

FAITH AND FURY

The Rise of
Blasphemy-Driven Violence
in Pakistan



Center for
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ABSTRACT

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of blasphemy-related extrajudicial killings in Pakistan from the British Raj to present times. It examines the escalation of these incidents, driven by societal and legal changes, and highlights the alarming rise in mob-driven enforcement of blasphemy laws. By analyzing distinct periods, including British Rule, post-independence Pakistan, and the era following General Zia-ul-Haq's regime, the report underscores the transition from a more tolerant judicial process to extreme intolerance marked by harsh laws leading people to take mob justice for granted. The evolution of blasphemy-related violence, the role of religious and political dynamics, and the impact on minorities are discussed. The findings are drawn from documented cases, highlighting the implications of false accusations, the failure of legal protections, and the societal mindset that enables such violence. This report serves as a crucial document for understanding the complex interplay of religion, law, and society in Pakistan and calls for a reevaluation of blasphemy laws to ensure justice and accountability.

INTRODUCTION

During the British Raj, three extrajudicial killings occurred due to blasphemy charges. Since Pakistan's creation up to May 2024, this number has risen to 104, with an additional 71 individuals narrowly surviving such attacks. Thousands have faced blasphemy charges, raising a critical question: Was the founding of Pakistan intended to witness such widespread disrespect toward the religion it was established for? Alternatively, if these victims were falsely accused by unruly crowds and amplified by religious leaders, these extrajudicial killings represent both a religious sin and a legal crime. A thorough examination of these incidents and their implications is essential.

This report analyzes blasphemy-related extrajudicial killings across three distinct periods:

1. **British Rule:** During this era, there were three recorded extrajudicial killings related to blasphemy accusations. Legal proceedings for such cases were conducted through formal judicial processes.
2. **Post-Independence Pakistan (1947-1994):** This period saw a rise in blasphemy-related incidents, with no Muslims subjected to extrajudicial killings until 1994. The trend began with the killing of Hafiz Sajjad Tariq, a devout Muslim and member of Jamaat-e-Islami. Legal procedures during this time were generally more tolerant.
3. **Post-1994 and General Zia-ul-Haq's Regime (1977-1988):** The introduction of harsher blasphemy laws, coupled with increasing mob-driven enforcement, marked this era. Stricter punishments and a more authoritarian approach led to a significant rise in extrajudicial killings and incidents. Law enforcement and the judiciary faced increasing threats, further complicating the legal landscape.

Blasphemy, often a social crime committed by individuals with or without intent and no prior criminal record, poses significant challenges in tracking its evolution. The escalation of minor issues into major societal problems is evident in high-profile blasphemy cases.

False blasphemy accusations frequently provoke oversimplified responses from commentators and officials, lacking depth and historical understanding. For instance, a recent case involved a woman accused of blasphemy for wearing a dress with Arabic calligraphy.

Analysts often avoid addressing the shift from a more liberal to an authoritarian interpretation of religion, which suppresses open discussion and dissent. Over the past four decades, mob-driven enforcement of blasphemy laws has undermined law enforcement and threatened the judiciary. Fear of repercussions stifles open discourse, allowing obscurantism to thrive and leading to actions that lack sensibility, legality, and religiosity.

Since Pakistan's creation, over 1,700 individuals have faced blasphemy charges, resulting in extrajudicial killings, prolonged imprisonment without trial, and attacks by religious zealots. These zealots act without verifying the charges, believing it their religious duty.

The Center for Research and Security Studies has documented these troubling events in two comprehensive reports over the past decade. These reports detail victim demographics, geographic distribution, and specifics of lynching incidents driven by false blasphemy accusations. Unfortunately, these reports have not received adequate attention from authorities, media, or religious leaders, reflecting a societal mindset where rational voices advocating for reevaluating blasphemy laws and ensuring accountability are often suppressed or ignored.

This report traces the evolution of blasphemy-related incidents from tolerance to extreme intolerance, highlighting a decline in judicial standards and the introduction of stricter blasphemy laws during General Zia-ul-Haq's tenure.

BLASPHEMY INCIDENTS DURING THE BRITISH RAJ (1929 – 1947)

Communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims during the British Raj were exacerbated by instances of disrespect towards religious figures from both communities. One notable incident occurred in 1874 when a book titled "Great Prophets of the World" by RH Jalbhoy sparked unrest in Bombay.¹

Such occurrences became more frequent, particularly as political tensions between the National Congress Party and the Muslim League intensified. Allama Muhammad Iqbal highlighted these communal divisions in his 1930 Presidential Address during the 25th Session of the All India Muslim League in Allahabad, advocating for a separate Muslim identity within India.

Allama Muhammad Iqbal highlighted these communal divisions in his Presidential Address during the 25th Session of the All India Muslim League in 1930 in Allahabad.

“Is it possible to retain Islam as an ethical ideal and to reject it as a polity, in favor of national polities in which the religious attitude is not permitted to play any part? Communalism is its higher aspect, then, is indispensable to the formation of a harmonious whole in a country like India.....The principle of European democracy cannot be applied to India without recognizing the fact of communal groups. The Muslim demand for the creation of a Muslim India within India is, therefore, perfectly justified.”

It represented a rejection of European democratic ideals and an acknowledgment of intolerance towards communities different from our own. This argument laid the groundwork for the creation of a separate homeland for Muslims, as later evidenced. It was this political ideology that persuaded Allama Iqbal to support IIm-ud-din, popularly known in Pakistan as Ghazi IIm-ud-din Shaheed.

Blasphemous publications contributed significantly to this intolerance. In 1923, "Rangeela Rasool" by Pandit M.A. Chamupati, published by Mahashe Rajpal in Lahore. It was, as claimed by the publisher, a retaliation to the posters published by Muslim showing Hindu Godess Sita as a prostitute. This marked the first recorded extrajudicial killing on blasphemy charges during the British Raj, supported by many Muslim leaders, including Allama Iqbal.

¹ https://hindunet.org/alt_hindu/1994_2/msg00096.html

Other notable incidents include:

- **1924:** Kohat riots sparked by an anti-Islamic poem published by Sanatan Dharm Sabha, resulting in 155 casualties.
- **1927:** Amritsar witnessed derogatory remarks about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the journal Risala Vartman.
- **1935:** Abdul Qayyum killed Nathoo Ram in Karachi for blasphemous content in "Islamic History," leading to public unrest and several casualties.²
- **1935:** Mureed Hussain killed a Hindu veterinary doctor, Ram Gopal, in Chakwal for showing disrespect to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

These incidents were mostly triggered by written texts, with four occurring in Punjab and one each in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

Key Points:

- Most blasphemers were Hindus.
- All cases took place in Punjab, NWFP (now KP), and Sindh.
- Extrajudicial killings were carried out by self-motivated Muslims from lower classes.
- The court unanimously upheld the verdicts despite resistance.
- Despite hanging the perpetrators, incidents continued.
- Muslim leadership, especially those affiliated with AIML, supported the perpetrators in Lahore and Karachi.

² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1680899>

BLASPHEMY INCIDENTS AFTER THE CREATION OF PAKISTAN (1947 – 1977)

Between 1948 and 1950, three Ahmadis were extrajudicially murdered in Pakistan due to their religious identity, marking the first mob killing in the newly formed Islamic state. This violence initially targeted Ahmadis instead of Hindus.

After these initial incidents, there were no extrajudicial killings on blasphemy charges for over two decades. Blasphemy cases were mostly handled judicially, with legal protection for all religious communities.

Notable incidents include:

- **1953:** Khawaja Nazir Ahmad's book "Jesus in Heaven on Earth" was confiscated for offending Christians, though the court ruled out malicious intent.
- **1959:** "Mizan-ul-Haq" by C.G. Pfander was forfeited for its offense to Muslims. The Lahore High Court ordered to expunge the offensive remarks from the book. This case set a precedent requiring intent under Section 295-A and emphasized the court's duty to protect all religious communities.
- **1960:** A case was filed in Akilpur, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) for destruction of a place of worship of Hindus. The Magistrate 1st Class, Sunamganj, ordered to punish the accused for serve six months rigorous imprisonment and were fined Rs. 200 each under section 295 PPC.
- **1962:** A book titled "Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory" was forfeited by the West Pakistan government on the grounds that it "[tended] to promote feelings of enmity between different sects of Muslims in Pakistan. The Court observed that the author harbored no deliberate or malicious intention to offend the religious sensibilities of the Muslims of Pakistan. (Lahore-Punjab)
- **1963:** A case in Karachi involving abuse of worshippers as "Wahabis" was dismissed due to lack of derogatory content.
- **1976:** A case in Punjab involving the removal of religious posters was dismissed, with the court noting the requirements of section 295 PPC.

Most blasphemy cases in West Pakistan were filed in Punjab, with East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) reporting only one incident until it remained part of Pakistan.

Year	Balochistan	Capital	East Pakista	GB	KP	Punjab	Sindh	AJK	Grand Total
1948	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1950	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
1953	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1959	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1960	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1962	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1963	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
1976	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
1977	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1	0	1	0	0	6	1	0	9

To understand why Punjab appeared more motivated towards preserving the sanctity of religion compared to other parts of the country, and why blasphemy laws did not gain similar traction in East Pakistan, a brief socio-political background of the country is necessary.

Population Demographics as per the 1941 Census:

Punjab:³

Muslims: 53%

Hindus: 31%

Sikhs: 15%

Christians: 1.5%

Sindh:⁴

Hindus: 27%

³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjab_Province_\(British_India\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjab_Province_(British_India))

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sindhi_Hindus#:~:text=Prior%20to%20the%20partition%20of,9%25%20of%20the%20region's%20population

East Pakistan:⁵

Hindus: 28%

Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmed, a reputed historian, noted that 500,000 to 800,000 Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs lost their lives during and after the partition. Around 10 million Punjabis were displaced from their ancestral homes⁶, making Punjab a hotspot for communal violence during this period. In contrast, Sindh did not experience the same level of communal riots, though an estimated 1,200,000 to 1,400,000 Sindhi Hindus migrated to India primarily by ship or train. By 1951, the Hindu population in Sindh had reduced to 1.6%.⁷ According to the 2017 census, approximately 2.14% of Pakistan's population, or about 4.4 million Hindus, lived in the country.⁸

East Pakistan had the highest Hindu population in the country, but by the 1951 census, it had dropped from 28% to 22%. This decrease occurred despite no reported Hindu-Muslim riots in East Pakistan at the time of partition.

SOCIO-POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The creation of Pakistan, driven by a religious ideal, led to expectations that the country would learn from the bloodshed of partition and avoid repeating such mistakes. However, post-partition, the situation evolved differently. Religious parties in West Pakistan, realizing that their ideological base had been overshadowed by the All-India Muslim League (AIML), sought to reassert their influence. They aimed to ensure the country was governed by religious ideals and viewed any deviation as unacceptable. They used the religious card to regain popularity and importance in a nation whose leadership they perceived as highly Westernized.

The Muslim League also adopted the religious card to demonstrate their adherence to the faith followed by the majority population. While the Ahmadi community became the first target of religious parties in West Pakistan, Hindus were targeted in East Pakistan. This dynamic is well-captured in the "Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted Under Punjab Act II of 1954 to Inquire into the Punjab Disturbance of 1954," prepared by Justices Munir and M.R. Kiyani, which describes the communal issues emerging in West Pakistan post-Partition. It says:

The Partition of 1947 and the establishment of Pakistan came as a great disappointment to the Ahrar because all power passed to the Congress or the Muslim League, and no scope for activity was left for the Ahrar in India or in Pakistan. The new Muslim State had come to them as a shock, disillusioned them of

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_in_Pakistan

⁶ The 'bloody' Punjab partition — VIII—Ishtiaq Ahmed
http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2012\09\09\story_9-9-2012_pg3_5

⁷ Sindhi Voices from the Partition | The Heritage Lab

⁸

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Pakistani_census#:~:text=Pakistan%20Bureau%20of%20Statistics%20released,%25%20Ahmadis%20and%200.02%25%20others

their ideology and finished them as a political party. For some-time they found themselves in a state of frustration, completely bewildered as to their future. In the first conference after this, held in May 1948 at Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), faint references were made to Ahmadis and loyalty to Pakistan was affirmed. More distinct sentiments in favour of Pakistan were expressed in the next meeting in Lahore in June 1948, accompanied by a hint that the Ahrar were not joining the Muslim League because of the un-Islamic beliefs of men like Chaudhri Zafrullah Khan and Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din.

The demand for the declaration of Ahmadis as a non-Muslim minority was first made at a conference in Rawalpindi and reiterated at a public meeting held at Pind Dadan Khan on 1st May 1949. (Reference: Page 12 and 13 of the report)

It is noteworthy that while anti-Ahmadi violence was occurring in West Pakistan, the eastern part of the country was also experiencing a rise in communal violence between Muslims and Hindus during the same period. According to Wikipedia's "1950 East Pakistan riots," several Hindu-Muslim riots erupted throughout East Pakistan from 1949 to February 1950, resulting in massacres of around 500,000 Hindus and the exodus of approximately 2 to 3.5 million Hindus to West Bengal, India. However, these figures are highly biased and likely exaggerated.

Reports from February to August 1950 provide a more reliable glimpse into the situation in East Pakistan and West Bengal:

February 7, 1950: Dawn reported that the West Bengal Government's press note belittled the sufferings of Muslims and minimized acts of loot, arson, murder, and crimes against women by Hindu goondas in Berhampore and Calcutta. Lawlessness reportedly continued from January 24 to February 5, resulting in deaths, injuries, looted shops, and burnt huts.

February 14, 1950: Municipal Commissioners of Chittagong appealed for peace and order, urging Muslims to protect minorities and uphold Pakistan's Islamic ideals.

February 17, 1950: Dawn reported that over 100,000 Muslims were uprooted in Calcutta alone due to violence organized by the RSS and Congressmen in power.

August 2, 1950: More Hindus and Muslims arrived in East Pakistan than left the province in late July. Specifically, 4,871 and 4,694 Hindus arrived on July 28 and 29, respectively, while 5,018 and 3,811 Hindus left for West Bengal. Similarly, 3,192 and 3,038 Muslims left for West Bengal on the same dates.

August 29, 1950: Dawn reported that from April 12 to August 27, the net influx of Hindus into West Bengal from East Pakistan was 126,428, while the net influx of Muslims into East Pakistan from West Bengal was 172,428. This data was collected at the Darsana and Benapole border crossings since the Prime Ministers' agreement.

Incoming Hinus	Incoming Muslims	Outgoing Hindus	Outgoing Muslims
79,183	43,496	132,185	6,580
158,768	90,440	204,102	28,913
162,948	77,239	177,977	53,454
134,552	100,410	164,486	55,594
168,866	58,806	151,985	53,442
704,307	370,391	830,735	197,963

“Dacca, Feb 10: A dusk-to-dawn curfew was clamped down on Dacca city for three days following reports of stray cases of loot and arson in certain parts of the city this afternoon.

Police have been ordered to shoot at sight any person found looting, committing arson, or similar offences, and Sec 144 has also been promulgated prohibiting assemblies of more than four persons, the carrying of arms and banning the holding of meetings and processions. A large crowd demonstrated in front of the East Pakistan Secretariat building today when the Chief Secretary of West Bengal and the Deputy High Commissioner for India in Pakistan arrived for the conference of the Chief Secretaries of East Pakistan and West Bengal, which met for the second day today..... Nervousness was noticeable in predominantly Hindu Muhallas where houses were barred and bolted in the afternoon and generally people stayed indoors or on roof tops..... Mr Nurul Amin the East Pakistan Premier said: “I have been greatly pained to receive reports of stray cases of arson and looting in Dacca in spite of my last night’s appeal to the citizens to keep calm and not to resort to any acts of lawlessness whatever the provocation. Having regard to unbroken period of peace and tranquility and communal amity which has prevailed in Dacca since the partition it is a matter of great regret to me as indeed it must to any right-thinking person that fair name of this city should have been allowed to be sullied by a handful of miscreants⁹.”

All the reports published in Dawn confirm that a mass exodus did indeed occur in the eastern part of the country. The 6% drop in the Hindu population, as recorded in the 1951 census, further corroborates these events.

Meanwhile, in West Pakistan, political tensions escalated dramatically in January 1953. A religious party, Jamat-ul-Ahrar, along with Jamaat-e-Islami and other religious leaders, demanded that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims and removed from high-ranking government positions, including the foreign

⁹ “Curfew in Dacca”, Report, Dawn 11 February 1950 (Page 10)

minister, Sir Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, who had been appointed by Quaid-e-Azam. The situation was exacerbated by certain sections of the press, particularly publications with ties to the government, which used inflammatory language to target the Ahmadi community, making their lives increasingly difficult. Interestingly, independent newspapers did not participate in this propaganda campaign. There were also suspicions regarding Punjab's Chief Minister, Mian Mumtaz Daultana, allegedly aligning with religious scholars to advance his political ambitions by undermining Khawaja Nazimuddin..

“A campaign for the enlistment of volunteers has been started throughout the Province and Sahibzada Faiz-ul-Hasan appointed as the first dictator. The volunteers are required to sign a pledge which binds them to lay their life, if necessary, for the honour of the Prophet. Volunteers are said to have given the pledge with their blood. At Lahore, about 150 persons are said to have been enlisted. In other parts of the Province, the number of volunteers so far enrolled is estimated to be about 500. The target for the Province is 50,000.”¹⁰

As the agitation for declaring Ahmadis non-Muslims became violent, Superintendents of Police in Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Lyallpur (now Faisalabad), Montgomery (now Sahiwal), and Multan were directed to use persuasive methods to stop volunteers from going to Karachi. If persuasion failed, they were not to be arrested.¹¹

A batch of 110 Ahrar volunteers on Brandreth Road was met by officials, including Sayyad Hasanat Ahmad, City Magistrate, Malik Khan Bahadur, Superintendent of Police, and Sayyad Firdaus Shah, Deputy Superintendent of Police. When the volunteers refused to disperse, a lathi-charge proved ineffective, and they were lifted bodily, put into trucks, and taken away. False rumours quickly circulated, claiming the police had profaned the Holy Qur'an by kicking and tearing it and had killed a small boy. At a meeting outside Delhi Gate, a boy was produced, holding torn leaves of the Holy Book, claiming to be an eyewitness. A maulvi, likely Maulvi Muhammad Yusuf, held these leaves and made a violent speech, further inflaming the crowd.¹²

This is the first known attempt to use false blasphemy charges for a political agenda in Pakistan. After finding the allegation baseless, Justice Munir added his views on the subject in the report, saying, “We cannot imagine that a Musalman police officer, however irreligious he may be, would kick at the Holy Book, and thus be guilty of the grossest blasphemy. This is conceded in the arguments before us but it is suggested that the Book might have been trampled upon unintentionally. Sayyad Hasanat Ahmad and Malik Khan-Bahadur Khan have both denied the allegation and since non-official evidence about it is hopelessly discrepant, we cannot hold that anyone kicked at the Holy Book or beat any boy to death.”¹³

¹⁰ Justice Munir Report – Page 141

¹¹ Justice Munir Report – Page 150

¹² Justice Munir Report – Page 155

¹³ Justice Munir Report – Page 155, 156

What started as demonstrations in February soon spiraled into widespread chaos, with instances of looting, arson, and tragic loss of lives, estimated to range between 200 to 2000 individuals. The aftermath left thousands displaced, adding to the magnitude of the tragedy.

The military intervened to quell the riots, marking their first direct involvement in managing Pakistan's civilian politics. This 70-day deployment restored order to Lahore. The government took a hard line against religious leaders, arresting Maulana Maududi and Maulana Abdul Sattar Khan Niazi. Initially sentenced to death, their punishments were later commuted to life imprisonment. These decisive measures against religious factions likely played a role in curbing blasphemy-related extrajudicial killings for the ensuing four decades.

For the next twenty years, no major anti-Ahmadi riots occurred in the country. However, the electoral results of the 1971 elections dealt two blows to the country: the separation of East Pakistan and an almost complete wipe-out of religious parties from the political arena. Facing a repeat of the 1946 election results, the religious parties found the situation highly detrimental to their survival. The anti-Ahmadi card once again became an effective tool for them to reassert their presence and create a space for themselves.

On May 22, 1973, tensions erupted in Rabwah when Ahmadi passengers of a train were attacked by some youngsters. This incident became a flashpoint that sparked further violence. Following the attack, a series of anti-Ahmadi riots broke out in various parts of Punjab, leading to widespread violence and destruction of property. Rioters targeted Ahmadi homes, businesses, and places of worship.

The 1973 anti-Ahmadi riots in Pakistan resulted in several casualties. According to various reports, the violence led to the deaths of around 30 Ahmadis. Additionally, many others were injured, and there was significant damage to property, including Ahmadi homes, businesses, and places of worship. The exact number of casualties can be difficult to determine due to varying accounts and the chaotic nature of the riots.

The religious parties, unsuccessful in achieving their goal in 1953, succeeded in 1974, even though the country was then led by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who wielded far greater power than Prime Minister Khwaja Nazmuddin did in 1953.

On September 7, 1974, the Pakistani parliament unanimously passed the Second Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan. This amendment added a new clause to Article 260, explicitly stating that Ahmadis were to be considered non-Muslims. However, no amendment or addition to blasphemy laws was introduced as a result of this amendment.

These incidents reflected several tendencies:

- No particular religious community was targeted except the Ahmadis.
- All blasphemous incidents were addressed through legal channels.
- The intent of the accused was meticulously evaluated before judgment was passed.
- All religions were accorded due respect, and disrespect to any religion, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, was deemed an act of blasphemy and prosecuted without discrimination.
- Most blasphemy cases were not entertained by the court if the requisite government sanction was not obtained.
- Leniency prevailed in sentencing, with corrective measures often suggested instead of harsh punishment.
- A blasphemy case was filed by Hindus in Dhaka, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), marking an unprecedented incident in the region's history.

BLASPHEMY CASES POST-ZIAUL HAQ ERA (1978 ONWARDS)

Initial Blasphemy Cases (1978)

In 1978, the first blasphemy cases under PPC 295-A were filed, citing offenses against the religious sentiments of the Muslim community. One case implicated Fazal-e-Raziq, the WAPDA chairman, whose speech at a Tarbela Dam meeting was deemed offensive by a religious magazine. Another case involved Qaisar Raza, a teenager accused of inscribing the names of the first three Caliphs on the soles of his feet. Both cases were dismissed due to lack of authorization from the Central or Provincial Governments.

These cases emerged a year after General Ziaul Haq assumed power from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in July 1977. At that time, the blasphemy laws enacted by the British in 1860 were still in effect, with no amendments. Ziaul Haq's Islamization program had not yet begun.

Legal Revisions and Surge in Cases (1984 Onwards)

From 1979 to 1986, no blasphemy cases were recorded. However, this changed with the 1984 amendments to the blasphemy laws, aligning them with Ziaul Haq's religious doctrine. The revised laws included:

- ❑ PPC 295-B: Desecration of the Holy Qur'an
- ❑ PPC 295-C: Derogatory remarks regarding the Holy Prophet (PBUH)
- ❑ PPC 298-A: Derogatory remarks about holy personages
- ❑ PPC 298-B: Restrictions on the Ahmadiyya community regarding the use of Islamic terms
- ❑ PPC 298-C: Prohibition on Ahmadis presenting themselves as Muslims

In 1987, Advocate Muhammad Ismail Qureshi filed Shariat Petition No.6/L, seeking to review the punishment for offenses under Section 295-C. Despite various opinions suggesting lesser punishments for repentant offenders, the court decided in favor of the death penalty, raising questions about the lack of consideration for alternative punishments.

Aapa Nisar Fatima, a PML-N leader,¹⁴ and Dr. Tahirul Qadri significantly advanced this petition, with the latter proposing immediate execution without proof of intent. The government was given until 1991 to amend Section 295-C, which Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif complied with.¹⁵

Notable Cases (1987-1992)

The amendments led to a surge in blasphemy cases, particularly targeting Ahmadis and Shias, echoing the 1974 declaration of Ahmadis as non-Muslims under Bhutto's regime. Between 1987 and 1988, nine blasphemy cases involving twelve individuals were recorded, six of which targeted nine Ahmadis. These cases often involved allegations of Ahmadis posing as Muslims. All individuals were eventually acquitted or granted bail.

In 1992, of six reported blasphemy cases, four resulted in fatalities, while two non-fatal cases drew attention due to their nature and judicial verdicts. One involved an Ahmadi for using Islamic phrases on a wedding invitation; he was acquitted. Another case, “Haq Nawaz v. Province of Punjab 1997 MLD 299,” involved the demolition of a mosque, which the court equated to blasphemy. The court recommended amending the law to impose harsher penalties.

Continuing Influence of Ziaul Haq's Ideology

Blasphemy laws (Sections 295, 297, and 298 of the PPC) remained largely unchanged since Ziaul Haq's regime, but his fundamentalist ideology continued to influence religious parties, jihadi groups, and parts of the judiciary. This was evident in the judiciary's recommendation to enhance penalties within sections 295 and 297 PPC during proceedings against the Lahore Deputy Commissioner.

¹⁴ Apa Nisar Fatima — the Jamaat e Islami legislator and mother to Ahsan Iqbal — sitting MNA from PML-N moved in 1986 the law that became known as Blasphemy Law. She then went to the Federal Shariat Court and got a judgment which stated that death penalty can be the only punishment for blasphemy.

It has been my considered view that roots of all Islamist terrorism and extremism in Pakistan can be traced back to Majlis-e-Ahrar- which as most of you are aware was famous for calling Pakistan “Kafiristan” and Jinnah “Kafir-e-Azam”. Islamist dictator General Zia- himself from an Ahrari family — deliberately strengthened the Islamist elements from Majlis-e-Ahrar and Jamaat-e-Islami and handed the state over to them. <https://medium>

¹⁵ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/113997/hand-out-blinkers-for-blasphemy-law>

EXTRAJUDICIAL MURDERS ON BLASPHEMY CHARGES

1992:

In 1992, four Christians were extrajudicially killed on blasphemy charges in Punjab, marking a significant and troubling shift. This was the first instance since the introduction of blasphemy laws in 1860 where four individuals faced such a fate in a single year, highlighting the vulnerability of another non-Muslim community to blasphemy accusations.

- **January 1992:** Naimat Ahmar, a Christian teacher, was brutally murdered by a member of a militant religious group in Faisalabad.
- **July 21, 1992:** Tahir Iqbal, a Christian convert from Islam accused of blasphemy, was found dead in police custody, suspected to have been poisoned by police officials.
- **1992 (specific dates not available):** Two Christians, Bantu Masih (80) and Mukhtar Masih (50), were arrested on blasphemy charges and died in a Lahore police station. Bantu Masih was stabbed eight times by a fundamentalist in the presence of policemen and later succumbed to his injuries. Mukhtar Masih was tortured to death in police custody. This year marked a significant shift in social attitudes as law enforcers (the police, in this case) became lawbreakers.

1993-1994:

In May 1993, Salamat Masih (12), Manzoor Masih (37), and Rehmat Masih (42) were accused of inscribing derogatory remarks against Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) on the wall of a mosque in Ratta Dhotran village, Gujranwala. Despite being illiterate, they were charged with this offense. Tragically, Manzoor Masih was fatally shot outside the District and Sessions Court during a hearing in April 1994. Salamat and Rehmat Masih were initially sentenced to death by a lower court but were acquitted by the Lahore High Court a year later, which cited their lack of familiarity with the Arabic language. The lower court's failure to consider this crucial fact raises questions, hinting at the potential influence of Zia-ul-Haq's fundamentalist ideology on the legal proceedings. The unanswered question remains: how did the murderer of Manzoor Masih justify his crime when it was later declared false by the court?

1994:

One of the most infamous blasphemy-related cases occurred in 1994. Hafiz Sajjad Tariq, accused of blasphemy in Gujranwala, accidentally dropped the Holy Quran on a burning stove and exclaimed, "Oh God, I have sinned and burnt the Holy Quran." This was overheard by a neighbor who incited a mob. Tariq was taken into protective custody by the police, but under pressure,

the police handed him over to the crowd, who stoned him to death and burned his body. Tariq was a devout Muslim, a Hafiz-e-Quran, and a member of Jamat-e-Islami, a religious party known for its support of Zia-ul-Haq and advocacy for amendments to the blasphemy law. This incident raises questions about the implications of extremist policies adopted by the country. Was the extrajudicial killing of Hafiz Sajjad Tariq a wake-up call for the rulers, religious parties, and judiciary to reassess the extremist policies being pursued? This remains a contentious question, with varied responses from both proponents and opponents. Nevertheless, the country continued to witness similar cases in subsequent years, and no religious community, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, remained safe from such incidents. Unfortunately, neither the religious nor political leadership showed any significant concern to investigate whether these extrajudicial incidents were based on factual findings or merely on hearsay.

Nevertheless, the country continued to witness similar cases in subsequent years, and no religious community, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, remained safe from such incidents. From 1948 to May 2023, extrajudicial killings on blasphemy charges took 104 lives.

Table 02: Casualties of extrajudicial attempts on blasphemy charges 1948 - May 2024			
Year	Killed	Injured	Casualties
AJK	0	8	8
Balochistan	2	0	2
Islamabad Capital Territory	2	1	3
East Pakistan	0	0	0
GB	0	0	0
KP	10	16	26
Pakistan	0	0	0
Punjab	77	28	105
Sindh	12	18	30
Thailand (wife of a Pakistani)	1	0	1
Grand Total	104	71	175

The religious identities of the victims of extra-judicial killings are reflected in the Table 3 below. It shows that as many as 48% of these victims are Muslims and 52% are non-Muslims.

Table 03: Extrajudicial killings of blasphemy accused - 1948 - May 2024												
Year	Ahmadi	Budhist	Christian	Christian convt to Islam	Ex. Ahmadi	Hindu	Ismaili	Muslim	Muslim convt Christian	Shia Muslim	Unknown	Grand Total
1948	1											1
1950	2											2
1953 - 1991	0											0
1992	0		3					0	1			4
1993	0		1									1
1994	0							1				1
1995	2		1					1				4
1996	0		0					0				0
1997	0		0					1				1
1998	0		1					0				1
1999			0					2				2
2000	1							0				1
2001								1				1
2002			0					2	1			3
2003			2					2				4
2004			0					0				0
2005			0					2				2
2006	0		0					2				2
2007			0					1				1
2008			1			1		1				3
2009	0		8			0		2				10
2010			2			0	0	0				2
2011	1	1	2	1		0		5		0		10
2012	0		1					1		0	1	3
2013	0	0	0					0				0
2014	5		2					4				11

2015	0		0				1	2				3
2016			0			0		1			0	1
2017	0		1			0		3		1	0	5
2018	0		0			0		2				2
2019	0		0			0		1				1
2020	0		2		1	0		2		0	0	5
2021	0		1			0		2		1	0	4
2022	1		0			0		5		0	0	6
2023	1		1	0		0		3		0	1	6
2024	0		1			0		0			0	1
Grand Total	14	1	30	1	1	1	1	49	2	2	2	104

Out of these 104, nearly 75% of the victims were ordinary citizens with no significant social, political, or professional backgrounds. The remaining 25% included:

Educators:

- Karachi University Professor Shakeel Auj,
- Principal & Hafiz-e-Quran Sareer Ahmed,
- Professor Khalid Hameed,
- Madrassa Teacher Safoora Bibi,
- Abdul Rauf, Teacher.

Educators from minorities:

- Maulvi Nur Din, Teacher (Ahmadi)
- Niamat Ahmad, Teacher (Christian)
- Tahir Iqbal, converted to Christianity
- Dilawar Hussain, Teacher (Converted to Ahmadiyya),

Foreigners:

- Ditney, Thai wife of a Pakistani
- Tahir Ahmad Nasim, a US-Pakistani dual national
- Priyantha Kumara, Sri Lankan,

A Chinese, Mr. Tian, working at Dasu Dam had barely escaped mob lynching on 15 April 2023 because of blasphemy charges.

Health Professional:

Dr. Rashid Ahmad – Ahmadi,

Legal fraternity:

- Judge Arif Iqbal Bhatti,
- Rashid Rahman - Lawyer

Politicians:

- Salman Taseer, Former Governor, Punjab
- Shahbaz Bhati, Minister Minority Affairs

Religious persons:

- Dr. Sajjad Farooq, Hafiz-e-Quran & JI member
- Mohamamed Yousaf Ali, 55-year-old Muslim Cleric,
- Maulvi Sanaullah,
- Muhammad Azam, hafiz-e-Quran,
- Taqi Shah, Shia scholar,
- Maulana Nigar Alam

University student:

Mashal Khan, University Student

Table 04: Victims of extrajudicial violence on blasphemy charges - 1948 - May 2024	
Victims	Killed
Civilians	76
Educator	5
Educator minority	4
Foreigner	3
Health professional	1
Legal fraternity	2
Politicians	2
Religious person	6
Religious person - minority	2
Security official	0
Security - non-Muslim	1
Shrine caretaker	1
University student	1
Grand Total	104

These extrajudicial killings illustrate two contrasting perspectives on the issue of blasphemy in Pakistan: either there has been a significant increase in disrespect toward Islamic teachings and revered figures across various communities and professions, or religious zealots have initiated a witch hunt, where even

the slightest deviation from their rigid interpretations is deemed a blasphemous crime. The case of a woman accused of blasphemy for wearing a dress with Arabic script is one of such examples.

The trend of extrajudicial killings on blasphemy charges reflects the alarming manipulation of Islamic laws by certain groups. Dr. Raghbir Hussain Naimi, Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), recently condemned this misuse, emphasizing that no law in Pakistan prescribes the death penalty for desecration of the Holy Quran, highlighting the need for legal and societal reforms.¹⁶

Prominent Case of Aasia Bibi

A notable blasphemy-related case involved a Christian woman, Aasia Bibi, which resulted in extrajudicial killings of high-level government officials. She was the first woman to be sentenced to death on November 8, 2010, under the country's controversial blasphemy laws for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during an argument with Muslim neighbors over drinking water from a cup used by other Muslim women.

Salmaan Taseer, the former Governor of Punjab and a vocal critic of the blasphemy law, publicly supported Aasia Bibi. On November 20, 2010, he held a press conference with Aasia Bibi and stated, "The sentence against Aasia is inhumane. I have been handed over an appeal for a presidential pardon which I will take to the president and soon Aasia will be pardoned."¹⁷

Taseer's support for Aasia Bibi drew significant criticism from the media and the right-wing religious lobby in the country. In an Urdu column titled "آسیہ بی بی اور قانون توپین رسالت...قلم کمان" (Aasia Bibi and the Blasphemy Law...Pen Command...Hamid Mir), senior journalist Hamid Mir expressed his views. The following is an excerpt from this column translated into English:

"After this verdict, Federal Minister for Minority Affairs, Shabaz Bhatti, declared Asia Bibi innocent and also deemed Pakistan's blasphemy law, Section 295-C, as unjust. A few days later, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer reached Sheikhpura Jail. He also declared Asia Bibi innocent and stated that she would be pardoned by President Asif Ali Zardari. It would be better to resolve Asia Bibi's case through understanding and wisdom instead of giving it a political color. There are instances where innocent individuals were falsely accused under this law, similar to how innocent individuals are falsely accused under Section 302. Of course, there is a need to prevent the misuse of blasphemy laws and there is a law for punishment of false accusation. The efforts of Shahbaz Bhatti and Salman Taseer, in this case appear to be an attempt to challenge the Section 295-C rather than saving Asia Bibi."

¹⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1855604/religious-groups-misusing-islamic-laws-cii-chief>

¹⁷ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/99277/taseers-remarksabout-blasphemy-law>

Considering the attempts of Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti as politicization has merits but is slightly out of context. The amendments and additions to the blasphemy law were political steps by General Zia-ul-Haq to create a religiously fundamentalist environment, countering the ideology of Islamic Socialism promoted by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and strengthening his political power. Addressing one case while ignoring others shows a bias, intentional or not, demonstrated by the writer.

The media hype and criticism by religious leaders against Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti are now part of history. It is up to the people to decide whether their assassinations were collective crimes by certain groups or by the individuals who committed them. There is no clause in blasphemy laws that defines questioning or challenging these laws as an act of blasphemy.

The argument comparing the misuse of other laws to the misuse of the blasphemy law is also out of context. While other laws are misused by outraged individuals acting irrationally, the misuse of blasphemy laws often involves mobs incited by self-motivated fanatics.

The assassination of Salman Taseer on January 4, 2011, by his bodyguard and the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti by the Pakistani Taliban for his opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws are examples of premeditated misuse of the blasphemy law.¹⁸

Salman Taseer's extrajudicial murder highlighted the involvement of law enforcement in such crimes, reflecting a belief that extrajudicial killing on unverified blasphemy accusations was justified. This view was reinforced when many lawyers supported Taseer's assassin, Malik Mumtaz Qadri. Religious parties and scholars also backed Qadri, and a shrine was built in his honor in Islamabad after his execution. This raises a critical question: If extrajudicial killings on blasphemy charges are considered a sacred act, why was such reverence showered on one policeman and not on all those who committed similar crimes before and after this incident? At least six extrajudicial killings were committed by policemen, three before and two after Taseer's murder.

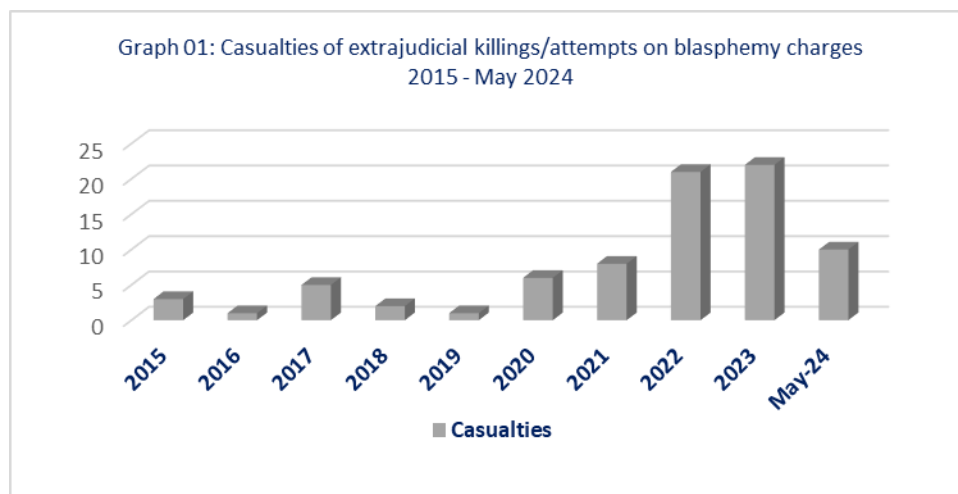
Females have been both victims and perpetrators of extrajudicial killings on blasphemy charges. In one case, a female teacher at a madrassa in D.I. Khan was brutally slaughtered and beheaded at the doorstep of Madrasatul Falahul Banaat Islamia on March 30, 2022.

Another surprising fact is the link between jihadi militancy and extrajudicial offenses related to blasphemy charges. Jihadi militancy has been prevalent in the country for over two decades. The trends of these crimes from 2015 to May 2024 are highlighted in the table below. In 2015, the security operation Zarb-e-Azb was at its peak, targeting and eliminating a significant number of militants or forcing them to flee the

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/02/pakistan-minister-shot-dead-islamabad>

country. During the period from 2015 to 2020, 18 people were subjected to extrajudicial killings or injuries on blasphemy charges. However, this number surged to 61 from 2021 to May 2024. Is this a coincidence, or is there a direct correlation with the rise in militancy since 2021? This subject needs further inquiry before drawing a conclusion.

Table 05: Casualties of extrajudicial attempts on blasphemy charges 2015 - May 2024			
Year	Killed	Injured	Casualties
2015	3	0	3
2016	1	0	1
2017	5	0	5
2018	2	0	2
2019	1	0	1
2020	5	1	6
2021	4	4	8
2022	6	15	21
2023	6	16	22
May-24	1	9	10
Grand Total	34	45	79



CONCLUSION

The trajectory of blasphemy-related extrajudicial killings in Pakistan reveals a disturbing pattern of increasing intolerance and mob justice, driven by legal and societal shifts. This trend is exacerbated by the manipulation of Islamic laws by certain religious groups to suit their own agendas. As recently highlighted by Chairman CII, the misuse of blasphemy laws and the resort to mob justice are not only contrary to the principles of Sharia but also to the laws of the land.

This shift toward a more authoritarian interpretation of religion has had dire consequences, particularly for minority communities. The unchecked power of mob-driven enforcement and the failure to protect individuals from false accusations indicate a deep-seated issue within Pakistan's societal and legal frameworks. As we reflect on these findings, it becomes imperative to question whether the current trajectory aligns with the foundational principles of justice and respect for all religions.

Moving forward, a critical reassessment of blasphemy laws and their enforcement is essential. Only by addressing these issues can Pakistan hope to cultivate a society where justice prevails over mob rule and respect for religious diversity is upheld. This report, therefore, urges policymakers, religious leaders, and society at large to confront these challenges and work towards a more equitable and just system.

The Center

CRSS Background

The Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) is a think tank/advocacy center launched in September, 2007. Founded by noted security expert and media personality Imtiaz Gul, it is committed to the cause of independent research, nonpartisan analysis, and informed advocacy.

As an advocacy center, CRSS is dedicated to trigger critical thinking through discourse anchored in global democratic values such as socio-political diversity, rule of law, equal citizenry, and acceptance of diversity, fundamental human rights, all at the intersection of empirical research in security studies.

Core Values

CRSS strives to embed the national conversation in constitutionalism, and rationalize it over extremism and sectarianism. CRSS believes the path to peace is through embodying fundamental human rights, specifically:

- strict adherence to the rule of law, and stringent implementation
- informing the public on civic education, especially good governance and public accountability
- promoting equal rights for all citizens of Pakistan
- championing women empowerment
- providing training and opportunities to youth to veer them away from radicalization through critical thinking

CRSS' programming reflects its core values, which CRSS believes can, along with time-tested methodologies in strategic communications, impactful message development, research and advocacy result in a more tolerant and cohesive Pakistan.

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