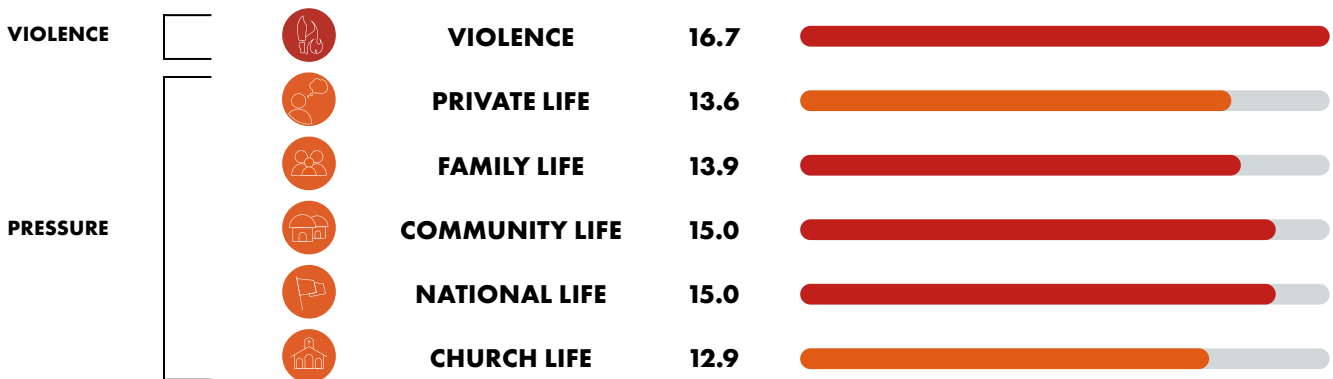
WORLD WATCH LIST NO.
8

PAKISTAN



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LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AND PRESSURE



Each of the six categories is scored out of a maximum of 16.7 points. The categories added together total 100 points (6 x 16.7 = 100).

Key findings

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has been a Muslim state since its independence in 1947. Historical churches have relative freedom but are heavily monitored and have been targeted for bomb attacks (the last large attack happened in December 2017 in Quetta). Churches more active in outreach and youth work face severe rights violations.

All Christians suffer from institutionalized discrimination; occupations seen as low and dirty are reserved for Christians by the authorities, as can be seen in job adverts. Many Christians are poor and can be victims of bonded labor. In many cases of bonded labor, victims are either forced to convert to Islam and/or are given in child marriage by their employers. Christian girls in bonded labor situations are more vulnerable to being illegally detained by their employer.

The country's notorious blasphemy laws target religious minorities (including Muslim minorities). The Jaranwala incident that destroyed 21 churches and forcibly displaced hundreds of Christians in August 2023 is an illustration of violence resulting from the blasphemy laws. The trend of use of the blasphemy law to target Christians (as well as Muslim minorities) is still increasing.

Christians with a Muslim background suffer the brunt of religious freedom violations both from radical Islamist groups (who see them as apostates) and from their families, friends and neighbors who see conversion as a shameful act of betrayal.

Quick facts

LEADER

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif

POPULATION

245,210,000

NUMBER OF CHRISTIANS

4,526,000¹

MAIN RELIGION

Islam

GOVERNMENT

Federal Parliamentary Republic



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Context

Religious Context	Number of adherents	Percentage
Christians	4,526,000	1.8
Muslims	233,815,000	95.4
Hindus	3,413,000	1.4
Others	2,568,000	1.0

Source²

Pakistan has suffered from unstable governments, with three prolonged phases of military rule, the most recent ending in 2008. The army continues to have a strong influence on politics, despite claiming otherwise. Army leaders became impatient with former Prime Minister Imran Khan trying to influence and delay military appointments (Reuters, 26 October

2021) and passed a no-confidence motion against him in April 2022. Shahbaz Sharif became the new Prime Minister, immediately facing a barrage of challenges. On 7 August 2023, Ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan was [sentenced to three years in prison](#) on charges of corruption. The 8 February 2024 elections resulted in an [inconclusive vote](#), leaving the country with unclear options for political coalitions. Just a few days after the elections PML-N and PPP cobbled together a ruling [coalition](#). The coalition formed in February 2024 is a minority government that was further weakened when the [Supreme Court ruled](#) that the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party led by the imprisoned Imran Khan could be represented in parliament. Imran Khan [openly acknowledged](#) that Pakistan has official links with Islamic militant groups. It should also be noted that the representation of Christians falls far short of this minority's need, as a Catholic bishop recently explained.

96% of the population is Muslim, of which the majority follow the Sunni tradition. According to the

¹ Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

² Others include Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian. Data source: Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024)

constitution, the right to free speech is subject to the restrictions necessary to ensure “the glory of Islam”.

Christians are victims of roughly a quarter of all blasphemy accusations despite being less than 2% of the population. [Business rivals accuse Christian men](#) of blasphemy as a means of destroying their business and reputation. Additionally, Christians and people from other minority communities typically occupy lower-status jobs and have been referred to as “Chura”, a derogatory word reserved for road sweepers or sewage cleaners meaning “filthy”.

Christians in Pakistan suffer from the volatile security situation and the high level of violence and lack the necessary channels for seeking protection. The police force is more interested in appeasing local strongmen and keeping things calm than in implementing the law and protecting minorities. Courts - at least the higher ones - have a slightly better track record in this respect. However, when they are finally in a position to judge a case, Christians have often languished in prison for years before any ruling is made.

The strong influence of Pakistan’s Islamic religious landscape is particularly [discriminatory towards women and girls of minority religions](#). Statistics reveal that over 1,000 Christian and Hindu girls, typically between 12 and 25 years, are [kidnapped, forced to convert, and married off](#) to Muslim men annually. Christian women are at [risk of kidnappings, forced conversions, and forced marriages](#). More specifically, [bride trafficking](#) along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a big problem. The report states: “Offsetting this was the fact that many of the victims belonged to the Christian community of Pakistan — less surrounded by society’s notions of honor, and less protected because they are marginalized. ... That most of the victims belonged to the poor and marginalized Christian community of Pakistan sadly made it easier for Pakistan to divert attention away from the issue without an ensuing public outcry.” As noted in a [report](#)



[by CREID](#) (2020, p.55) ideologically targeted sexual abuse is directed specifically at religious minorities, both for sexual predation but also as a ‘conquest’ to win the girl over to the majority religion.

How the situation varies by region

Since most Christians live 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.

Who is 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. Expatriate Christians face high pressure, but there is only a small number of them.

HISTORICAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The Roman Catholic Church and Church of Pakistan (Anglican Church) are examples of this category. The Church of Pakistan is an interdenominational grouping of historical churches uniting Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran and others. As the most visible churches, they increasingly face hostilities which include challenges in getting permits to meet, and abductions or forced conversions of their members. They have to put up with being controlled and monitored. Especially in the cities, buildings and plots of land owned by the historical churches can be preyed upon by developers and authorities.

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

NON-TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Evangelical, Baptist and Pentecostal groups have come under close 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.

Main sources of persecution and discrimination

ISLAMIC OPPRESSION BLENDED WITH ETHNO-RELIGIOUS HOSTILITY

Pakistan is home to dozens of radical Islamic groups. Increasingly, advisory bodies to the government are completely made up of Islamic scholars who influence the laws. Thousands of madrassas are being run without government scrutiny of how they are funded or what they are teaching. Anyone calling for reform of blasphemy laws is openly threatened by radicals who believe “infidels” deserve death. Banned radical groups often do not dissolve but rebrand, [go online](#) or merge with an existing group. Religious sentiments and resulting mob violence are easily stirred up and are targeted against religious minorities, especially Christians, as showcased in the August 2023 violence in Jaranwala. Pakistan suffers from ethnic fragmentation. Baluchistan Province and the central Sindh regions are considered beyond the reach of the state authorities. Religious minorities are seen as impure, both for religious reasons and because they do not belong to the ruling ethnic groups.

ORGANIZED CORRUPTION AND CRIME

Corruption in politics, the justice system and the military is rampant. Organized crime is a big problem in urban and tribal areas and is frequently connected to violent Islamic militancy. In Karachi, gangs, extortionists and the mafia are all part of the landscape and enjoy political patronage due to influential connections. Bonded labor is an old but still widespread form of

slavery, affecting thousands of Christians in rural areas. Laborers become trapped, unable to repay their loans due to high interest rates. They have no legal way of registering complaints. Rich landlords collude with local politicians, benefiting greatly from this system. Land-grabbing also takes place; churches are expropriated and Christians are chased away from their land.

DICTATORIAL PARANOIA

Although the current government has to contend with strong opposition from the ousted Prime Minister Khan and the masses he is able to mobilize, every government faces corruption charges, increasingly assertive radical groups and a powerful independent army, with whom it must remain on good terms. Christians easily become political pawns. They can be courted by the government and army to stay in power or discriminated against if that is beneficial. Since the army wants to please some radical groups, the targeting of Christians, while not army policy, is considered necessary collateral damage. impression of the country’s religious tolerance. These church representatives make public statements about “the freedom all Christians enjoy”, while just a small section of the Christian community enjoys a very limited level of freedom. These statements are often used to delegitimize other Christian denominations (mostly Protestant converts from a Muslim background) who do not conform to the government’s restrictions and who want to exercise their religious freedom to a greater degree.



How are men and women differently affected?

WOMEN

Reports indicate the number of Christian girls who are abducted, raped, forced to convert and “marry” their abductor is increasing, including in areas previously considered to be ‘safe.’ Such “marriages” are used to place underage girls beyond other means of legal recourse available to their parents. Many families never see their girls again, and the authorities rarely take action to bring perpetrators to justice. Christian women and girls are also trapped in cycles of debt and bonded labor, such as in brick kiln factories; within this context, they may be additionally exposed to sexual violence.

Female typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- Forced marriage
- Targeted seduction
- Trafficking
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual

MEN

Christian men live in constant fear of blasphemy allegations, destruction of property, imprisonment, beatings and execution. There are reports of Christian boys being subject to sexual abuse. Christian men are often compelled to take lower-status jobs and are considered impure. They are often referred to as “Chura”, a derogatory word meaning “filthy”. While there is also a Christian middle class and not all hold lower-status jobs, discrimination and social inferiority are ubiquitous. Men and boys might also be trapped in cycles of bonded labor.

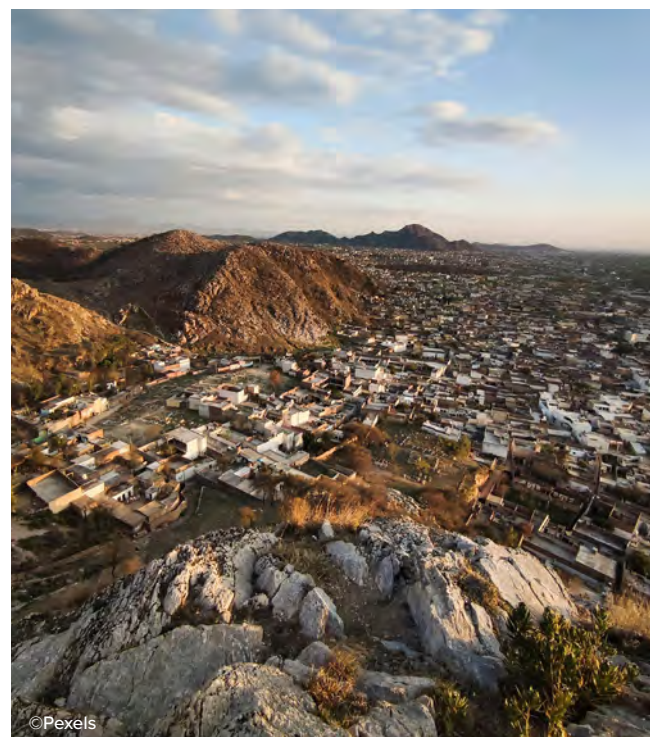
Male typical pressure points:

- Abduction
- Economic harassment via business/job/work access
- False charges
- Imprisonment by government
- Violence – death
- Violence – physical
- Violence – psychological
- Violence – sexual

WWL 5 year trend

WWL Year	Position on Open Doors World Watch List	Persecution rounded score out of 100
2025	8	87
2024	7	87
2023	7	86
2022	8	87
2021	5	88

The very high and extremely high scores for pressure in the individual spheres of life virtually stayed unchanged. This confirms the fact that Pakistan continues to be one of the countries where it is most difficult to live as a Christian. The violence score has stayed at the maximum level for many years now. Violence against Christians does not only include widely publicized attacks against the Christian community, such as in Jaranwala in August 2023, but small scale, localized but increasingly persistent killings and attacks on Christians and churches, often associated with the country’s notorious blasphemy laws, which have been expanded in scope and punishment. Christian girls continue to be particularly vulnerable to abduction, forceful conversion and marriage to older, Muslim men.



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Examples of violence in the reporting period

- **17 March 2024:** Two Christian sewage workers [died](#) while they were cleaning a sinkhole and sewerage in front of the Sapphire Marquee Wedding Hall in Faisalabad district, Punjab province.
- **13 April 2024:** A 13 year old Christian boy from Lahore was forced to swallow an unknown substance by a security guard in an attempt to [poison](#) him after he refused to be converted.

WWL Year	Christians killed	Churches or Christian buildings attacked or closed	Christians forced to marry	Christians' private property damaged or confiscated
2025	14	40	100*	1000*
2024	14	40	100*	1000*

This table includes only a few categories of faith-based violence during the reporting period - for full results see the violence section of the country's corresponding WWL Persecution Dynamics. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100* or 1000*) is given which in reality could be significantly higher. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*.*

PRIVATE LIFE

Christians avoid talking about their faith with Muslims because blasphemy laws can mean dangerous consequences. Even Facebook posts can be risky if the content is seen as challenging Islamic values. As a country expert explained: "Government agencies are policing social media and Christian pastors and parents have been warning the young people about the dangers of using social media to express their views." It is dangerous for Pakistani Christians to keep Christian materials beyond their immediate personal use as they could be suspected of evangelizing Muslims. Displaying a Christian symbol or having a Christian name can trigger discrimination or vandalism of property. Reports of Christians wearing a cross, being spat at or targeted aggressively in the street, in traffic or at a workplace, are indicators that the situation is becoming more difficult.

FAMILY LIFE

In small towns and remote villages, Christian children have to attend Islamic teaching at the local madrassa while Christian teaching is restricted to Sunday services. Christian parents will try to prevent their children from speaking about their faith since they could be pressured to "come back" to Islam. Christian parents are visited to pressure them into sending their children to Islamic events and teaching them Arabic under the pretence of bettering their grades. This confuses children and makes them vulnerable to forced conversion. At school, Christian children are often not allowed to use the same water fountain as their Muslim classmates to avoid "defiling" the

drinking water. Children are often bullied, and many are asked to clean the latrines or sweep the floor, as Christians are commonly perceived as being sweepers. This attitude also has its background in caste considerations, since the majority of Christians come from lower caste backgrounds. Some school books incite hatred against Christians. The new school curriculum further Islamizes education and educates children that adherents of other religions are inferior. This policy is harming Christian families.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Christians are monitored by the State and increasingly by non-state actors. Even expatriate Christians are called by the local *panchayat* (village council) to explain why they believe in Christ and to accept Islam. During the COVID-19 crisis, there was a campaign by radical Islamists to force conversions using food rations, which would be given to Christians who recited the Islamic creed (many young people did this, while others starved to death or committed suicide). At the same time, Christian nurses were asked to work at the forefront of infection wards. In workplaces, the pressure against Christians is often so great that they have to change jobs multiple times to avoid being made to convert to Islam. Christians are frequently forced to do menial work like sweeping or carrying water. A very [good illustration](#) is the 5% quota, which had been introduced to guarantee jobs for minorities in the government sector. Out of the total vacant posts, a huge 43% were reserved for minorities. In absolute numbers, there were more than 30,000 positions for minorities vacant at

the end of September 2021. Christians are seen as unclean, so their use of shared facilities is thought to defile Muslims, a [heritage of the caste system](#).

NATIONAL LIFE

Pakistan adopted an Islamic Constitution in 1973 and Sharia law in its civil code. The recent Islamization process began with the 1986 introduction of blasphemy laws, which affect minorities and are often used for settling personal scores. The Senate has passed a bill to [tighten](#) the country's notorious blasphemy law by (among other things) increasing the punishment from three to ten years' imprisonment. Christians are underrepresented in the political arena and their views are often ignored. Politicians deny that

it is necessary to protect religious minority girls from abductions and forced conversion/ marriage.

CHURCH LIFE

Church activities are monitored. Security guards are provided by the authorities, but they also listen, report and likely pass intelligence on to radical Islamic groups. Despite the State's promise to protect churches, there have been several attacks with dozens of victims. Church leaders are primary targets for harassment, as they are the most visible representatives of the Christian minority. Conversion from Islam to Christianity is strongly opposed, so it would be dangerous for a church to openly include converts. Advocacy for oppressed minorities is seen as a challenge to the government.

International obligations & rights violated

Pakistan has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights under 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 gang-raped (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)
- Christians cannot inherit from Muslims and have restricted access to higher education and public employment (ICCPR Art. 26)

Situation of other religious minorities

Religious minorities are extremely vulnerable.

According to the [US State Department](#): “Religious minority community representatives stated the government was inconsistent in safeguarding their members against societal discrimination and neglect, and that official discrimination against Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Ahmadi Muslims persisted to varying degrees. Ahmadis said they experienced the worst treatment” - they have to sign documents that declare the finality of the Prophet Mohammed, which goes against their faith.

According to the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Center for Social Justice (CSJ), 329 persons were accused of blasphemy during the year, of whom 75% were Muslims, 20% Ahmadi Muslims, and 3.3% Christians.”

Armed sectarian groups target Shia Muslims, including the Hazara community. There is no provision in the law for atheists, who are targeted by blasphemy laws.

Open Doors in Pakistan

Open Doors is active in Persian Gulf countries through the Hope network of partner churches.



ABOUT THIS BRIEF

- The content of this document is based on the more detailed WWL Persecution Dynamics per country published annually by World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. It may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © 2025 Open Doors International.
- All brief country profiles can be accessed under 'Advocacy resources' on the research pages of the Open Doors International website, along with the WWL Persecution Dynamics per country, accompanying Background Information per country and the latest update of WWL Methodology. These are also available at the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).
- The WWL 2025 reporting period was 01 October 2023 – 30 September 2024.

Many photos in this dossier are for illustrative purposes.

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