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LAWFARE, MOB DYNAMICS, AND SYSTEMIC EXCLUSION: AN INTEGRATED ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN PAKISTAN (2015–2025)

Nisar Ahmed
mna601@gamil.com
Sada Us Salam
sadakhan1512@gmail.com

Abstract

Between 2015 and 2025, religious minorities in Pakistan—including Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, Sikhs, and Shi'a Muslims—faced an increasingly hostile security environment as physical threats shifted from mass-casualty terrorism to localized mob violence, forced conversions, and institutional lawfare. Existing research treats blasphemy laws, terrorism, and forced conversions in isolation, leaving an empirical gap regarding how legal mechanics and majoritarian street violence operate together as a unified apparatus of coercion. Emerging cyber-facilitated extortion networks and personal dispute weaponization further demonstrate how informal vigilante power and formal statutes mutually reinforce one another. Using a qualitative document analysis of over forty primary datasets, court rulings, human rights reports (HRCP, CSJ, USCIRF), and census data, the study analyzed empirical evidence through reflexive thematic analysis supported by descriptive statistics. Findings reveal that blasphemy allegations quadrupled from 84 in 2021 to 344 in 2024, with Ahmadis facing a 200-fold statistical over-representation. Six primary themes emerged—weaponized legalism, permissive state structures, ideological reproduction, economic precarity, gendered harm, and civil society resilience—underpinned by pervasive state impunity and heightened intersectional risks for low-income minority women. Counter-terrorism operations alone cannot secure religious freedom; lasting protection requires statutory procedural safeguards against legal abuse, aggressive prosecution of mob organizers, curriculum reform, and an independent minorities commission endowed with suo motu powers.

Keywords: *Religious Minorities, Pakistan, Blasphemy Laws, Mob Violence, Ahmadis, Forced Conversion, Structural Violence, Electoral Accountability, Human Rights.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Context and Historical Precedents

On August 16, 2023, local mosque loudspeakers in Jaranwala, Punjab, broadcast accusations that two Christian brothers had desecrated the Qur'an. Within hours, thousands of mobilized men swept through the town's Christian quarter, destroying or looting at least 24 churches and over 80 residential properties (HRCP, 2023). Notably, no fatalities occurred during the attack; the primary objective of the crowd was the total symbolic and physical erasure of a minority's sacred and domestic spaces. Nine months later, in Sargodha, a mob exceeding one thousand individuals surrounded the home and shoe factory of 72-year-old Christian resident Nazir Masih following a similar allegation. Despite police presence, Masih was severely beaten and succumbed to his injuries on June 3, 2024 (HRCP, 2024). These incidents represent not isolated aberrations but the visible crest of a structural regime of violence targeting Pakistan's non-Muslim and non-majority Muslim citizens. According to the 2023 Digital Population Census, Pakistan's population of 241.49 million comprises 96.35% Muslims, with Hindus forming 1.61%, Christians 1.37%, Scheduled Castes 0.56%, and Ahmadis 0.07% (Minority Rights Group International, 2024). Although minority leaders contest these baseline figures—arguing that Christians alone constitute 3% to 4% of the populace (Herald Malaysia, 2024)—even official statistics depict communities demographically incapable of exercising electoral leverage or self-defense against majoritarian aggression.

The historical trajectory of minority exclusion in Pakistan traces a path from foundational secular commitments to state-sanctioned Islamization. Founding father Muhammad Ali

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Jinnah's address of August 11, 1947, articulated a secular state where religion would hold no bearing on civic status. However, the passage of the Objective Resolution in 1949, followed by the Second Constitutional Amendment of 1974 (which legislatively declared Ahmadis non-Muslims) and General Zia-ul-Haq's penal additions in the 1980s (Sections 295-B, 295-C, and 298-A/B/C), institutionalized a legal architecture that criminalized minority religious expression (Nelson, 2011; Patras, 2024; Saeed, 2017; Shah et al., 2024; Wohab, 2023).

1.2 Problem Statement

While scholarly literature extensively documents the legal origins of discrimination in the 1970s and 1980s, existing research fails to offer an integrated empirical account of the decade between 2015 and 2025. This decade exhibits four distinct structural shifts: (1) a transition in physical threat from mass-casualty terrorism against worshippers to localized, digitally facilitated mob lynchings; (2) an unprecedented expansion of statutory lawfare, with blasphemy accusations multiplying four-fold between 2021 and 2024; (3) the emergence of commercialized 'blasphemy business' networks utilizing extortion; and (4) complete judicial impunity, underscored by the acquittal of historic mob perpetrators. Previous scholarship treats terrorism, blasphemy, forced conversions, and legal exclusion as disconnected phenomena (Alam, 2022; Salam, 2025). This article bridges these gaps by providing an empirical, data-led framework linking statutory lawfare, majoritarian street power, and judicial outcomes into a single operational system.

1.3 Research Questions & Objectives

This study answers four central research questions:

RQ1: What empirical patterns and structural transitions defined violence against religious minorities in Pakistan between 2015 and 2025?

RQ2: Which institutional, ideological, and socio-political factors explain the persistence of vigilante mob violence despite declining overall terrorism indicators in the late 2010s?

RQ3: How do intersecting legal, economic, and gendered vulnerabilities shape the psychological and physical outcomes experienced by minority communities?

RQ4: What legal and statutory reforms are required to dismantle the systemic incentives that sustain vigilante violence and state impunity?

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

To analyze the multi-layered victimization of religious minorities, this study synthesizes four complementary theoretical perspectives alongside an empirical variable framework, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Integrated Theoretical Matrix for Analyzing Minority Persecution

THEORETICAL LENS	CORE THEORETICAL PROPOSITION	EMPIRICAL INDICATORS (2015–2025)
Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)	Dominant majorities preserve collective self-esteem by constructing out-groups as existential threats to the sacred.	Curricular 'othering'; loudspeaker mobilization; active participation of ordinary citizens in mob lynchings (Shah et al., 2024).
Political Instrumentalism (Brass, 1997; Wilkinson, 2004)	Political elites and state institutions tolerate or incite communal violence when it yields electoral or strategic utility.	State deference to radical groups (e.g., TLP); weak police intervention; failure to secure convictions in mob cases (Imran et al., 2024).

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THEORETICAL LENS	CORE THEORETICAL PROPOSITION	EMPIRICAL INDICATORS (2015–2025)
Structural & Cultural Violence (Galtung, 1969)	Cultural norms legitimize structural laws (statutes), which produce direct physical harm without requiring a centralized actor.	Vague penal provisions (PPC 295-C); Anti-Ahmadi laws; procedural biases in police FIR registration (Siddique & Hayat, 2008).
Intersectional Vulnerability (Crenshaw, 1991)	Religion, gender, class, and caste interact to create distinct, heightened exposures to systematic exploitation.	Abduction and forced conversion of minor Hindu and Christian girls from low-income, bonded-labor backgrounds (Pirzada et al., 2024).

Social Identity Theory elucidates why minor, unverified allegations spark immediate majoritarian violence: in a society where religious purity forms the dominant badge of public identity, perceived insults to the sacred are experienced as direct threats to the collective group status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Political Instrumentalism explains police inaction and political concession: law enforcement protects minorities only when political incentives demand it; where political actors fear majoritarian backlash or seek religious legitimacy, police are instructed to stand down (Imran et al., 2024; Wilkinson, 2004). Galtung's (1969) framework demonstrates how cultural violence (sermons, textbooks) feeds structural violence (statutes), which inexorably triggers direct violence (arson, lynchings). Finally, Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality highlights why poor, low-caste Hindu and Christian women face systematic abduction and forced conversion—their social position deprives them of legal, economic, or physical protection (Pirzada et al., 2024; Salam, 2025).

Figure 1. Integrated Conceptual Variable Model

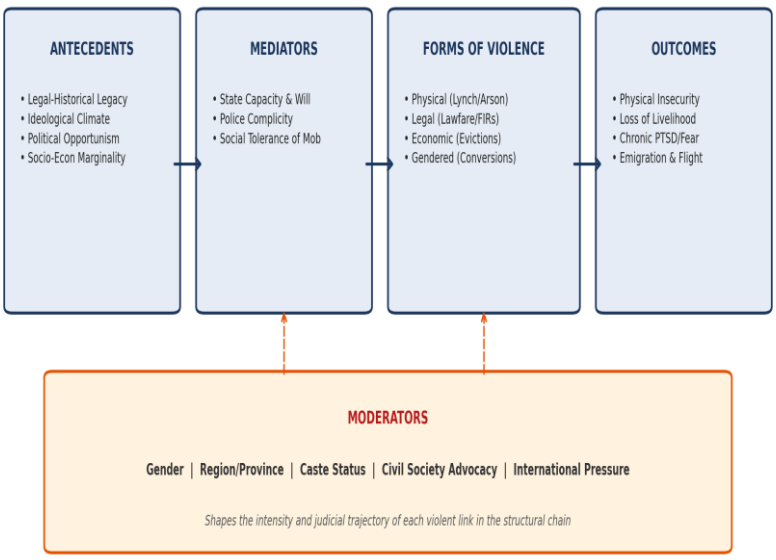


Figure 1. Integrated Conceptual Variable Model depicting structural antecedents, institutional mediators, multi-dimensional violence, and community outcomes.

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3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative document-based research design integrated with descriptive statistical analysis. Adopting a social-constructivist paradigm (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Salam, 2025), violence is examined not as an inevitable outcome of primordial religious difference, but as a socially constructed and institutionally sustained phenomenon produced through legal statutes, majoritarian political mobilization, and state inaction (Bowen, 2009).

The empirical corpus was constructed by synthesizing five distinct categories of primary and secondary documentation published between 2015 and October 2026: (1) Judicial records, Supreme Court judgments, anti-terrorism court verdicts, and legislative texts; (2) Fact-finding reports from independent human rights organizations including the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Amnesty International, and the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ); (3) Official reports and monitors from the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and the U.S. Department of State; (4) Incident datasets and security monitors from the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) and the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP); and (5) Demographic reports from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2017 and 2023 censuses).

Data analysis followed the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis approach established by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019): dataset familiarization, initial code generation, searching for thematic structures, reviewing themes against raw text, defining thematic boundaries, and synthesizing empirical narratives. Trustworthiness was established through source triangulation across independent monitors and strict application of Scott's (1990) criteria for documentary analysis (authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning). Quantitative metrics—such as over-representation ratios (OR = % Accused / % Population)—were calculated directly from primary monitoring counts.

4. Comprehensive Literature Review

4.1 Historical Antecedents and Escalation (2013–2025)

The origins of religious violence in Pakistan stem from colonial divide-and-rule policies and the traumatic communal dislocation of the 1947 Partition (Akande 2024; Shakil and Yilmaz 2021). Although early state formation under Muhammad Ali Jinnah envisioned an inclusive democratic order, subsequent political shifts—beginning with the Objectives Resolution of 1949—guided the progressive Islamization of state institutions, establishing a legal framework that relegated non-Muslim minorities to secondary civic status (Shukla 2020; Hunter 2024). This trajectory intensified during the 1980s Afghan Jihad, where state-backed strategic depth policies, funded alongside international partners, flooded the region with weaponry and radical ideology, empowering militant groups that targeted religious minorities as heretics (Lynn 2024).

Between 2013 and 2020, religious intolerance escalated into systematic physical violence, extrajudicial lynchings, forced conversions, and targeted mass terrorism against Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and Shia Muslims (Eller and Khazaal 2024; Nandy 2024). Major attacks—including the 2013 Peshawar church bombing, the 2014 Gujranwala Ahmadi mosque assault, and the 2016 Peshawar Shia mosque bombing—demonstrated the operational reach of extremist factions like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Islamic State (Poetri and Indraswari 2024). State security responses, such as the 2014 National Action Plan (NAP), proved largely ineffective in curtailing socioeconomic marginalization or securing minority places of worship (Patras 2024).

From 2021 through 2025, the trajectory of communal violence evolved from localized sectarian terror toward digital vigilantism, rapid-onset mob lynchings, and systemic state-sanctioned harassment (HRCP 2024; USCIRF 2025). High-profile mob attacks surged across Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, marked by the August 2023 Jaranwala rampages—where

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over 20 churches and dozens of Christian homes were destroyed—alongside the extrajudicial lynchings in Swat and Sargodha in mid-2024 (NCHR 2024). Concurrently, state-backed targeted harassment of the Ahmadiyya community accelerated, characterized by the widespread police-led desecration of Ahmadi minarets and gravestones, alongside an unprecedented spike in blasphemy-related detentions, with total imprisoned individuals surpassing 750 by late 2024 (USCIRF 2025; CSW 2025).

4.2 Identity, Construction, and Resource Competition

Scholars examine intergroup violence in Pakistan primarily through Social Identity Theory (SIT), Social Constructivism Theory (SCT), and Group Conflict models. SIT posits that dominant religious majorities engage in oppressive behavior when perceived threats jeopardize their collective identity or cultural primacy, using violence as a mechanism to enforce in-group hegemony over marginalized out-groups (Lipnicka and Peciakowski 2021; Sutherland et al. 2024; Hossain 2024). Complementing this, Realistic Conflict Theory and Group Conflict Theory illustrate how political and economic competition over finite resources and state power drives majority elites to suppress minority sociopolitical emancipation (Ali et al. 2024; Ferrare and Phillippo 2023).

From a constructivist perspective, communal conflict is not inherent but actively 'narrated' through political discourse, state policies, and educational curricula (Berger and Luckmann 2020; Espinoza 2024). Discriminatory legislation and blasphemy laws function as socially constructed mechanisms that institutionalize majority supremacy while framing minorities as existential threats to the moral fabric of the nation (Haque and Malik 2020). Furthermore, normative social influence reinforces this dynamic, as individuals conform to entrenched societal biases and participate in discriminatory practices to maintain standing within the dominant group (Ellington 2024; García-Magariño 2024).

The period between 2021 and 2025 expanded these theoretical dynamics into digital space. Algorithmic social networks and mobile messaging platforms transformed Social Constructivism into 'digital mobbing,' where unverified blasphemy claims travel rapidly to mobilize physical crowds before state intervention can occur (USCIRF 2025). Furthermore, Group Conflict Theory manifests in digital economies, where specialized criminal syndicates ('blasphemy gangs') fabricate online content to extort minority business owners and professionals, using the apparatus of state blasphemy laws as an instrument of economic extraction (NCHR 2024; USCIRF 2025).

4.3 Geodemographic Profiles and Regional Vulnerabilities

The nature and frequency of religious violence in Pakistan vary significantly across geographical regions and demographic lines (Lynch and Logan 2023). In Punjab, violence predominantly manifests through blasphemy accusations, mob attacks, and the social and legal ostracization of Ahmadis and Christians (Khan 2024). In rural Sindh, Hindu communities experience high incidences of abduction, forced marriage, and coerced conversion of young women, exacerbated by geographical isolation and lack of legal recourse (Ali et al. 2024). Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan remain acutely vulnerable to anti-Shia sectarian terrorism driven by cross-border militant networks operating along the Afghan border (Zare et al. 2022).

Demographic stratification further amplifies these security risks. Structural poverty confines a large proportion of Christian and Hindu populations to low-wage, low-status occupations, restricting their capacity to seek formal justice or political protection (Hardesty and Ogolsky 2020; Mahmud and Halim 2024). Urban centers such as Lahore and Karachi offer greater resource visibility but suffer from heightened hostile polarization, whereas remote rural areas frequently lack state policing, allowing extremist actors to carry out unpunished violence (Grip 2020).

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Data from 2021 to 2025 demonstrates a striking demographic concentration: Punjab accounted for over 75% of all registered blasphemy cases nationwide, targeting Christians and Ahmadis disproportionately relative to their population proportion (NCHR 2024). In rural Sindh, human rights monitoring registered dozens of cases annually involving the forced conversion and underage marriage of Hindu and Christian girls, sustained by local feudal structures and acquiescent religious seminaries (ACN 2025). In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, the resurgence of TTP and regional affiliate networks following 2021 renewed targeted assassination campaigns against Shia professionals and tribal elders (CSW 2025).

4.4 Institutional Drivers, Media, and Structural Impunity

The persistence of religious violence is sustained by structural flaws within state institutions, public education, and media ecosystems. Pakistan's public school curriculum fosters intolerance by portraying Muslims as a homogeneous ideological group, embedding anti-minority stereotypes in early childhood, and failing to encourage critical thinking (Pirzada et al. 2024; Rosario 2024). Concurrently, sensationalist coverage in traditional media and unmonitored hate speech on social media platforms weaponize blasphemy allegations, inciting public outrage and encouraging vigilante action (Chadha 2024; Wahlström et al. 2021).

Judicially and administratively, lower courts frequently submit to societal pressures and sectarian threats, convicting individuals on questionable evidence in blasphemy cases (McCrea 2022; Iqbal and Abbas 2024). Inaction by security forces and the tacit patronage of certain militant non-state actors by state elements create an environment of systemic impunity (Sabatini 2022; Marsden et al. 2024). Finally, economic competition acts as an underlying driver, where religious pretexts are frequently weaponized by dominant actors to validate property seizures, business rivalries, and targeted financial exclusion against minority communities (Imran et al. 2024).

Between 2021 and 2025, institutional weaponization deepened through the deployment of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) and Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) cybercrime wings (NCHR 2024). Investigative reviews by national commissions revealed systemic procedural violations: over 90% of accused individuals in digital blasphemy cases were invited under false pretenses before extra-legal arrest, subjected to custodial mistreatment, and denied mandatory initial investigations under Sections 156-A and 196 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) (NCHR 2024). Despite occasional judicial acquittals by higher courts, structural impunity remains entrenched, as acquittees and defense attorneys routinely face mortal threats, forced displacement, and vigilante retaliation (USCIRF 2025).

5. Statistical Overview and Demographic Realities (2015–2025)

5.1 Demographic Baseline

Table 2 traces minority demographic trajectories across three national censuses. The data reveals a secular decline in the enumerated Ahmadi population due to community boycotts driven by official disenfranchisement (Minority Rights Group International, 2024).

Table 2. Minority Population Share by National Census (1998, 2017, 2023)

CENSUS YEAR	CHRISTIAN (%)	HINDU (CASTE) (%)	SCHEDULED CASTES (%)	AHMADI (%)
1998 Census	1.59	1.60	0.25	0.22
2017 Census	1.27	1.73	0.41	0.09
2023 Census	1.37	1.61	0.56	0.07

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5.2 Blasphemy Accusation Dynamics (2020–2024)

Data compiled by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) demonstrates a steep surge in blasphemy allegations. Accusations expanded from 84 individuals in 2021 to 344 in 2024—a 309% increase over three years (Dawn, 2025; Suleman, 2024).

Table 3. Annual Blasphemy Accusations Breakdown by Religious Affiliation (2020–2024)

YEAR	MUSLIM	AHMADI	CHRISTIAN	HINDU	OTHER / UNSTATED	TOTAL ACCUSED
2020	150	40	7	2	0	199
2021	45	25	7	7	0	84
2022	88	75	4	2	2	171
2023	247	65	11	1	5	329
2024	241	48	21	31	3	344

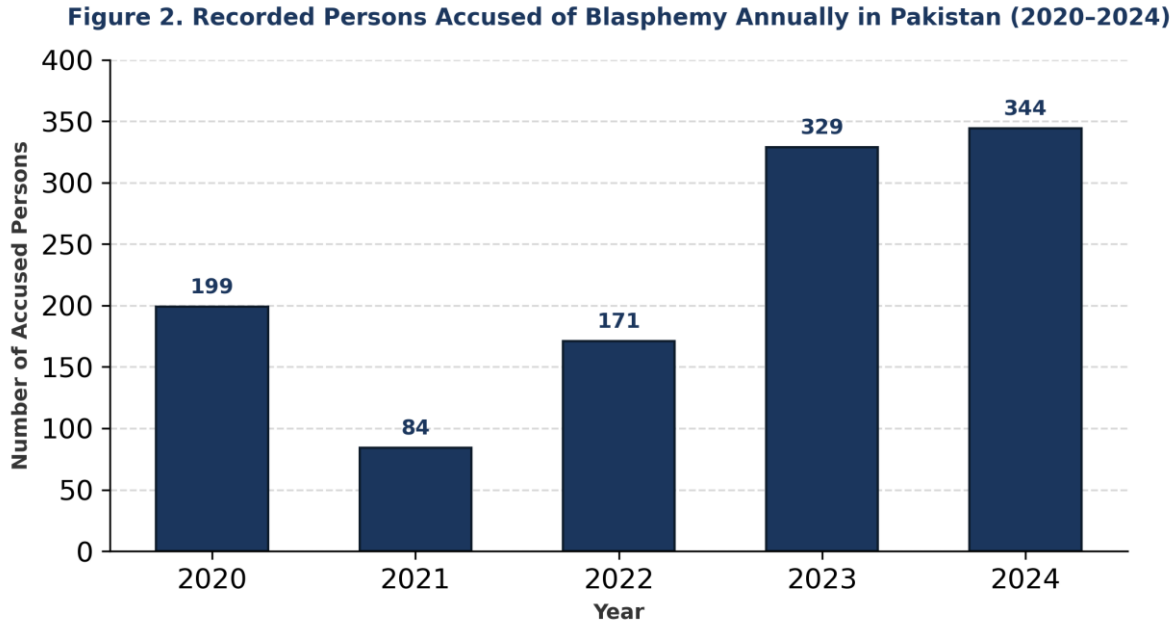


Figure 2. Recorded persons accused of blasphemy annually in Pakistan (2020–2024). Source: CSJ Monitoring Data.

Two crucial analytical findings emerge from Table 3. First, Muslim citizens constitute the largest raw absolute block of accused individuals, confirming that blasphemy provisions are broadly deployed to settle commercial conflicts, family feuds, and land disputes (South Asia @ LSE, 2025). Second, non-Muslim minorities bear a disproportionate burden relative to their population share. In 2024, Ahmadis comprised 14% of accused individuals despite accounting for 0.07% of the census population—a statistical over-representation ratio of 200:1. Christians faced an over-representation ratio of roughly 4.5:1.

5.3 Mass Casualty Attacks and Security Metrics

Five major mass-casualty attacks on minority communities accounted for 257 total recorded fatalities between 2015 and 2024, as outlined in Table 4 (Imran et al., 2024).

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Table 4. Principal Mass-Casualty Attacks Targeting Minorities (2015–2024)

INCIDENT / LOCATION	DATE	TARGETED GROUP	FATALITIES	PRIMARY PERPETRATOR / MODE
Youhanabad Church Bombings (Lahore)	March 2015	Christian Worshippers	15	TTP-JA Suicide Bombing
Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park Bombing (Lahore)	March 2016	Christians / Public Park	75	TTP-JA Suicide Bombing
Parachinar Market Bombing (Kurram)	January 2017	Shi'a Public Market	25	Lashkar-e-Jhangvi / TTP
Bethel Memorial Church Attack (Quetta)	December 2017	Christian Worshippers	9	IS-Khorasan Suicide Attack
Kurram Convoy Ambush & Clashes (KP)	Nov–Dec 2024	Shi'a Passenger Convoy	133	Sectarian Militant Groups

Figure 3. Recorded Fatalities Across Principal Mass-Casualty Attacks (2015–2024)

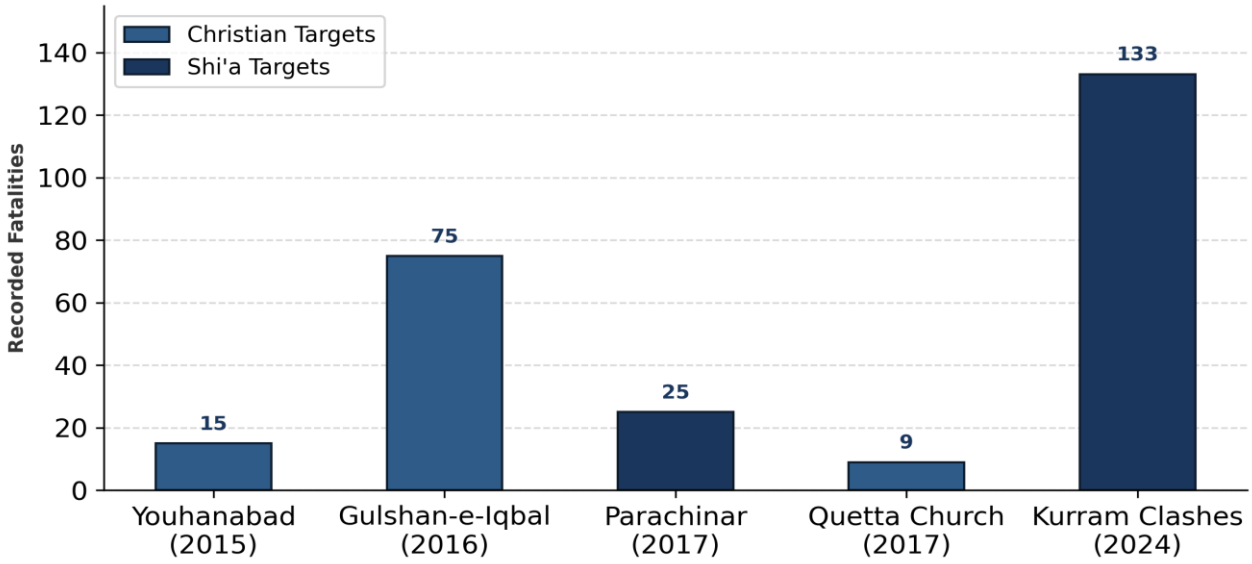


Figure 3. Recorded fatalities across principal mass-casualty attacks (2015–2024). Blue shading denotes Christian targets; solid navy denotes Shi'a targets.

Between 2015 and 2024, five major mass-casualty attacks specifically targeting religious minority communities in Pakistan resulted in 257 recorded fatalities. The data highlights a violent vector directed against both Christian and Shi'a Muslim populations across major urban centers, public spaces, and transit routes. Christian communities were struck in high-profile attacks including the dual suicide bombings at Youhanabad churches in Lahore (15 fatalities in March 2015), the Easter Sunday bombing targeting families at Gulshan-e-Iqbal

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Park in Lahore (75 fatalities in March 2016), and the assault on Bethel Memorial Church in Quetta (9 fatalities in December 2017). Concurrently, Shi'a Muslims faced severe sectarian violence, including the Parachinar market bombing in Kurram (25 fatalities in January 2017) and the intense passenger convoy ambush and subsequent clashes in Kurram during November–December 2024, which recorded the highest loss of life with 133 fatalities. Perpetrated by diverse extremist factions—including Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP-JA), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, IS-Khorasan, and local sectarian militant groups—these security metrics illustrate how major terrorism incidents have repeatedly targeted sacred, public, and transit spaces to inflict maximum casualties on minority groups.

5.4 Major Incident Chronology & Flashpoints (2015–2025)

The timeline in Figure 4 illustrates the functional transformation of violence: from terrorist strikes against places of worship (2015–2017) to accusation-driven vigilante lynchings and statutory lawfare (2018–2025).

Figure 4. Strategic Event Trajectory: Mass Terrorism to Accusation-Driven Mob Lynching

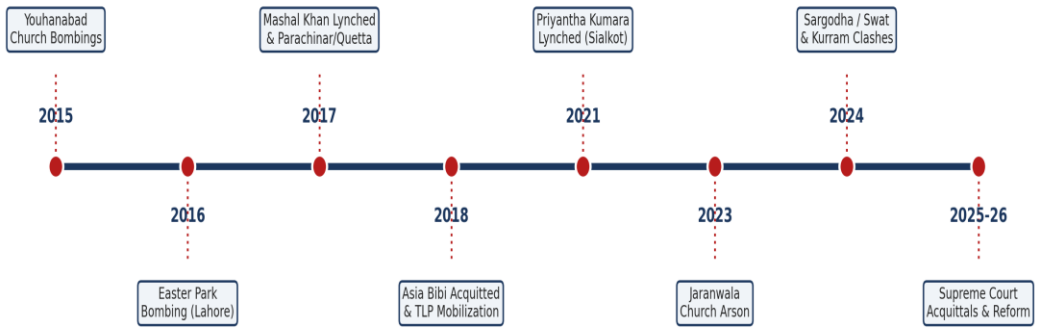


Figure 4. Strategic event trajectory illustrating the transition from mass terrorism to accusation-driven mob lynching.

Phase I: Mass Terror and Sacred Space Desecration (2015–2017)

The decade opened with high-casualty attacks on religious infrastructure. On March 15, 2015, dual suicide bombers struck St. John's Catholic Church and Christ Church in Youhanabad, Lahore, killing 15 worshippers (SATP, 2024). The attack ignited spontaneous Christian protests, during which two suspected co-conspirators were lynched. In March 2016, a suicide bomber targeting Christian families celebrating Easter at Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park in Lahore killed 75 individuals (TIME, 2016). The April 2017 lynching of journalism student Mashal Khan inside Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan marked a critical inflection point: the murder demonstrated that accusation-driven vigilante execution had moved beyond peripheral militant cadres into mainstream university campuses (HRCP, 2018).

Impacts of Physical Violence

Physical violence against religious minorities in Pakistan has serious consequences, both in the short and long term. Direct physical loss or harm, including death and injuries, has an impact on victims and their families; thus, loss, suffering, and an altered lifestyle are associated. For example, a terrorist assault on a Peshawar church in December 2013 killed over 80 people, and as a consequence, fear and anguish have driven many victims away from the Christian organization (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Direct physical loss has an economic impact since a person's life or health might be lost, affecting a family's source of income. Furthermore, violence forces individuals to restrict their mobility, preventing them

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from participating in society; therefore, avoiding any group gatherings leads to social isolation. This over time leads to the development of vulnerability and fear, to the disadvantage of minorities who believe they cannot exercise their rights or feel comfortable in their homes or places of worship.

Phase II: Judicial Battles and Street Mobilization (2018–2021)

On October 31, 2018, the Supreme Court of Pakistan issued a landmark ruling acquitting Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who had spent eight years on death row following a 2009 field argument (Supreme Court of Pakistan, 2018). The judgment sparked nationwide blockades organized by Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), underscoring the severe political risks borne by judicial officers who enforce evidentiary standards in blasphemy trials. On December 3, 2021, a mob in Sialkot tortured and burned Sri Lankan factory manager Priyantha Kumara over accusations of removing religious posters (Tribune, 2022).

Phase III: Mob Arson and Systemic Impunity (2023–2026)

The August 2023 Jaranwala attack resulted in the burning of 24 churches and 80 Christian residences. Despite police registering 22 FIRs naming over 140 suspects, state prosecution collapsed: by mid-2026, anti-terrorism courts had convicted only one individual while acquitting twelve main co-accused (Catholic News Agency, 2026). Similarly, in July 2026, the Supreme Court acquitted the final remaining death-row convicts in the historic 2014 Kot Radha Kishan case—wherein a Christian couple, Shahzad Masih and Shama Bibi, were burned alive in a brick kiln (AsiaNews, 2026). This judicial pattern reinforces a structural dynamic: mob violence against minorities carries negligible legal consequences.

6. Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Coding of court judgments, fact-finding transcripts, and monitoring datasets produced six core thematic structures, organized around a repeating feedback loop (Figure 5).

Table 5. Six Core Analytical Themes Derived from Qualitative Coding

THEME CODE	THEMATIC DESCRIPTION	EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATIVE EVIDENCE
T1: Weaponized Lawfare	Statutory provisions function as immediate pre-trial punishment and extortion mechanisms.	344 accused in 2024; creation of 26-complainant 'blasphemy business' networks implicating over 700 citizens (South Asia @ LSE, 2025; Suleman, 2024).
T2: Permissive State & Impunity	Police delaying tactics and prosecutorial failure eliminate deterrence against majoritarian crowds.	Zero convictions retained in Kot Radha Kishan case (2026); single conviction secured across 24 burned Jaranwala churches.
T3: Ideological Reproduction	Educational textbooks, sermons, and digital networks normalize religious chauvinism.	Loudspeaker incitement in Jaranwala; expanded religious mandates in Single National Curriculum (Rahman, 2004).
T4: Economic Precarity	Destruction of minority commercial property and land dispossession entrench structural poverty.	Sargodha factory attack; brick kiln destruction in Kasur; land evictions in Tharparkar Hindu settlements (Nawaz, 2024).

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THEME CODE	THEMATIC DESCRIPTION	EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATIVE EVIDENCE
T5: Gendered Intersectionality	Systematic abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage of minority minors.	CSJ recording 136 cases in 2023; 23% of victims aged under 14; complete legislative rejection of Anti-Forced Conversion Bill.
T6: Civil Society Resilience	Human rights advocates, legal teams, and community monitors maintain documentation and defense.	HRCP and CSJ emergency missions; Supreme Court defense teams securing high-profile legal acquittals (Alam, 2022).

Figure 5. The Structural Feedback Loop Linking Accusation to Systemic Impunity

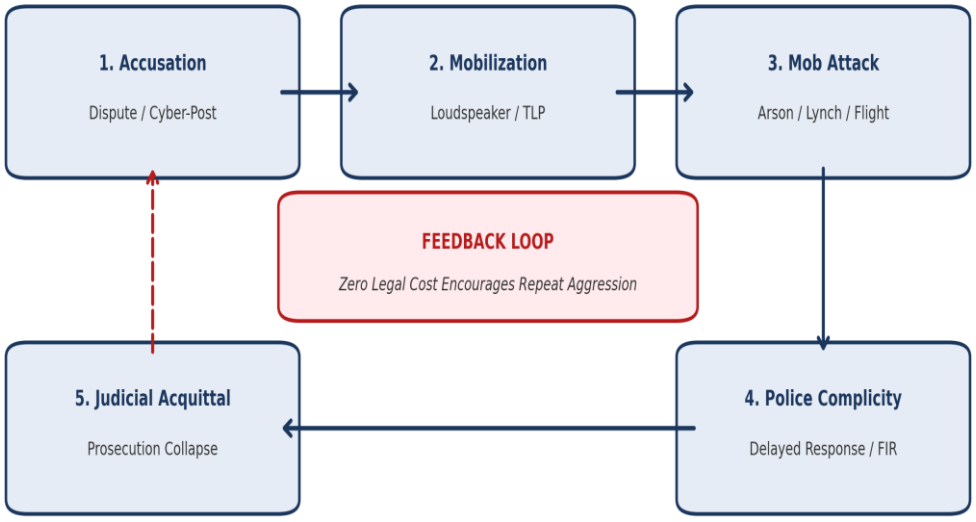


Figure 5. The structural feedback loop linking initial accusation to state failure and systemic impunity.

7. Critical Discussion & Analytical Synthesis

The empirical record demonstrates a fundamental mutation in the structural dynamics of minority persecution in Pakistan. During the 2015–2017 period, threat vectors were dominated by organized militant formations (such as TTP-Jaish-ul-Ahrar and IS-Khorasan) conducting high-explosive suicide attacks against churches and public venues. From 2021 onwards, physical security threat shifts from centralized terrorism to hyper-localized, digitized majoritarian vigilante mobs (Imran et al., 2024; Salam, 2025).

This structural evolution creates a paradox: while official state statistics document declining overall deaths from sectarian terrorism between 2017 and 2020, minoritarian vulnerability actually intensified. Counter-terrorism military operations (such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad) successfully degraded hard militant networks, yet left majoritarian social norms, street-level mobilization infrastructures, and statutory blasphemy provisions completely intact (Alam, 2022; Nawaz, 2024).

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The passage of the National Commission for Minorities Rights Act in December 2025 illustrates the structural limits of state-led reform. Enacted eleven years after the Supreme Court's landmark 2014 Jillani Judgment (which ordered the establishment of an independent statutory minority rights body), the 2025 Act was stripped of suo motu investigative authority during parliamentary committee review and explicitly preserved anti-Ahmadi legal prohibitions (UCA News, 2025; Times Headline, 2025). As political instrumentalism predicts (Wilkinson, 2004), state institutions design human rights bodies to signal international compliance while intentionally withholding the statutory powers necessary to hold majoritarian actors accountable.

8. Comprehensive Reform Agenda & Policy Recommendations

To interrupt the feedback loop illustrated in Figure 5, reform initiatives must address legal mechanics, police protocols, educational systems, and statutory oversight bodies:

Priority Statutory & Executive Reforms (RQ4)

- **Mandatory Preliminary Inquiries:** Statutory amendment to Section 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) requiring a preliminary investigation led by a Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) prior to registering any blasphemy FIR under PPC 295-C (Siddique & Hayat, 2008).
- **Penalties for False Accusation:** Strict enforcement and escalation of penalties under Section 211 of the PPC against individuals who knowingly lodge false blasphemy allegations for commercial, personal, or political gain (Suleman, 2024).
- **Restoration of Minorities Commission Powers:** Legislative amendment of the 2025 National Commission for Minorities Rights Act to reinstate suo motu powers, mandate independent sub-poena powers, and guarantee inclusive representation for all communities (Patras, 2024).
- **Enactment of Anti-Forced Conversion Laws:** Federal legislation establishing a minimum age requirement of 18 for legal religious conversion, mandatory judicial evaluation of voluntariness in High Court chambers, and rigorous prosecution of complicit marriage registrars (Pirzada et al., 2024).
- **Curricular Neutrality & Media Standards:** Comprehensive auditing of primary public school textbooks to remove derogatory content, combined with strict enforcement of PEMRA regulatory codes against mosque loudspeaker incitement and online blasphemy extortion networks (Nayyar & Salim, 2003; Rahman, 2004).

9. Limitations & Conclusion

9.1 Methodological Limitations

This study operates under four methodological constraints: (1) Empirical datasets compiled by monitoring bodies rely primarily on reported press and judicial filings, introducing potential under-reporting in remote rural regions; (2) Quantitative categorization across distinct reporting organizations (CSJ, CRSS, SATP) uses non-identical metrics, preventing direct mathematical aggregation; (3) Demographic baseline calculations for Ahmadis rely on official census counts that reflect community boycotts; and (4) Qualitative document analysis relies on published secondary testimonies rather than direct primary field interviews due to safety considerations for vulnerable victims.

9.2 Conclusion

Between 2015 and 2025, violence against religious minorities in Pakistan evolved from centralized mass-casualty terrorism into a pervasive system of majoritarian lawfare, cyber-enabled extortion, and vigilante mob violence. The defining institutional indicator of this decade is absolute impunity: judicial acquittals in 2026 for historic mob killings confirm that street-level violence against minorities incurs near-zero legal costs. Counter-terrorism operations alone cannot secure religious freedom. Lasting protection demands statutory

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procedural safeguards, impartial prosecution of mob instigators, legislative protection against forced conversions, and systemic curriculum reform. Without these structural interventions, minorities will remain trapped between the hammer of majoritarian lawfare and the anvil of majoritarian street power.

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