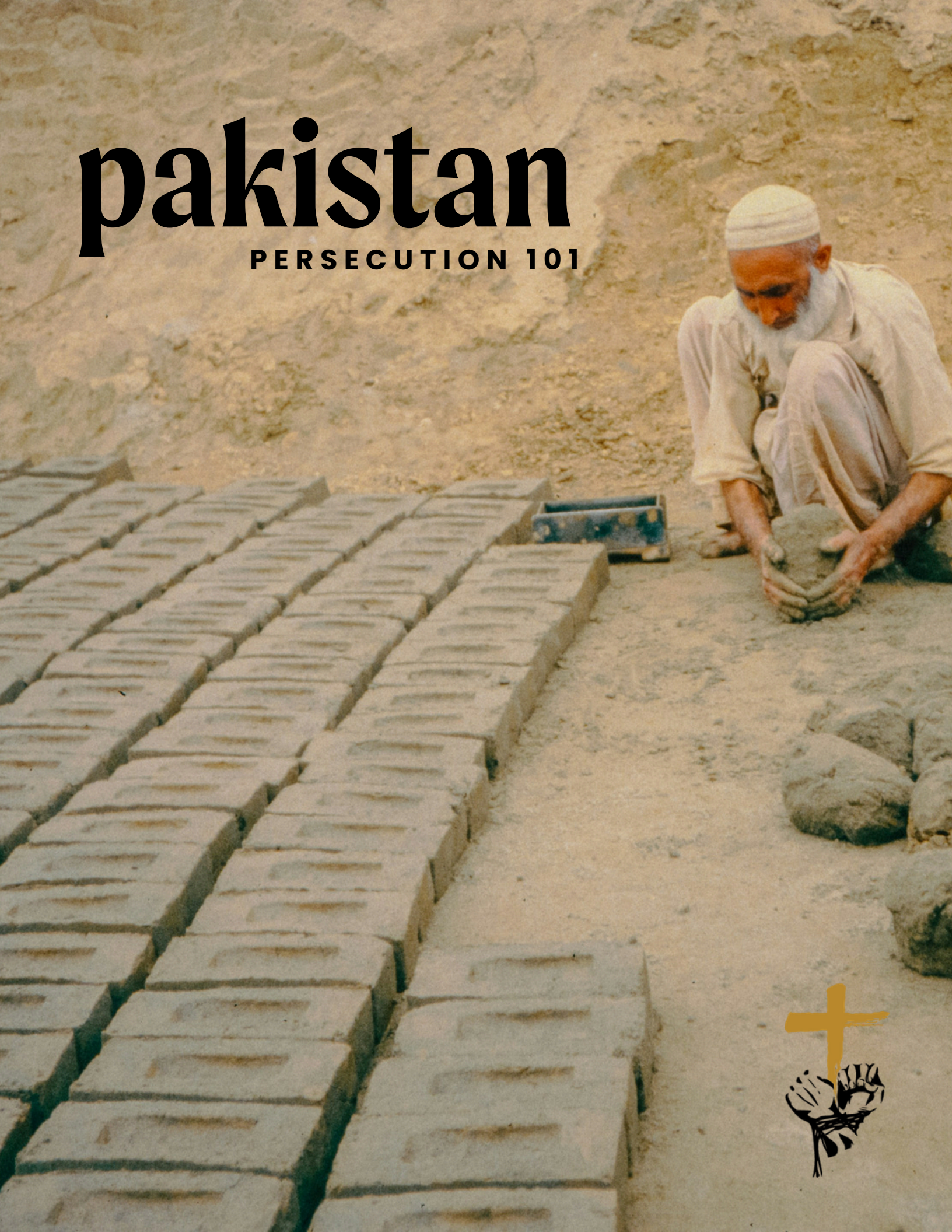


pakistan

PERSECUTION 101



pakistan

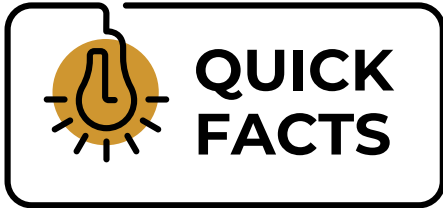
PERSECUTION 101

Protected by a biased legal system and a repressive security state, radicals in Pakistan leave little room for Christians in society

Pakistan's small Christian population has long been relegated to the outskirts of society. Job advertisements for degrading, dangerous jobs like manually cleaning out sewers sometimes declare that Muslims need not apply, the job being reserved for religious minorities. In cities around Pakistan, Christians are pushed to separate neighborhoods or "ghettos." In the legal system, Christians are singled out by an array of laws that criminalize their faith and punish them severely for criticizing Islam. Even the accusation of blasphemy can lead to the death penalty, casting a severe chill over everyday interactions between Christians and their majoritarian neighbors.



A hospital in Pakistan.



TYPES OF PERSECUTION



Government Restrictions

Pakistan's blasphemy laws and judicial system create a culture of repression for the country's religious minorities.



Social Persecution

Social pressure relegates Pakistani Christians, and other religious minorities, to the furthest outskirts of society



Radical Extremists

Extremist elements of Pakistani society commit acts of violence against Christians, with a large degree of legal and social impunity



Type of Government

Federal Parliamentary Republic



Chief Executive

Prime Minister Anwar ul Haq Kakar (since 2023)



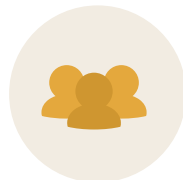
Total Population

Approx. 247.65 million (2023 est.)



Religious Demography

96.5% Muslim - 238.98 million
1.2 % Christian - 3.14 million
2.3% Other - 5.53 million



Ethnic Demography

44.7% Punjabi
15.4% Pashtun
14.1% Sindhi
8.4% Saraiki
7.6% Muhajirs
9.9% Other

ICC IN PAKISTAN

As a result of their diminished place in society, Pakistani Christians often suffer from extreme cyclical poverty affecting generation after generation. Lack of resources often causes families to pull their children out of school prematurely, lessening their job prospects as adults and perpetuating a vicious pattern of events from one generation to the next.



In response, ICC works in Pakistan to ensure that children can attend school, helping to cover the costs of schooling and supporting families who might otherwise be forced to put their child to work doing menial labor in factories or elsewhere. Though not ICC's only response to the situation in Pakistan, the work to free children from poverty through education is a core part of what ICC does in the country.

Backgrounder on Religious Freedom in Pakistan

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“From criminalizing minority religious thought to enabling radical extremists, the Pakistani government is consistent in its pressure on the country’s tiny religious minority communities.”

—Jeff King

Established as an Islamic republic in 1956, Pakistan openly favors Islam over the other all other faiths, both in official policy and across society. For the majority, this system is tolerable—the country is more than 96% Muslim—but for the small religious minority communities scattered across the country the arrangement is stifling and threatening in the extreme.

In their interactions with the government, Christians and other minorities find themselves relegated to second-class status. What little attention they do receive in the policymaking sphere is often negative, focused on ending their rights and stifling their views. Family and civil law do not consider their ways of living and create unequal burdens on the everyday lives of minority faiths. Registering one's conversion to Islam is a simple administrative process, but registering one's conversion away from Islam is not given as a choice.

As outlined in a 2021 report by ICC, Sections 295, 295-A, 295-B, and 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code collectively make up Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Under these sections, Pakistani authorities are empowered to punish individuals believed guilty of offending another's religious sentiments.

- **Section 295:** Injuring or defiling places of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class. Punishable by up to two years' imprisonment, or fine, or both
- **Section 295-A:** Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs. Punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment, or fine, or both
- **Section 295-B:** Defiling, etc., of the Quran. Punishable by imprisonment for life
- **Section 295-C:** Use of derogatory remarks—spoken, written, direct or indirect, etc.—that defile the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Mandatory death sentence and fine

Seen together, these laws serve to stymie and even criminalize minority religious expression. They are often abused to intimidate minority groups, with even an accusation of blasphemy being enough in many cases to whip up a local mob or land one in prison for years.

Christian and Hindu girls, along with women of other faiths outside the Muslim majority, are regularly abducted and forcibly converted to Islam before being placed into a forced marriage. The perpetrators of these crimes against women enjoy an extreme degree of impunity—even when caught, they often walk free or are allowed to continue the marriage.

Working conditions for many Christians are extremely poor. From sweeping the streets to diving into sewers to clear blockages with no protective equipment to working as factory workers in isolated brick kilns, the law provides precious few rights to minority workers.

The brick kiln industry, largely staffed by indentured workers trapped in inescapable debt to the factory owners, is disproportionately made up of Christians and other minority groups. In one kiln visited by ICC in 2023, the staff were approximately 50% Christian—a grossly disproportionate share in a country where Christians make up just 1.2% of the population.

To address the problem of religious persecution in Pakistan requires a multipronged approach, one that confronts the discriminatory legal system but also considers the deeply rooted general animosity against the Christian population in the country. There is no simple approach, but for the millions of Pakistani Christians trapped in an oppressive system an answer must be found.

YEAR	USCIRF Recommendation	State Dept. Action
1999		
2000		
2001	USCIRF Watchlist	
2002	USCIRF Watchlist	
2003	CPC	
2004	CPC	
2005	CPC	
2006	CPC	
2007	CPC	

YEAR	USCIRF Recommendation	State Dept. Action
2008	CPC	
2009	CPC	
2010	CPC	
2011	CPC	
2012	CPC	
2013	CPC	
2014	CPC	
2015	CPC	
2016	CPC	
2017	CPC	SWL
2018	CPC	CPC
2019	CPC	CPC
2020	CPC	CPC
2021	CPC	CPC
2022	CPC	CPC
2023	CPC	

