

# Minority Rights in Pakistan

Historic Neglect or State Complicity?



**PAK INSTITUTE FOR PEACE STUDIES (PIPS)**



# **Minority Rights in Pakistan: Historic Neglect or State Complicity?**

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A survey-based study of the lives of religious minorities in Pakistan and their  
relationship with followers of other faiths

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

While multiple factors have historically contributed to discrimination against religious minorities and faith-based violence in Pakistan, there have been inadequate efforts on the level of state and society to create an environment that supports interfaith harmony and social cohesion. The processes of Islamisation of the state and society have negatively affected the overall behaviours and attitudes, which are increasingly becoming intolerant and rejecting towards religious minorities in the country. Growing threats to physical security of minority communities from Islamist extremist and militant groups and government's inaction to counter these threats further compound the problem.

This report examines socio-political views and everyday challenges faced by Pakistan's largest minority communities based on a countrywide survey conducted by the Pak Institute of Peace Studies in 2014 with 327 respondents belonging to Christian, Hindu, Baha'i and Sikh communities from Pakistan's four provinces: Sindh, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Balochistan. Some of the main objectives of the survey were to study the lives of religious minorities and their relationship with followers of other faiths; explore social, cultural, economic and political aspects of and challenges in day-to-day living shared among followers of different faiths; and identify inter-faith and inter-cultural connectors from Pakistan's existing composite cultural heritage such as shrines, festivals and folklores etc.

The survey findings reveal that discrimination against minorities is connected with overall inequality and government inattention. One of the recurrent themes of this survey reveals a persistent complaint from minority groups about the lack of effective protection accorded by the state against violence, intimidation and intolerance. This survey also finds that most respondents although deeply committed to their faith are able to integrate and live peacefully with other religious groups but feel threatened by the overall deteriorating security situation countrywide. However, a big majority of respondents from all four provinces also believe that they are not part of the larger social and cultural mainstream. This is despite the fact that a considerable number of respondents say they participate freely in cultural and religious festivals along with followers of other religions and have exchange of visits with the latter. Also, most respondents do not experience any problem in business and other transactions with followers of other religions.

## **BACKGROUND**

It was in 2013 when Pakistan witnessed an unprecedented transition of democratic power that the changing of guard between two democratically elected governments was acknowledged as a critical political milestone. For the country to be watchfully steered towards increased stability and national pluralism, increasing internal conflict perpetuated by sectarianism and extremist attacks against religious minorities would need to be tackled without deviation. Religious tensions would need to be quelled by the government whether through a process that would engage religious leaders and combined with inter-faith dialogue and tolerance-building at the local level within diverse religious and ethnic communities where the slightest spark of dissent is liable to set a fire of violence and distress. Given the spectre of sectarianism, much of it perpetuated by religious and other sect-based intolerance tearing at the fabric of human rights and democracy, it was thought the government would proceed and commit resources, appoint special officials/ ministers and intelligence to curb right-wing hardliners from conducting terror attacks and vigilante justice. But that was not to happen. Government assurances, especially articulated in the aftermath of an attack targeting a minority community or a place of worship, did not go beyond visiting the scene of violent incidents/attacks and pledging to conduct an investigation. Activists in Pakistan and other international watchdogs have reminded that minorities lack police protection and legal assistance. Perpetrators of hate crimes are not charged and punished. In a 2013 Pew survey, fifty-seven percent of Pakistanis said that they considered religious conflict as a national problem.<sup>1</sup>

Religious minorities comprise 9 million out of the 183 million Pakistanis. Christians and Hindus, making up 2 percent of the population are the largest group of minorities, while the remaining include Sikhs, Zoroastrians, Baha'is, Buddhist, Jews and Ahmadis making up a quarter of the country's population. It is clear that the state of security and protection for all citizens has come under greater threat as Nawaz Sharif's government grapples haplessly with political machinations and the reigniting and regrouping of various militant assortments, ceding further space for extremism to take root inside the country, which is reason why 'unprecedented' levels of violence affects minority groups and religious communities. As the Sword of Damocles hangs over Pakistan's minority groups, the future for religious communities and the younger generation has become more insecure and threatened than previously.

### **Target the Muslims and non-Muslims alike**

Faith-based violence, targeted killings and kidnapping for ransom, and incitement of hatred are not confined to non-Muslims alone; minority Muslim sects, mainly Shias including Hazaras in Balochistan, have become frequent targets of violence for their religious beliefs. State complicity is yet another factor which makes minority persecutions more rampant and left unpunished.

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<sup>1</sup>*The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society* was conducted by Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion and Public Life and published in April 2013, the main objective being to examine the social and political views of Muslims worldwide.

Discriminatory laws and socio- economic and political isolation which has historically categorized minorities has found endorsement through various democratic governments and military rule.

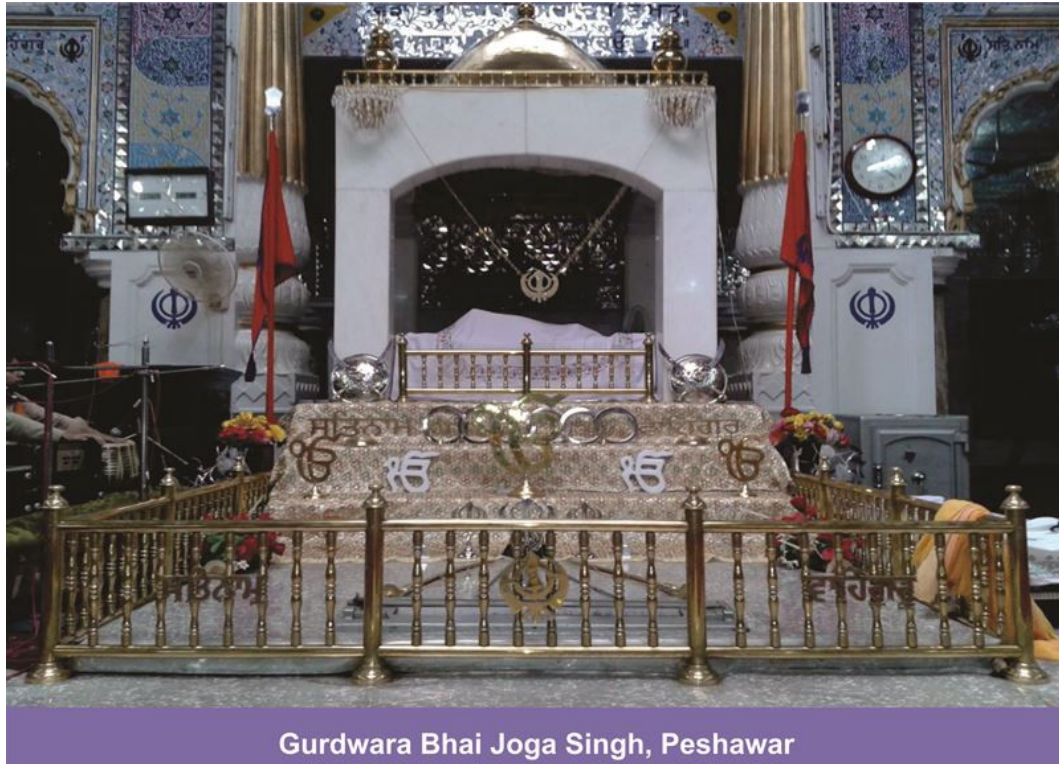
In June 2011, a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, *'We are the walking dead': Killing of Shia Hazaras in Balochistan, Pakistan* reiterated that the Pakistan government 'should take all necessary measures to stop Sunni extremist groups in Balochistan province from committing further killings and other abuses against Hazara and other Shia Muslims.' Several hundreds of Shia Hazaras have been killed since 2008 in incidents of targeted violence, the worse attacks in January and February 2013 that killed at least 180 people.<sup>2</sup> It is well established that civilian and military forces have done little to investigate such attacks against the Hazara community which allows perpetrators to kill with increasing impunity and attack Shia processions, pilgrimages and neighbour hoods. The HRW report points out that 'While the Pakistani military and political authorities deny any complicity in the LeJ's abuses or sympathy for its activities, the LeJ has historically benefitted from ties with elements in the country's security services.'

The situation for the country's larger minority groups— Christians, Hindus and Sikhs – remains no different as it continues to deteriorate with the government's limited capacity and will to investigate attacks, persecute perpetrators and promote a culture of tolerance. Religious communities remain under direct threat from religious extremists and individuals spreading a milieu of vigilantism and horrific brutality. Churches are bombed, temples vandalized, worshipers attacked and killed, buses targeted, homes destroyed and social gathering attacked. In September 2013, the Christian community in Peshawar faced its deadliest attack when the All Saints Church was targeted by a suicide attack leaving 127 dead and scores injured. Audacious and horrific attacks, symptomatic of the state of the nation, taking on increased frequency means there is little social and political space accorded to minorities and no meaningful dialogue and understanding between non-Muslim and Muslim communities. Well-known religious leaders belonging to mainstream Muslims communities, religious parties and sects have rarely been supported to take on positive roles in bringing about inter-faith resolutions that could foster tolerance and peace and put an end to attacks that target Shias, Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs.

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<sup>2</sup>Ongoing attacks against the Hazara community in Quetta by Sunni extremists has meant that the half a million Hazaras live under constant threat of attack, restricting their movement, facing economic challenges and hardships and with curtailed access to education and employment, members of this community have begun to leave Pakistan seeking refuge in other countries, states the 62-page Human Rights Watch report. It reminds of the two brutal attacks mentioned above: "On January 10, 2013, the suicide bombing of a snooker club in Quetta frequented by Hazaras killed 96 people and injured at least 150. Many of the victims were caught in a second blast 10 minutes after the first, striking those who had gone to the aid of the wounded. On February 17, 2013, a bomb exploded in a vegetable market in Quetta's Hazara Town, killing at least 84 Hazara and injuring more than 160. The LeJ claimed responsibility for both attacks, the bloodiest attacks from sectarian violence in Pakistan since independence in 1947."





### **Living under the Sword of Damocles**

The most common tool of persecution against non-Muslim communities has become a charge of blasphemy.<sup>3</sup> The misuse of the blasphemy laws in the context of scores of recent cases – some involving Muslim accused – have been used as a catalyst to promote intolerance and vigilante justice. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 34 individuals were charged with blasphemy in 2013. Although no one has been executed for blasphemy in Pakistan as yet, 16 people are on death row and 20 are serving life sentences according to HRW for blasphemous activity. The minority Ahmadi community has become a frequent target for Sunni extremist groups and as HRW notes Punjab provincial officers are known to support extremists instead of protecting the community, its mosques and graveyards.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Currently found in Pakistan's Penal Code (PPC) as the prohibition of blasphemy or irreverence towards holy persons, culture and artefacts, Pakistan's blasphemy laws were introduced under British colonial legislation drafted in 1860. Under the Indian Penal Code in 1860, prepared by the First Law Commission, this piece of legislature stated that the act of damaging or defiling a place of worship or a sacred object under Section 295 was a criminal act. In 1947 after Pakistan inherited this law – which by then had an additional Section 295A adding the offence of outraging religious feeling – amendments were sought over the years. Under Zia's Islamisation, amendments were made. The PPC Ordinance 1982 amended Section 295-B to include life imprisonment if "whoever wilfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran or any extract thereof or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life."

<sup>4</sup> The Human Rights Watch World Report 2013 stated: 'Members of the Ahmadi religious community continued to be a major target for blasphemy prosecutions and subjected to specific anti-Ahmadi laws across Pakistan. They faced increasing social discrimination as militant groups used provisions of the law to prevent Ahmadis from "posing as Muslims," forced the demolition of Ahmadi mosques in Lahore, barred Ahmadis from using their mosques in Rawalpindi, and vandalized Ahmadi graves across Punjab province.'



When Professor Muhammad Shakeel Auj propagated his moderate views on Islam – he had suggested that Muslim women should be allowed to marry non-Muslim men and that it was not mandatory to remove make-up before saying one’s prayers – he began to face threats which continued for years; some more sinister than other messages. But the Dean at the Faculty of Islamic Studies at the University of Karachi remained stoic and defiant.<sup>5</sup>In September 2014, the 54-year old professor was murdered as he travelled with a female student to attend an evening invitation at the Iranian Cultural Centre in Karachi.

Attempts through the past decade and previously at amending the blasphemy law have been rejected fearing backlash from the religious right<sup>6</sup>. In April 2001, Musharraf’s regime had attempted to regularize the registering of cases by amending procedures which meant that each case was to be initially investigated and verified by the District Commissioner before being submitted to court. This would immediately remove false accusatory cases for lack of evidence and curtail the misuse of the law. This process would have further identified unscrupulous complainants who have used the law to settle grudges and personal scores against members of minority communities. This suggested amendment that had come after recommendations made across the board during a national Human Rights and Dignity Conference was rescinded in May of the same year because of fervent religious opposition. Resultantly the blasphemy law has reared its ugly head as a tool for promoting religious intolerance and persecutes minorities. This said many of those accused are Muslims. The state has failed to intervene and protect those minorities and falsely accused victims who have suffered because of powerfully supported persecutors. While not punishing those who misuse the law and violently attack communities and places of worship, the state had turned away, while mobs create havoc and kill hundreds in incidents such as that in Gojra in Punjab. On July 30 and August 1, 2009, 7 Christians were burnt alive and dozens injured, their homes gutted when riots broke out over allegations of blasphemy. In another incident, an accused in a blasphemy case was shot dead in November 2010 outside his house after being granted bail.

Individuals –including mentally handicapped minors and young girls under the age of 6 years – belonging to minority communities have been charged with blasphemy and imprisoned with no

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<sup>5</sup> It has been widely reported that Professor Auj had received death threats and had also been accused of blasphemy in 2012 by four colleagues belonging to Karachi University. They had claimed a speech he made in the US insulted the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) One of the academics that he complained about had previously held his position in the same department. The four men who had accused him face charges but are presently out on bail.

<sup>6</sup>In 1986, the Criminal Law Act III provided another amendment to section 295 C which meant defamation against the Prophet was a criminal offence. The amended version noted:“Whoever by words, either spoke or written, or by visible representation, or by any other imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) shall be punished with death or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to a fine.” Aasia Bibi, who is the first Christian woman to be sentenced to death, is accused under this clause. Interestingly, in May 1998, during Nawaz Sharif’s previous government, there was talk of amending the blasphemy law but in September of that year Justice Nazeer Akhtar from Lahore is known to have said that there was no reason to amend this law and that all blasphemers should be killed. This statement caused a public uproar but the religious right supportive of the blasphemy law in its existing form led by Maulana Shah Ahmed Noorani warned the government of dire backlash if it amended the Penal Code. The Action Committee of the Namoos-e-Mustafa was mobilized to hold countrywide protests. In 1992, when Sharif’s government removed the option of life imprisonment from Section 295-C and inserted the mandatory death penalty it meant more power was given to those who wished to misuse this law.

access to legal assistance. Reported incidents have shown that those accused have been killed in jail even before being sentenced. Even committed and brave individuals advocating for minority rights and justice, including judges, lawyers and rights activists have been threatened by colleagues (for providing legal assistance to those accused in blasphemy cases) and religious groups; and more often than not targeted and murdered for their work.



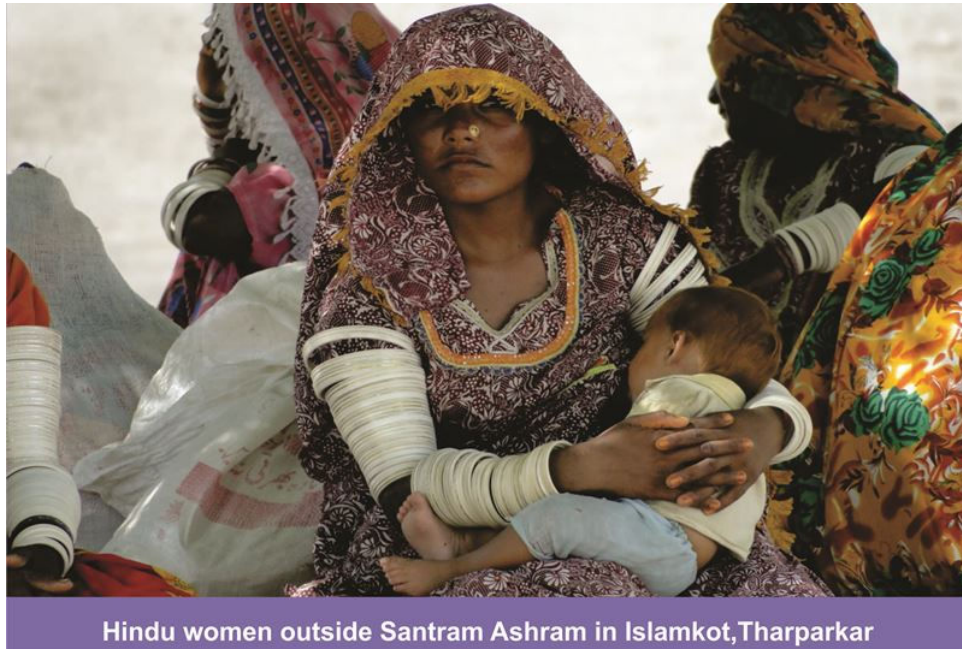
Joseph Colony, Lahore where Christians were attacked by Muslim mob

In May this year, a 53-year old lawyer representing an academic accused under the blasphemy law was shot dead in his office in the city of Multan. Rashid Rehman, a staunch defender of human rights had worked for more than twenty years with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan representing women, peasants, minorities and other vulnerable groups. It was because of this commitment to provide legal assistance when no other lawyer would take on controversial cases that he had agreed to represent university lecturer Junaid Hafeez.<sup>7</sup> However, Rehman had been threatened openly in court by the complainants in this case. This incident showing that it is more than evident that Pakistan's blasphemy laws support religiously motivated violence that goes beyond persecuting minorities but also targets the protectors of human rights and justice. Often lawyers state that it is difficult to find judges to hear appeals when it comes to high profile cases because of the unwillingness due to fear to be associated with blasphemy cases. In its 2014 annual world report, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom explains: 'Pakistan's laws and practice are particularly egregious [with regards to blasphemy], with its constantly-abused law penalising blasphemous acts with the death penalty or life in prison. In

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<sup>7</sup>Junaid Hafeez who taught at Multan's Bahauddin Zakariya University had been accused of defaming the prophet Mohammed on social media last year. Reports stated the accusations were levelled by hardliner university students who had pushed for him to be charged. Mr Rehman took on the case after no other lawyer would represent the lecturer.

addition to state enforcement, mobs feel enabled, under the cover of this law, to mete out vigilante justice against individuals deemed to have committed blasphemy.’



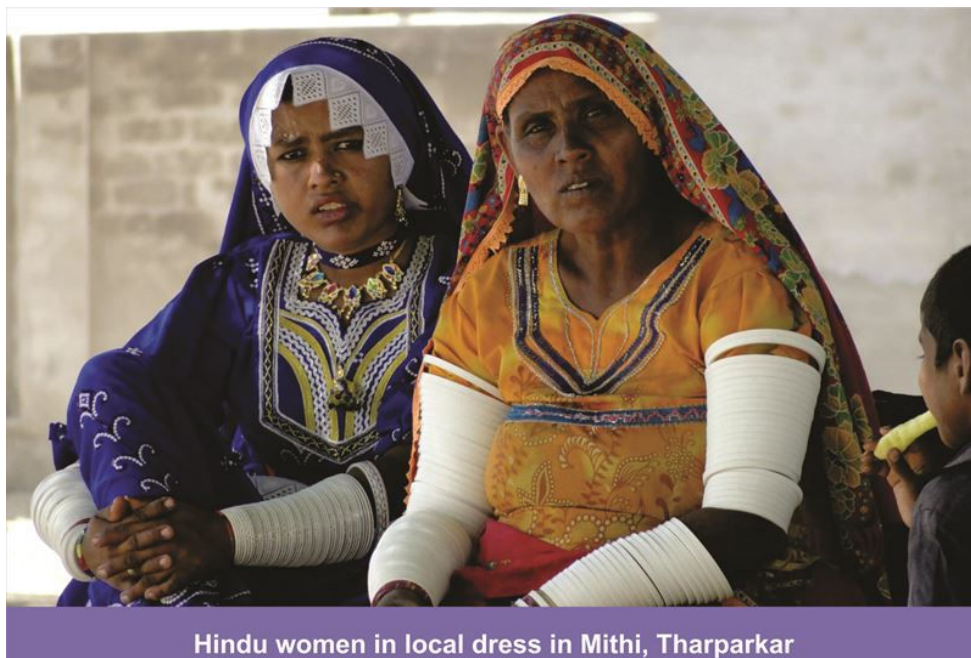
Targeted mob violence, hate crimes, murder, desecrating places of worship, verbal abuse and intimidation against Pakistan’s minorities has become a daily reality, often reflective of the socio-political exclusion of vulnerable religious groups and communities and the consequence of acceptable, intolerant extremist ideologies supported by the state. Violence against Hindus and Dalits, especially in rural Sindh, including kidnapping young women, forced conversions and marriages to Muslim men has become widespread with activists voicing concern at relentless inhumane practices. In its proposals over the past decade, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has recommended the repeal of the Penal Code Section 295–B and C besides other urgent measures to restore citizenship and security to non-Muslim Pakistanis. Official authorities have paid minimal, if no attention to protecting certain communities at risk with state complicity evident at the judicial, executive or legislative level.

### **Destined to death: The fate of human rights defenders**

Although high-profile ministers have advocated for minorities and their legal rights, especially in blasphemy cases, they have been suffered intimidation, some have been targeted and murdered for their convictions. When in November 2010, when Aasia Bibi, a young Christian farm labourer was sentenced to death for blasphemy, President Asif Ali Zardari sought a presidential pardon for her, but his decision was overruled by the ruling party’s coalition partner, the JUI-F. Interestingly, the law minister failed to seek amendments to the blasphemy law that rights advocates state are critical when reviewing the misuse of this law targeting vulnerable



individuals and communities. In 2011, Punjab's Governor Salman Taseer who had earlier visited Asia Bibi in prison and advocated openly against the discrimination of minorities was murdered by one of his own police guards in Islamabad.<sup>8</sup> He had also backed a private member's bill in the moved by parliamentarian Sherry Rehman, to amend the blasphemy law to ensure miscarriages of justice less likely and remove its death penalty.<sup>9</sup> Taseer's murderer was hailed a hero by certain extremist religious groups and offered pro bono legal assistance such is the tolerance level for first-degree murder seen as a legitimate act to cut down support for an accused blasphemer. Later, an Islamabad-based mosque was named after the man sentenced to death by a court of law.<sup>10</sup> Taseer's targeted killing was followed with that of Shahbaz Bhatti, the Federal Minister of Minorities, who like the liberal Governor of Punjab was a vocal advocate for fighting for greater and equal minority rights and had supported amendments to the blasphemy law.



Listing Pakistan as seventh among ten countries where people remain the most under threat in 2014, the Minority Rights Group International concludes that increases in threats to minorities

<sup>8</sup> Punjab's Governor Salman Taseer was the first senior government official who visited Asia Bibi, a mother of five, in prison and appealed to President Zardari for clemency. Taseer had told the media at the time that she was a poor woman who belonged to a minority community and should be pardoned. Asia Bibi was arrested on blasphemy charges in June 2009 when she was asked to fetch water out in the field. Women labourers objected saying she was a non-Muslim so should not touch the water bowl. She was later arrested when they complained that she had made derogatory remarks about the Prophet. Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti who had been asked by President Zardari to investigate the case was also murdered after the killing of Taseer.

<sup>9</sup> Ms Rehman submitted a bill for amending the Blasphemy Act in November 2010 seeking an end to the mandatory death penalty, urging constitutional protection for minorities. Reformers like Ms Rehman have not called for scrapping the blasphemy law as that would be akin to committing suicide in an emotive and extremist-driven milieu but have sought procedural amendments in the past so that miscarriages of justice are stopped. However, since the murder of high-profile rights activists and ministers advocating on behalf of blasphemy accused persons, there has been no public talk of amending the Act

<sup>10</sup> Mumtaz Qadri, a police guard who was sentenced to death by a court of law in 2011 confessed to murdering Salman Taseer because he objected to the Governor's calls to amend the blasphemy law. No Pakistani politician has since dared openly criticize the blasphemy laws or call for an amendment.

has been the result of governments and societies overlooking or tolerating ‘entrenched patterns of discrimination against particular communities.’<sup>11</sup> Noting the threat from sectarianism, including inter-ethnic political violence in Sindh, clashes between Deobandi and Barelvi militant groups, violent repression of Balochi activists in Balochistan, continued persecution of Christians and Ahmadis and an exterminatory campaign against Hazara and other Shias across the country waged by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba and the Pakistani Taliban, which claimed the lives of hundreds of victims last year, this ranking is a stark warning to the government that it must buckle up and act. In its subsequent annual report, *State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous People 2014 – Freedom from Hate* the group notes: ‘Hostility towards minorities and indigenous peoples can range from intimidation or denigration to murder and indiscriminate attacks.’

Compelling instances and overwhelming evidence of hate, violence and murder targeting minority groups has meant they continue to endure religious, social, economic and political discrimination given the all too acceptable milieu of extremism in the country which is propagated by hardliner Islamic groups and religious parties and tolerated by the government.

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<sup>11</sup>*Peoples under Threat* is Minority Rights Group’s annual authoritative rankings table which highlights those countries around the world where the risk of mass killing is greatest. Based on current indicators of authoritative sources, it has been compiled annually since 2005 to warn of potential future mass atrocities as it states in an introduction to the rankings report. The report states that the number of states which rose prominently in the index over the last two years – including South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Pakistan and Syria – subsequently faced episodes of extreme ethnic or sectarian violence.

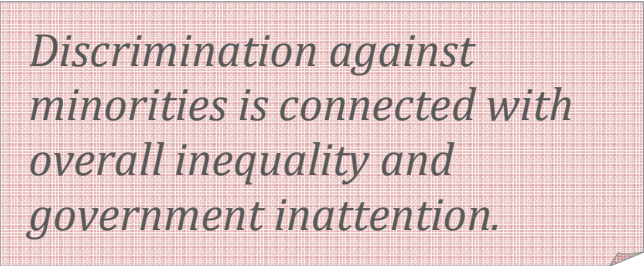
### **Historical trail: Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws**

- The British colonial administration formulated four laws to deal with blasphemy because of communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims prior to Partition and supported even at the time by political interests of various groups. Therefore, general laws against trespass and defiling monuments were first codified in 1860 by India's British rulers
- These laws were amended in 1927 to include 'deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion and religious believers' which meant words, insults would be punished with imprisonment and with a fine. This law was inherited by Pakistan after Partition in 1947. The ensuing tensions and tussle between the powers that led East and West Pakistan allowed the conservative religious right to further fuel hatred and intolerance of the other. This resulted in a movement led by Majlis-e-Ahrar in West Pakistan against the Ahmadi community, which was eventually declared non-Muslim and heretic under the Islamisation process that was gradually taking root.
- The blasphemy laws were Islamised under 1980s Zia-ul-Haq regime with more than 80 cases reported to the courts between 1977 and 1988 according to a report by the Islamabad-based Centre for Research and Security Studies.
- Further amendments to the blasphemy law were made between 1980 and 1984. These were: 295-B (defiling the holy book); 295-C (the use of derogatory remarks in respect to the Holy Prophet; 298-A (using derogatory language for holy personages); 298-B (misuse of holy titles, epithets and titles reserved for holy personages and places); 298-C ('Qadiani' or Ahmadis were forbidden from calling themselves Muslims or preaching and propagating their faith)
- Highlights of the controversial amendments under Zia: 1982: Life imprisonment introduced for desecration of Koran.
- 1984: Ahmadi sect barred from calling themselves, and behaving as, Muslims.
- 1986: Death sentence for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad.
- High rate of conviction in lower courts, but usually overturned in higher courts.
- No accused has been executed for blasphemy but jailed persons have been killed and threatened in prison or murdered when released on bail.



## SUMMARY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

Pakistan celebrates National Minorities Day on August 11 ever since Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's politics made a comeback for a third inning in 2013. If this was meant to be a commended reminder of an increasingly tolerant democracy where minorities are accorded rights and a voice as equal citizens, then it can be vehemently reiterated that is not the case given the constant anguish and endless threats faced by earmarked non-Muslim communities. Their situation and treatment defies belief: a potent reminder of the harsh reality that is Pakistan for most minority groups, including Muslim minority communities that continue to face alarming levels of hate, violence and intolerance. Economic deprivation, political divisions, weak laws and poor governance practices and other factors all contribute to the suffering of certain minority groups, but an underlying element is the Islamisation of thought that heightens such ongoing discrimination and marginalization. And very often, targeted violence has a purpose as an instrument of oppression. It sends a message not only to



*Discrimination against minorities is connected with overall inequality and government inattention.*

individuals but to entire communities. Take the example of Dalit women in India who are subjected to sexual violence as a result of their secondary status and traditionally vulnerable position within society. Similarly, Hindu women in rural Sindh are kidnapped, forcibly raped and converted to Islam, despite demands from within the community and its leaders that the authorities must act to apprehend the oppressors – in recent cases the oppressors have been under the wing of influential landowners with political clout so cases of abduction and forced marriages have been not portrayed as such. Such crime because it goes unpunished is under-reported and victims refuse to give statements for fear of their families being attacked. Even if reporting mechanisms support victims, only a small portion are willing to seek justice, often because of the lack of legal and other support infrastructure and importantly their lack of faith in the authorities to support them.

As extremist views take hold of the mainstream and are accorded encouragement by the state, it has been noted that a record number of blasphemy accusations have surfaced over the past years. Young children and handicapped individuals are punished for their words and their religion while those who seek to inflict inhumane harm against vulnerable, poor communities without influential, political support are permitted to do so with impunity.

On September 25, 2014, a policeman shot two men in prison, killing a Christian pastor accused of blasphemy and wounding another 70-year old British citizen, with a history of mental illness

and jailed for the same crime in Islamabad.<sup>12</sup> Blasphemy charges are not only hard to fight for lawyers but many do not want to identify themselves for fear of retribution from colleagues. Presenting evidence on behalf of the accused can also be perceived as a violation with advocates having been verbally threatened with dire consequences within court rooms. Judges have showed reluctance to hear blasphemy cases and many accused face years in jail as their trials continue. Earlier this year, a human rights activist and lawyer representing a university professor accused of a blasphemous Facebook post was shot dead in his office after being threatened by the prosecution in a court of law.

It is unquestionable that widespread discrimination and violence against minorities is largely tolerated by the state, if not ignored and politically motivated. Disproportioned exposure to hatred and extremist thinking, Pakistan's minority communities have no choice but to either suffer in silence, face certain death, or seek

*Minority groups persistently claim about the lack of effective protection accorded by the state against violence, intimidation and persecution.*

refuge out of the country to escape an increasingly bigoted approach buttressed by conservative ideologies. Historically entrenched, certain legislation and constitutional amendments – particularly during Zia's Islamisation drive – have further deprived religious minorities of freedom of movement and practice, justice, human rights and economic and political opportunities.

One of the main objectives of this report will be to examine socio-political views and everyday challenges faced by Pakistan's largest minority communities – Christians, Hindus and Sikhs – based on a countrywide survey, *Minority Rights in Pakistan: Historic Neglect or State Complicity?* This survey was conducted by the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies in 2014 with respondents belonging to Christian, Hindu, Baha'i and Sikh communities, and from four provinces (Sindh, Punjab, KPK and Balochistan) Focused on groups divided by educational qualifications and religious affiliation, the survey involved face-to-face interviews with 327 people.

As the survey results have documented, discrimination against minorities – within the social and cultural mainstream, undermining economic livelihoods and political participation – is connected with overall inequality and government inattention.

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<sup>12</sup>Zafar Bhatti who was killed had received recent death threats from inmates and guards and had shared a cell with Briton Muhammad Asghar, who was wounded in the attack in Rawalpindi. Bhatti had worked to protect the human rights of the country's beleaguered Christian minority, was on trial after he was accused in 2012 of sending blasphemous text messages.

In analysing the situation and current status of minorities in Pakistan, this report will initially discuss challenges faced and pose recommendations that could institute changes – such might be observed as a rerun but also a necessity for advocating minority equality and inclusion on a national scale.

There will be a reconstruction of the framework of the three largest minority communities in Pakistan – Christians, Hindus and Sikhs – and their experiences, also reflective of the outcome of this survey. Contextualizing the findings, the report will proceed to discuss issues faced by certain groups – whether historically entrenched or politically and religiously motivated.

The failure of the government to tighten protection mechanisms (judicial, executive) and its use of political religion as a tool to oppress minority groups are also examined in the larger context of spreading extremist, anti-liberal propaganda and a peripheral weak civil society to counter such right-wing ideologies. When mob violence dictates court verdicts in cases of blasphemy and judges hearing arguments are threatened and killed, there is severe need for protecting the accused and those defending them. One of the recurrent themes of this survey reveals a persistent complaint from Muslim and non-Muslim minority groups about the lack of effective protection accorded by the state against violence, intimidation and intolerance. Lack of action by the authorities (police, local government officials, judiciary) when it comes to punishing perpetrators of violent crimes against minority groups and protecting defenceless, unarmed (low-income) neighbourhoods appears as a concurrent theme as does communal unity apparent even within religiously diverse groups – an indicator which could be of positive assistance to forging peaceful interfaith harmony.

*A majority of survey respondents from all four provinces believe they are not part of the larger social and cultural mainstream although they participate freely in cultural and religious festivals along with followers of other religions.*

Religious minorities are politically underrepresented and least heard when it comes to political and socio-cultural discourses.<sup>13</sup> Voicing the rights of non-Muslims has not been prioritized or even given due attention within political parties. Nor do the former have adequate or effective

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<sup>13</sup> Minority communities believe that the official population statistics undercount their population. (Source: Life at Risk, Report of HRC Working Group on Communities Vulnerable because of their Beliefs, HRC, 2013, p. 13). According to the last population census conducted in 1998, out of the total population of 132,352,279, 4,918,870 citizens are non-Muslims. These are Hindus (around 50 %), Christians (42 %), Ahmadis (6%), and others (2%) including Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Baha'i communities.

representation in parliament.<sup>14</sup> Political and socio-cultural narratives presented in the media, within educational curriculums and institutes of higher learning and in other professional settings are also largely skewed in favour of the majority Muslim community.

As a countrywide survey focused on four provinces with respondents divided on the basis of educational qualifications (respondents range from having a Matriculation to a Master's degree) and religion (Hindus, Christians, Baha'is, Sikhs), it is particularly interesting to document that in certain provinces overall responses appear reflective of the level of awareness into rights issues and ongoing discriminatory practises. In Sindh where more respondents of minority groups remain uneducated in greater numbers and belong to poorer communities, it appears that persecution and marginalization of certain minorities is so rife – and has continued for decades – that many low-income and weak groups when discriminated against do not feel the need to identify or discuss their views openly for fear of reprisal. Many Hindu families work as bonded labour under Muslim landlords and therefore fail to voice their suffering – kidnapping, rape and forced labour is the norm. Additionally without trust in the police or the justice system, they realize their voices will be shunned. The concept of equal citizenship and non-discrimination in everyday life and work situations are unavailable to Hindu and Dalit communities in rural Sindh and the Christians of Punjab.

*Minority communities do not experience any problem in business and other transactions with followers of other religions.*

Take three minority communities in the Punjab – Christians, Hindus and Baha'is that state they are dissatisfied with the manner in which the government caters to their needs when compared to how it assists other religious groups. But when questioned about the law of the state as being discriminatory against minorities, 42 percent of respondents stated that was not the case.

This survey also finds that most respondents although deeply committed to their faith are able to integrate and live peacefully with other religious groups but feel threatened by the overall deteriorating security situation countrywide. There is also strong backing for intercommunity associations that appears to be functional for most minority groups in various parts of the country as the survey's respondents have proven. Harmony within religiously mixed neighbourhoods was seen as positively promoted and supported by those communities who have a stake in their areas. Although many respondents from all four provinces also believe that they are not part of the

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<sup>14</sup>Pakistan's National Assembly has a total of 342 members of which 272 are directly elected. 70 reserved seats are allocated for women and religious minorities. The latter has 10 seats allocated to political parties. In the 2013 election, minority parliamentarians selected included 5 from the Hindu community and 1 member from the Parsi community representing Punjab and Sindh; whereas 3 Christian parliamentarians were selected from Balochistan and Punjab.

larger social and cultural mainstream as is clearly the state of the nation's minority population. It can be deduced that because minority groups are excluded from political decision-making matters that in the long-term not only affects them – extremism and how to tackle its spreading – that this further marginalizes those communities persecuted by the religious right.

## GRAPHICAL DISPLAY OF SURVEY FINDINGS

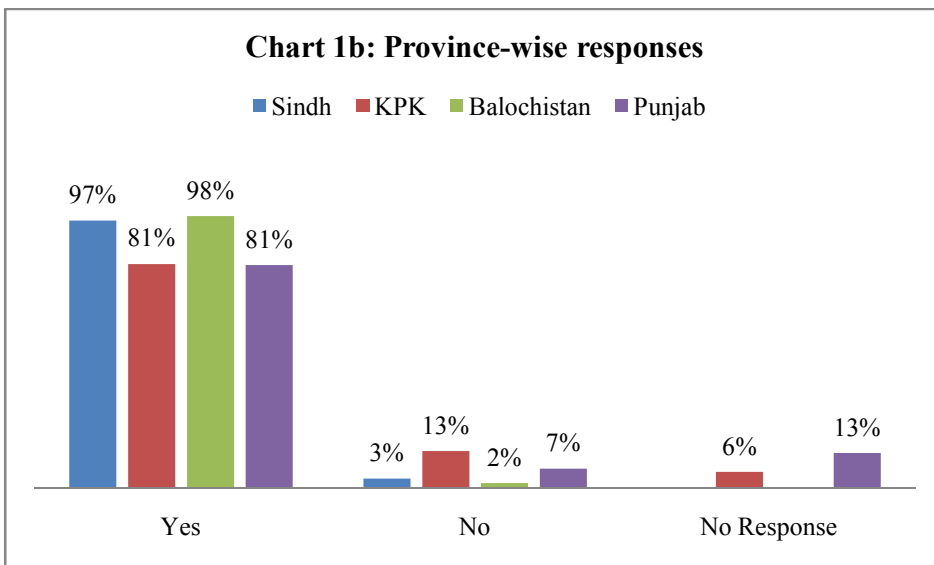
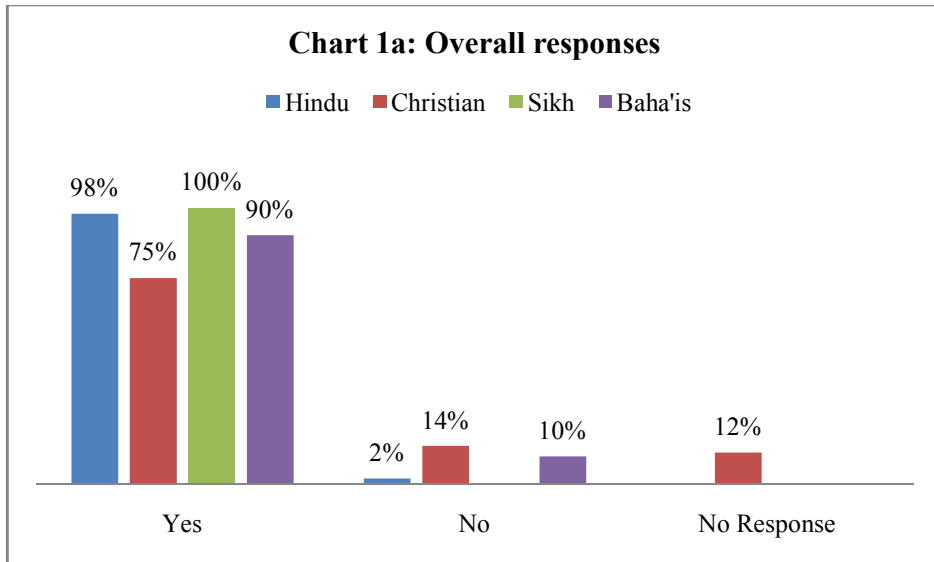
Table 1: Geographical distribution of respondents

Province	No. of respondents	Percent
Sindh	120	38%
KPK	62	20%
Balochistan	30	9%
Punjab	105	33%
Total	317	100%

Table 2: Geographical distribution of respondents by religion

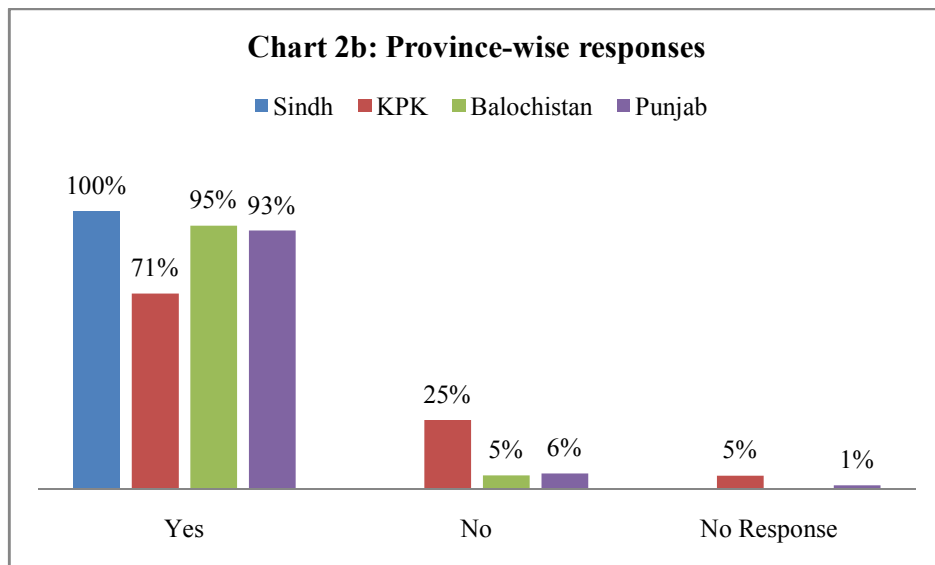
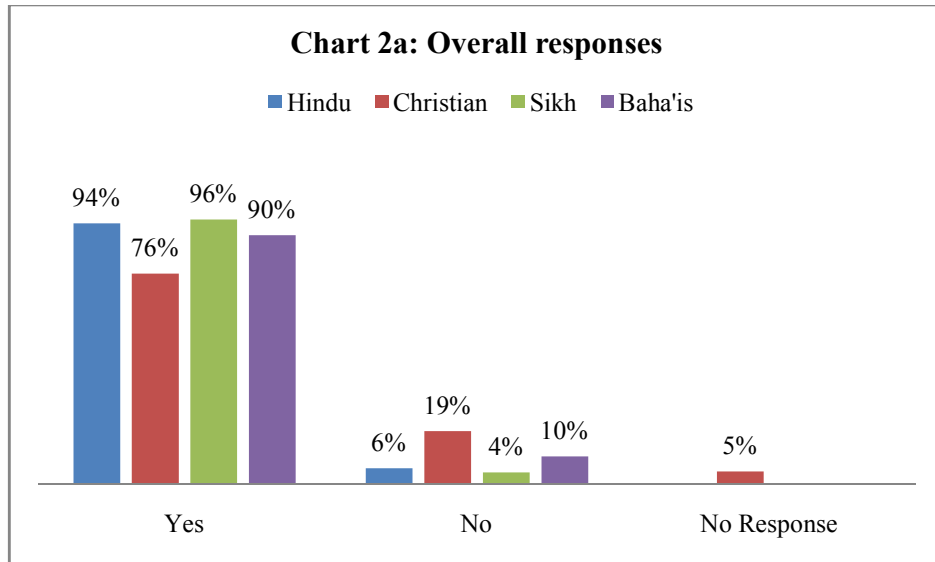
Province	Religion				Total
	Hindu	Christian	Sikh	Baha'is	
Sindh	113	7	0	0	120
KPK	0	17	45	0	62
Balochistan	10	20	0	0	30
Punjab	7	88	0	10	105
Total	130	132	45	10	317

**Question 1:** Being part of a particular religion, do you feel that you are not part of the larger social and cultural streams?

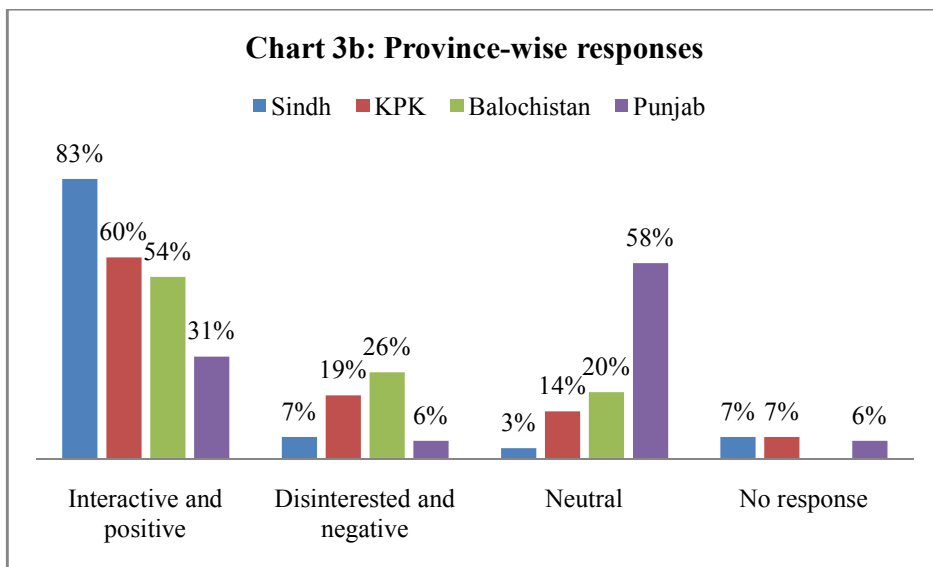
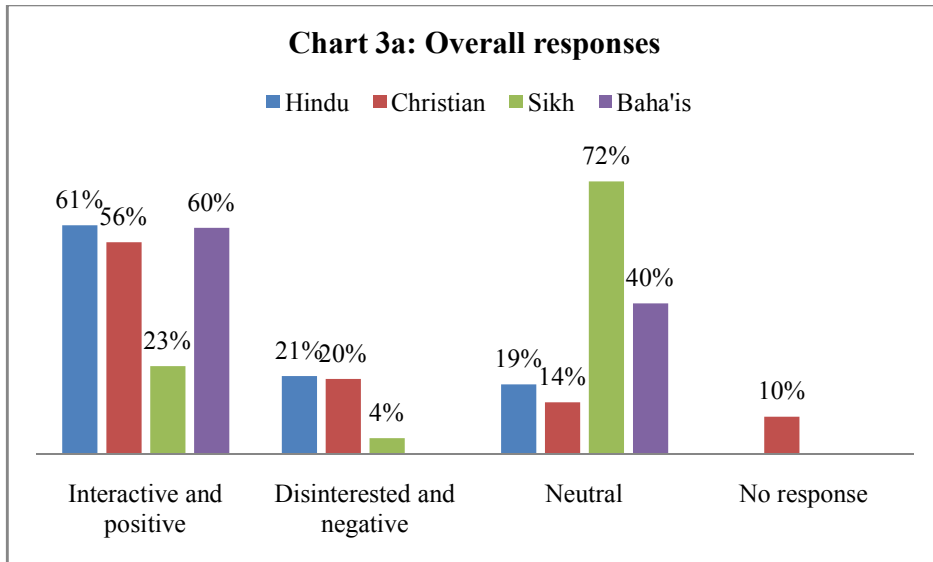




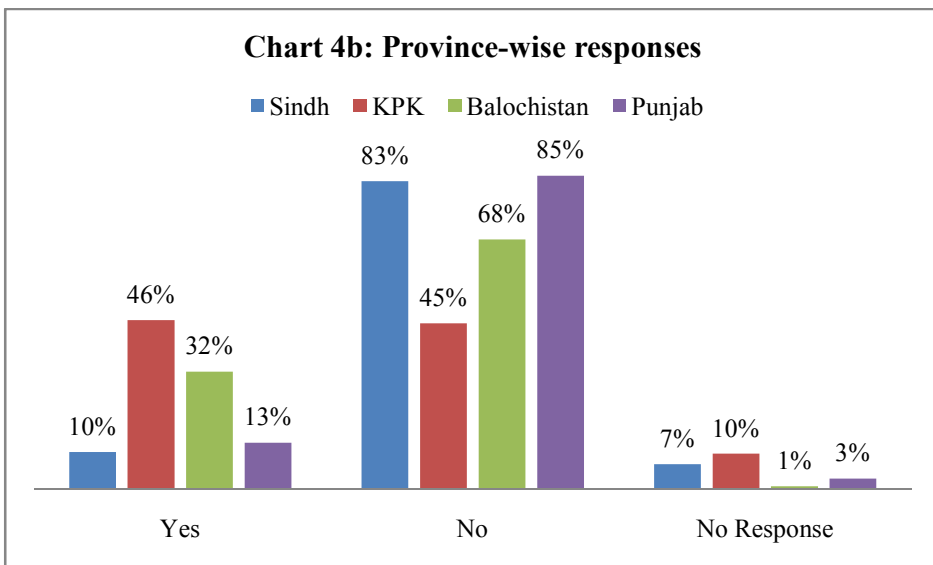
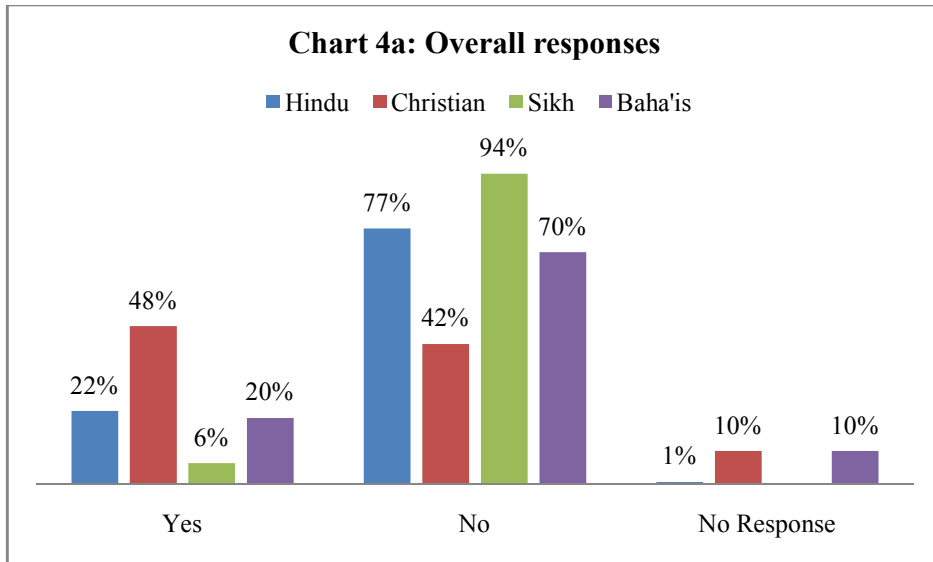
**Question 2:** Do you participate freely in cultural and religious festivities along with followers of other religions?



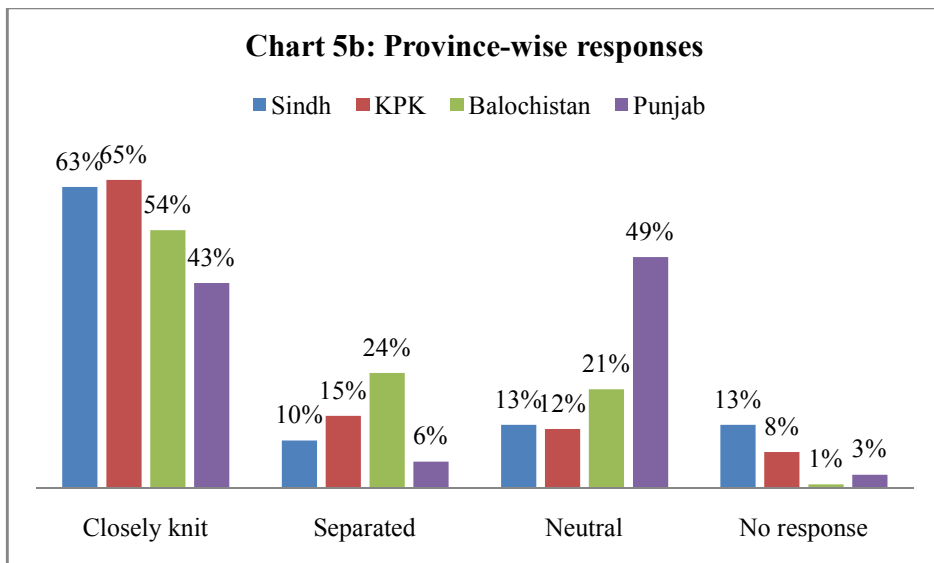
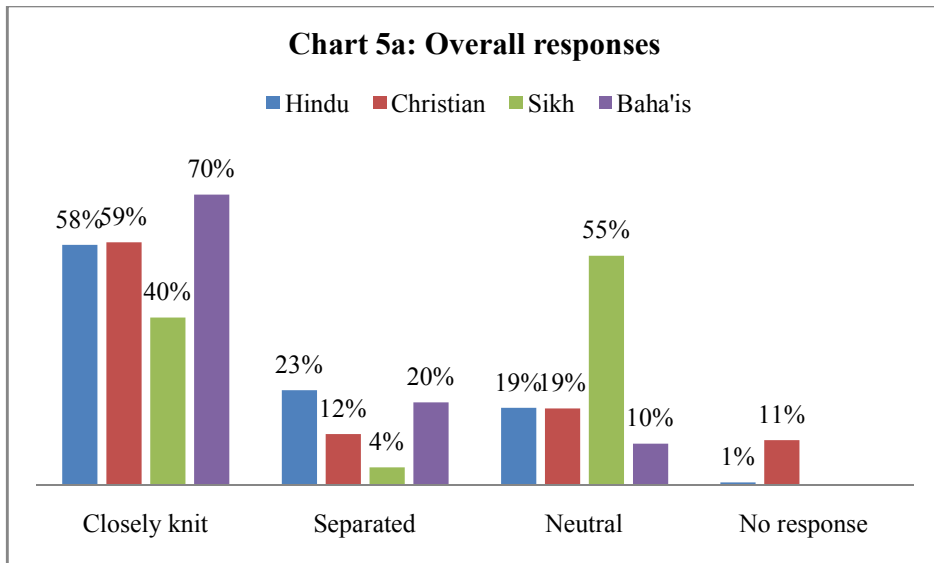
**Question 3:** How do you find the response of followers of community members belonging to other religions on your celebration of religious festivals or holidays?



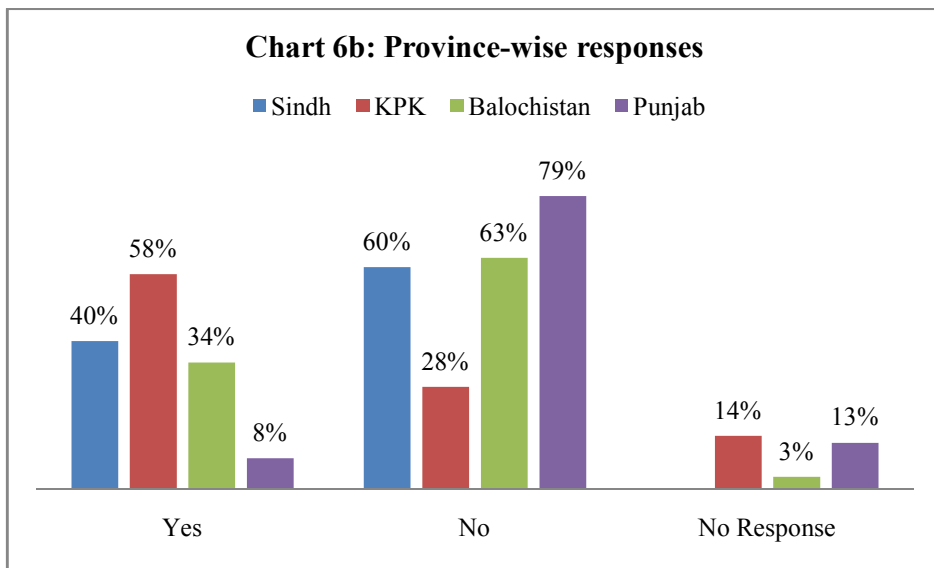
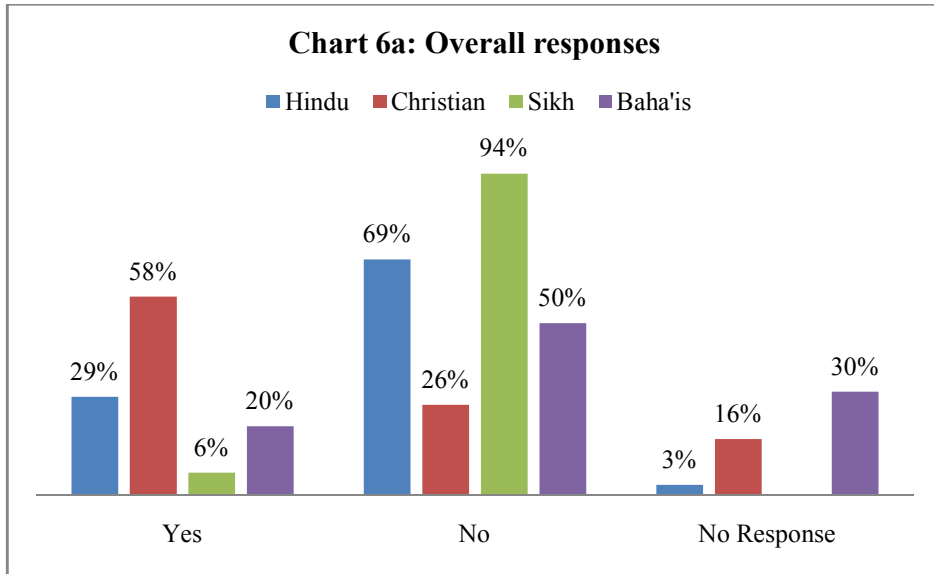
**Question 4:** Do you experience any problem in business and other transactions with followers of other religions?



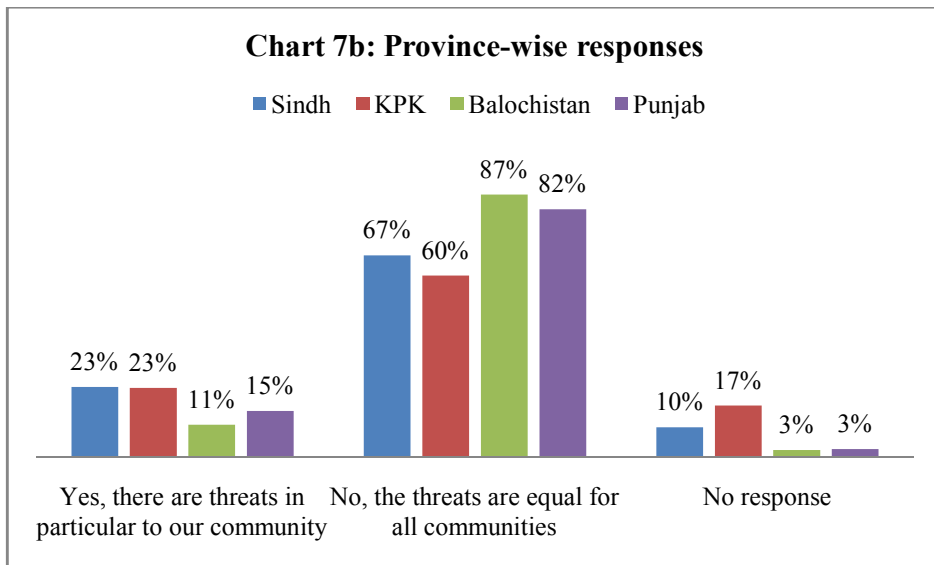
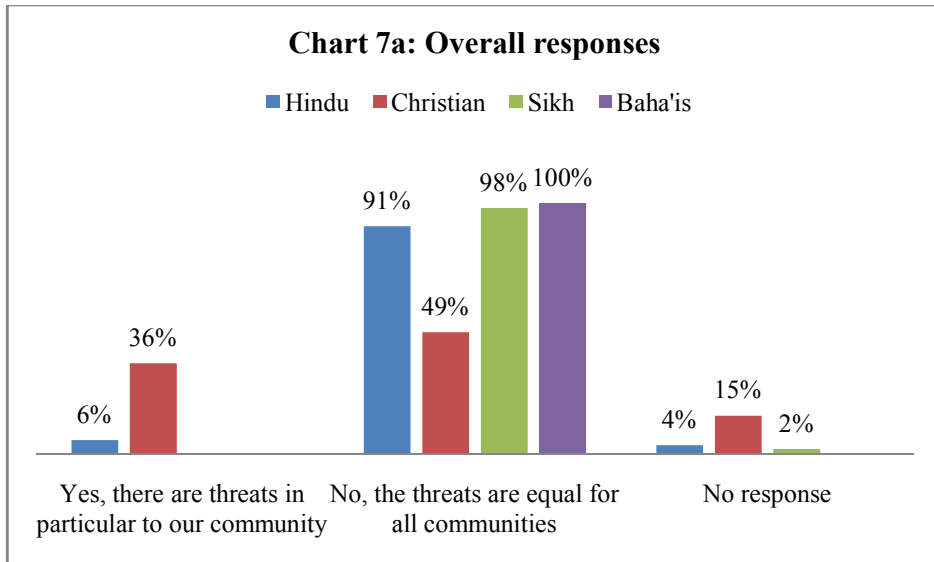
**Question 5:** How would you describe the inter-community relationship in your neighbourhood?



**Question 6:** Do you think you face some particular social, economic and political problems which followers of other religions in your neighbourhood do not face?

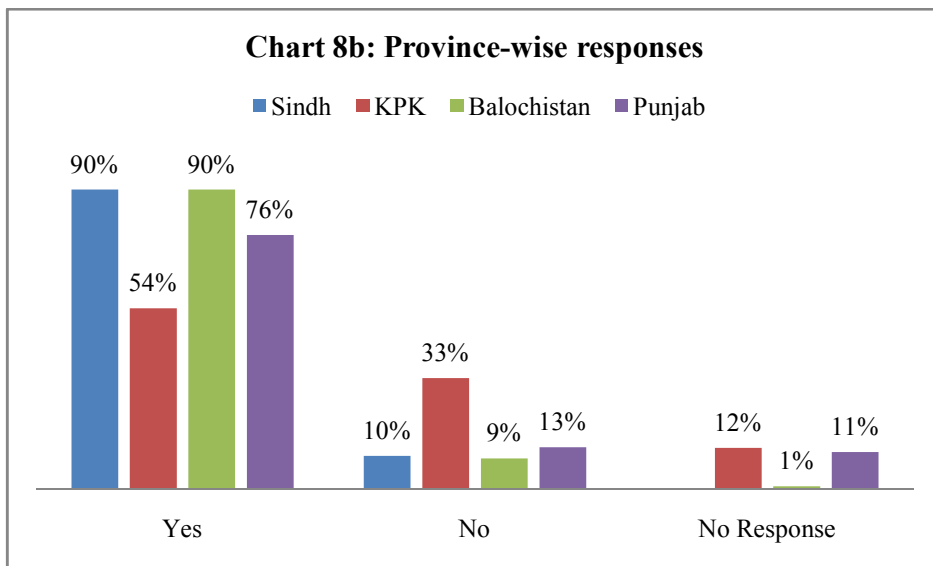
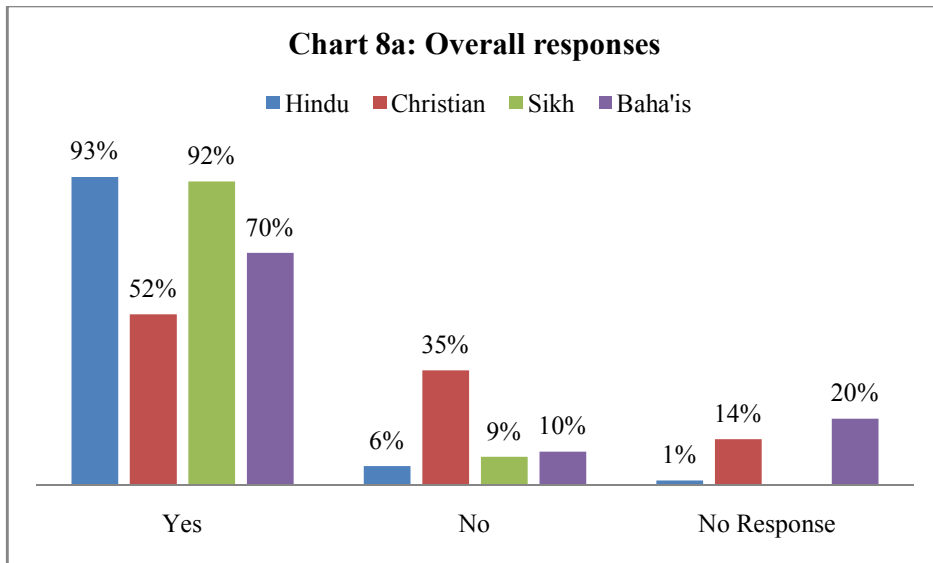


**Question 7:** Do you face some particular security and terrorism threats or are they same for all communities?

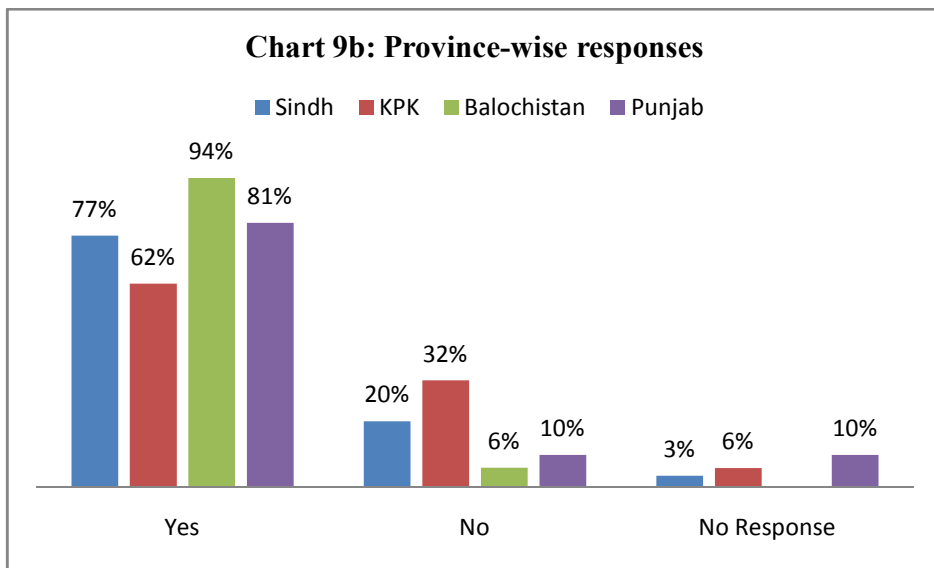
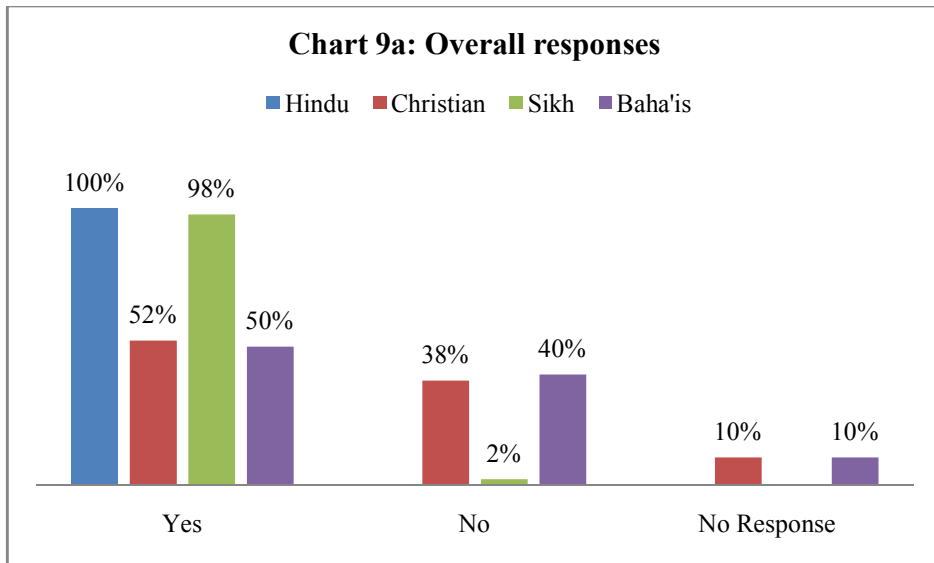




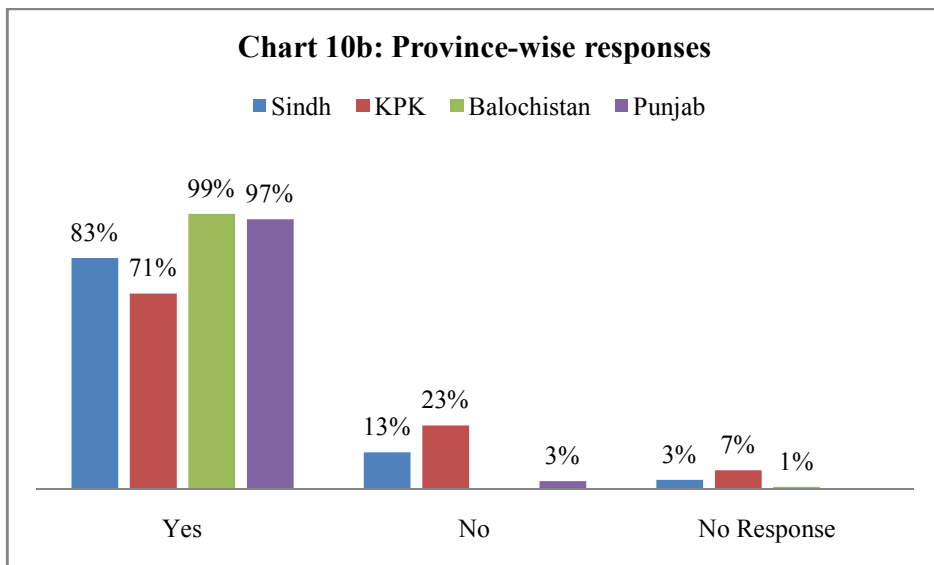
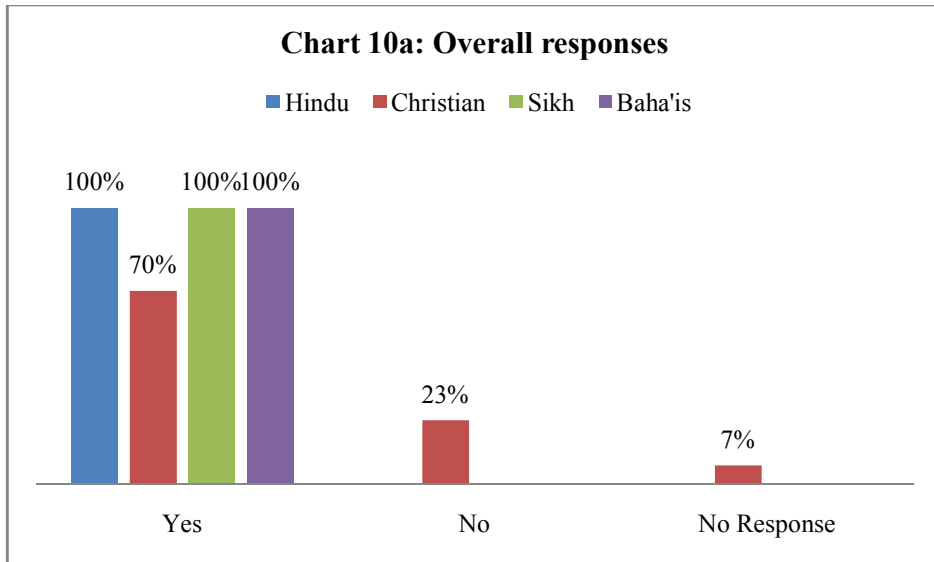
**Question 8:** Are there any shared aspects of your life with followers of other religions?



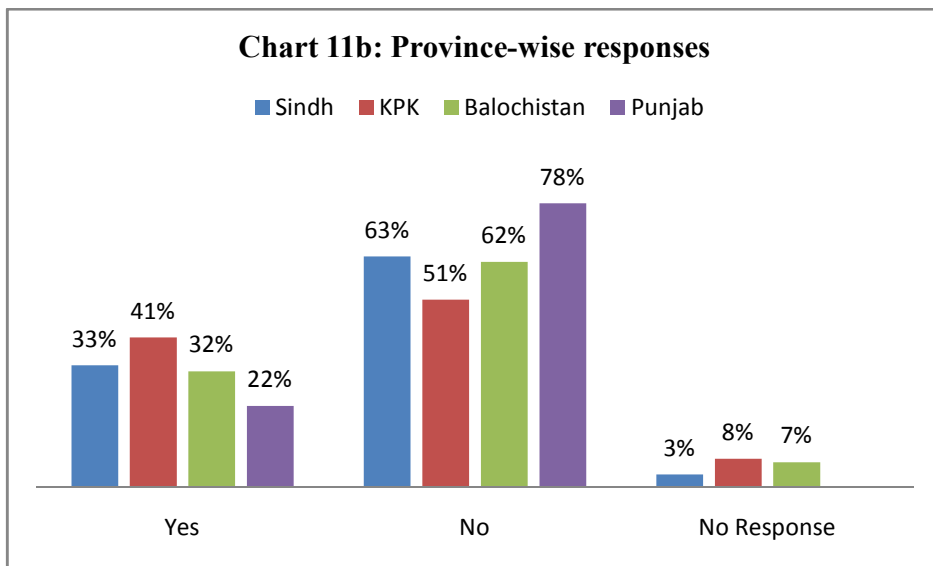
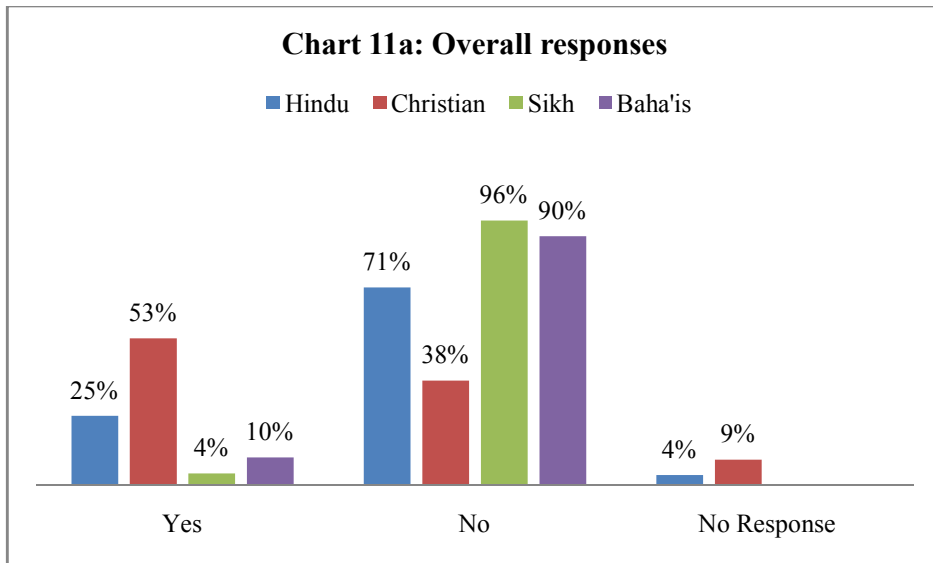
**Question 9:** Is there exchange of visits among followers of different religions in your area?



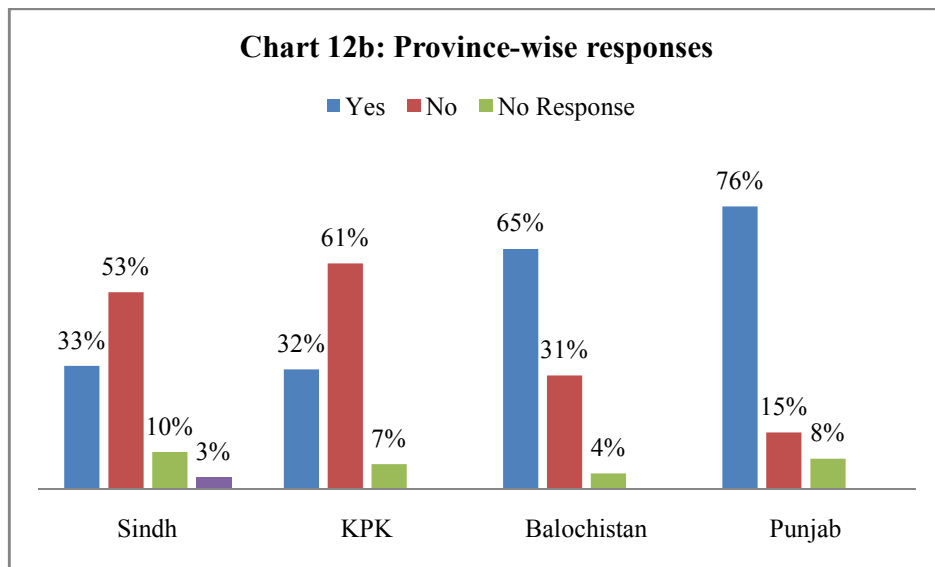
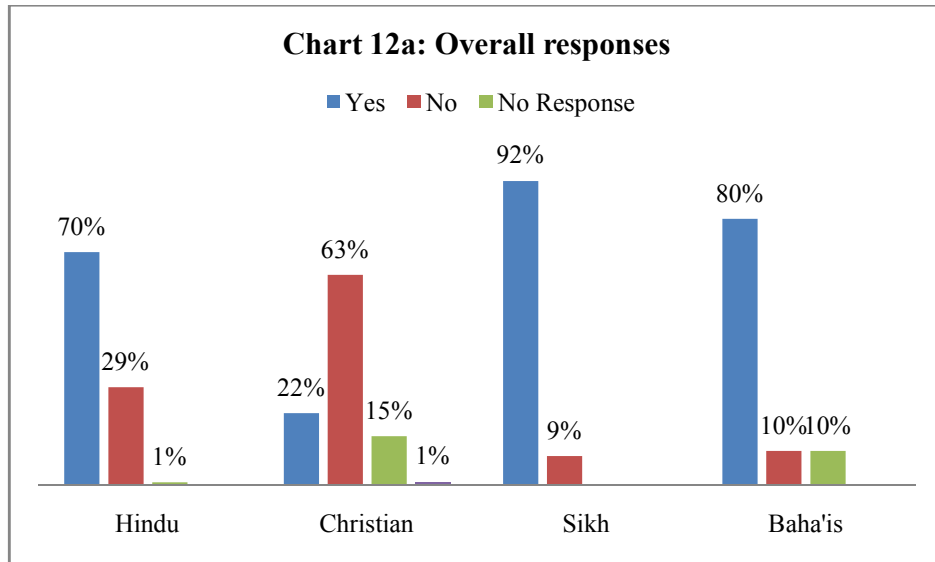
**Question 10:** Have you ever participated in weddings or other family functions of followers of other religions in your locality, and vice versa?



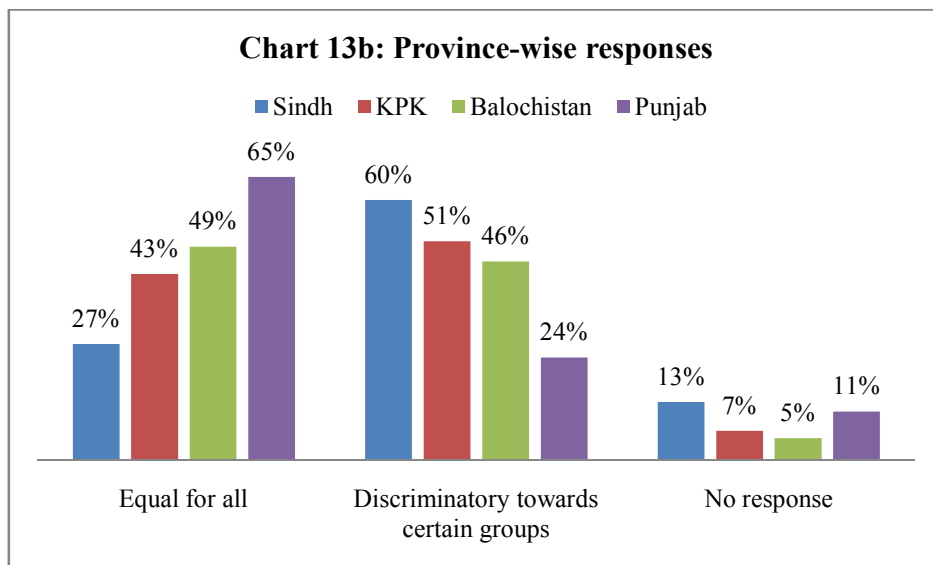
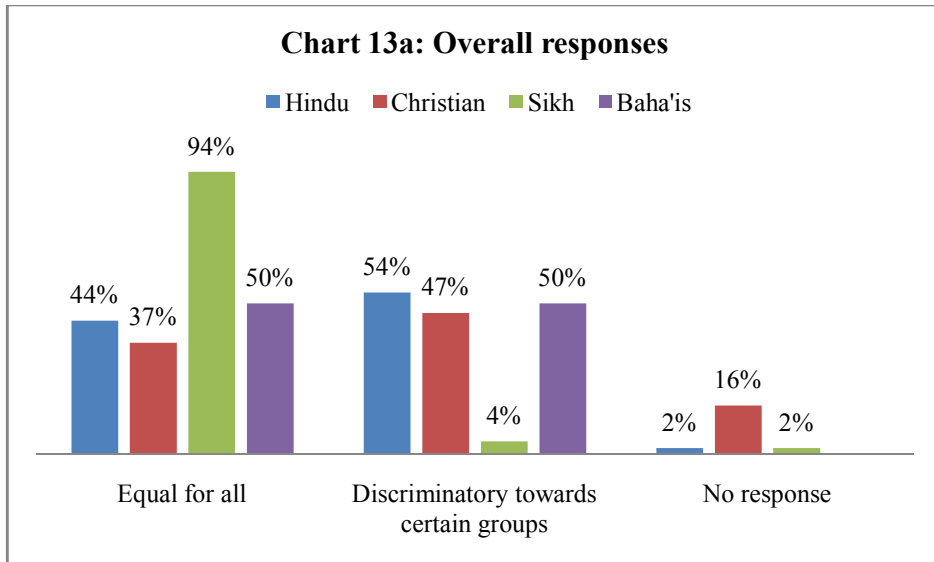
**Question 11:** Do you face faith-based persecution in day-to-day living in society?



**Question 12:** Do you think the government caters to your needs as much as they do for followers of other religions?

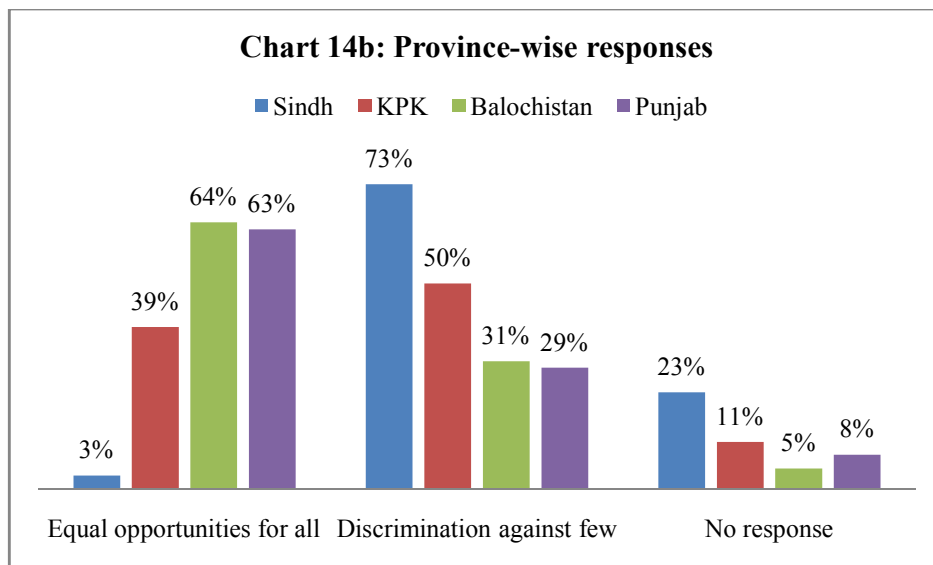
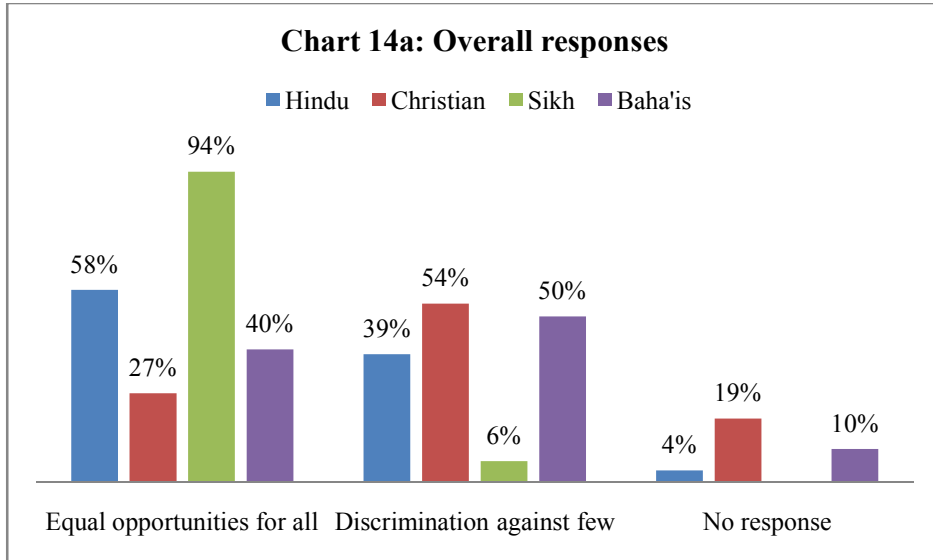


**Question 13:** Do you find the law of the state as equal for all members or discriminatory against a certain group?

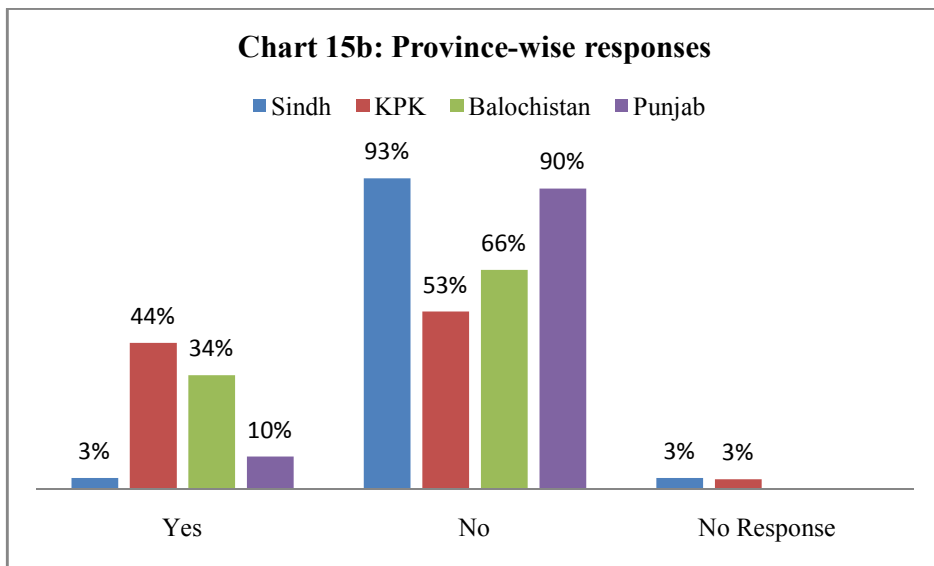
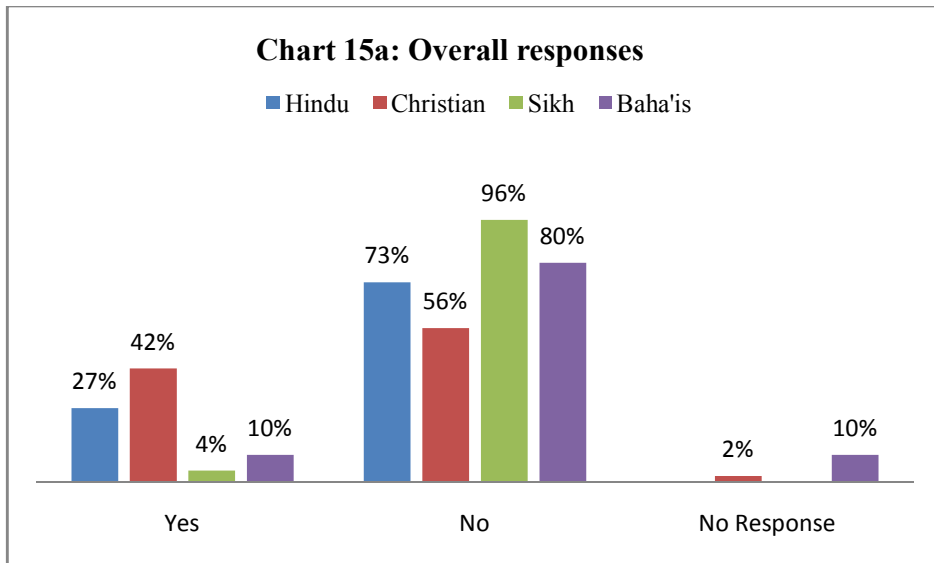




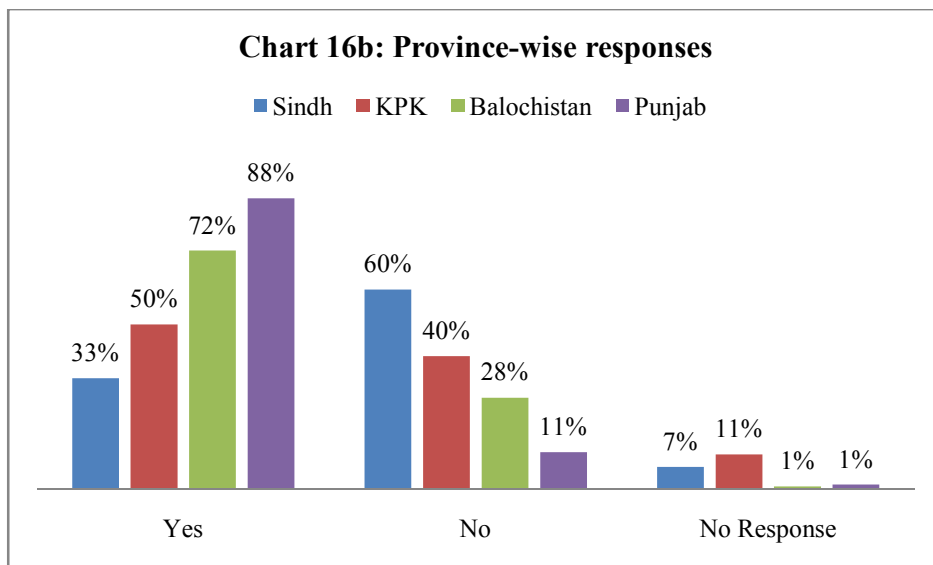
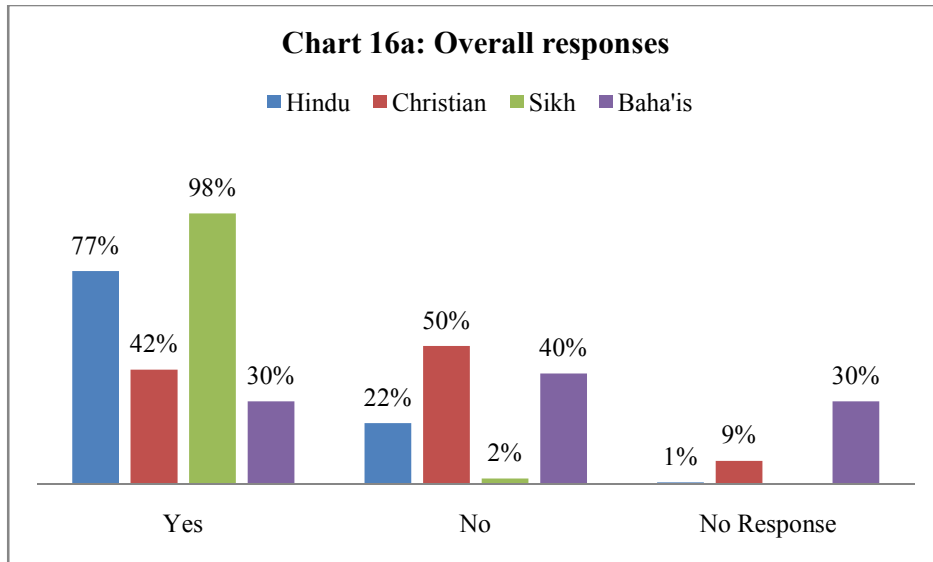
**Question 14:** Do you think there is equal opportunity for followers of all religions in terms of securing jobs and earning a livelihood or do you feel discriminated against?



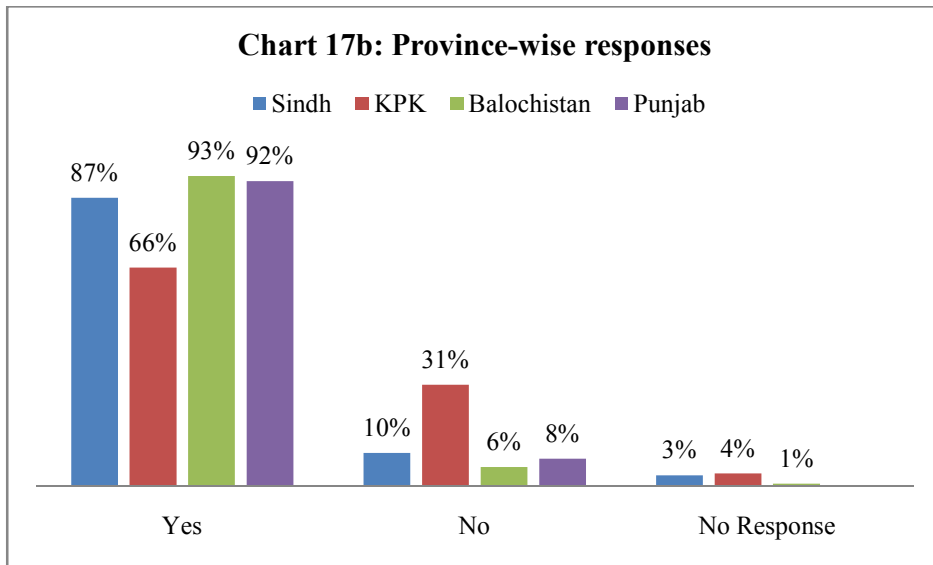
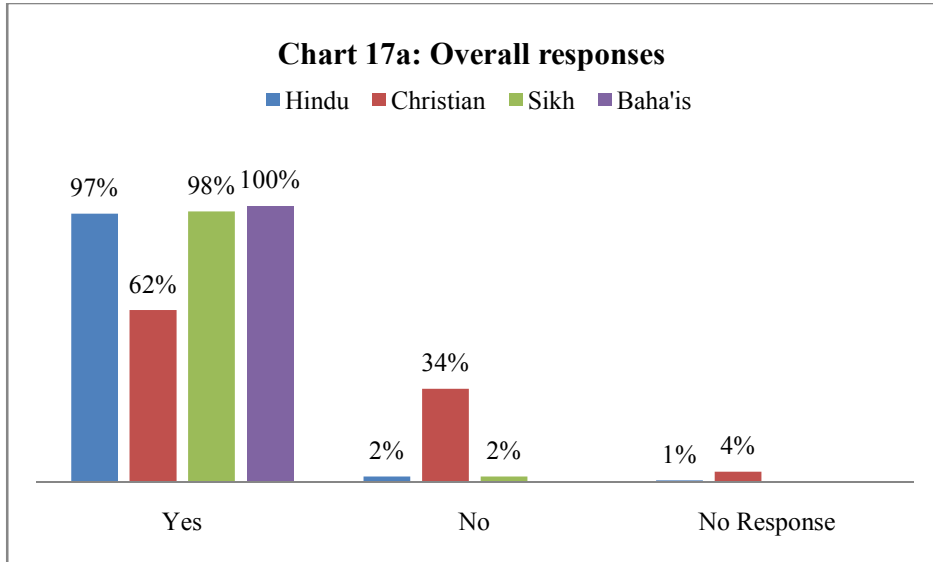
**Question 15:** Do you feel any threat while visiting the worship places of your particular faith?



**Question 16:** Do you think the education curriculum is fair and provides an accurate account of history of followers of all faiths?



**Question 17:** Do you think you can openly celebrate your cultural and religious festivities without any hindrance being caused by the larger cultural stream?



**Question 18:** Do you think you can openly depict yourself as follower of your particular religion in the society?

