



QUARTERLY SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT

69

Forced conversions/ Abductions

6

Blasphemy-related events

58

Faith-based discrimination

390,004

Hate speech

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

- March 11 – A 22-year-old Christian girl kidnapped from Sheikhpura
- March 22- An 18-year-old Hindu girl Pooja Kumari shot dead in Sukkur
- March 25 - Bhagchand Meghwar allegedly tortured to death in police station in Sindh
- March 27- Meghwar Hindu community was attacked by Laghari community in Tando Allayar
- April 1 - Christian sanitation worker lost his life due to a lack of safety equipment in Faisalabad
- April 6- Supreme Court refuses to order police to find missing Christian girl Mehak James
- April 19 - A Sikh family of the ex-president Mastaan Singh of PSGPC was attacked by the religious extremists in Nankana Sahib.
- April 21 – Body of married Hindu woman Hemi was found hanging by the neck in her house in Khipro.
- May 16- Two members of the Sikh community Ranjit Singh and Kuldeep Singh were shot dead in Peshawar.
- May 18- An Ahmadi man, Abdus Salam was stabbed to death in Okara.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In the last three months, more than 127 incidents targeting religious minorities took place with 69 cases of forced conversion or abduction of minorities, 58 cases of faith-based discrimination, and 6 blasphemy-related incidents.
- In addition, over 390K tweets propagating hate speech mainly targeting the Ahmadi and Hindu communities were found.
- In most cases of forced conversions, the converted were minor Hindu girls. Families of these girls claim that these girls were abducted, raped, and forced to sign marriage contract and conversion certificate.
- Faith-based persecution is on rise as more than 60 cases were reported of people suffering rape, murder, violence and torture during the reporting period. Some suicide cases of Hindus have also been reported with no clue of the reason behind such rise of suicide cases in minorities.
- Hate speech against Ahmadis was widespread throughout the quarter with many tweets openly inciting grievous violence against the community. Not surprisingly, on May 18, an Ahmadi was stabbed to death by a religious extremist in Okara.
- Sectarian hate speech between members of the Shia and Sunni communities is also a frequent sight on the social media with both hurling abuses at each other.
- Two members of the Sikh community were also murdered in Peshawar, and another Sikh family was attacked allegedly by land grabbers.
- This quarter also saw weaponization of blasphemy by ruling and opposition political parties against one another.

METHODOLOGY

To monitor violations of freedom of religious beliefs and hate speech in Pakistan, Twitter was manually searched for pre-defined key words and terms relating to the afore-mentioned problems on daily basis during the reporting period. In addition, Twitter pages of individuals and organizations working on similar issues were also monitored for relevant data. The collected data was exported to Excel sheets for statistical analyses and categorization as per pre-determined format.

Simultaneously, top trends on Pakistani Twitter space were analyzed for their relevance to the issue at hand. Top 50 trends in the country were analyzed manually at a specified Pakistan Standard Time 04:00 p.m. on daily basis. The top 50 trends were extracted from the following external source: <https://www.exportdata.io/trends/pakistan/2022-03-17/20>. In addition to the qualitative and quantitative analyses, a word cloud chart was also generated for easy and quick understanding of the overall picture using the <https://wordart.com/>.

FORCED CONVERSIONS

The crime of forced conversion is widely prevalent. Over 68 cases of sexual assault and forced conversions of girls/women of minority faith groups were reported. In March alone, 13 forced conversion cases were reported where minor girls aged 13-14 were abducted and converted to Islam. In these cases, a mother of four children was also forced to marry a man after being converted to Islam. As per reports, some of the underaged Hindu girls who were forcibly converted included Kamala Kohli, Rabia Bheel, Meran Bhat, Bindiya Meghwar, Anita Meghwar, Satran/Sattar Oad and others.

Similarly in April and May, more than 15 minor Hindu and Christian girls became the victim of forced conversion. Kavita Kohli was reportedly taken for a second time on 19 April 2022, and she has been married off twice to two different men in the last two years. Manisha Meghwar, Soomaro, Neelam Kohli and Reshma Meghwar share similar stories of abduction and forced conversion.

In addition to forced conversions, minority women also faced physical assaults and other forms of violence. In April, two Christian girls of age 16 and 18 were brutally struck by men over discussing their faith with few Muslims. Additionally, land grabbers have continuously attacked Hindu communities in Sindh and are seen manhandling women occasionally.

FAITH BASED PERSECUTION

Persecution of the Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and Ahmadis etc. is a continuing social phenomenon. In the reporting period, cases of minority persons facing attacks, torture, or death were

witnessed. In March, two Hindu citizens Bhagchand Meghwar and Kabeer Bheel allegedly died due to torture in police custody. Similarly, in late March, a clinic owned by an Ahmadi was attacked that resulted in the death of an innocent worker at the clinic in Peshawar.

Moreover, in April, three Hindus in Sindh were murdered on several occasions. Roshan Meghwar and Chetan Bheel were killed over petty disputes in Umerkot. Likewise, another Hindu Tando Bagho's throat was slit while he was asleep.

On May 17, two Sikh traders Ranjeet and Kanwaljeet Singh were shot dead by unidentified gunmen in the outskirts of Peshawar. Reportedly, the two had moved to Peshawar from Khyber Agency due to deteriorating security few years back. Similarly, on 19 May, Abdul Salam belonging to Ahmadi community was stabbed to death by a seminary student Hafiz Ali Raza in Okara.

Simultaneously, more than 15 cases of suicide by members of minority communities were reported. In one of such incidents, the body of a Hindu boy Jagan Bheel was found hanging from a tree. Twitter users claimed that postmortem analysis had found signs of rape and murder. However, this could not be independently verified by PIPS.

Cases of sexual assaults were also reported on the social media. In Sindh, three Hindu teenagers Jhaman Meghwar, Kelash Kumar, and Suraj Thakur were assaulted sexually allegedly by politically powerful persons. In a separate incident, a Hindu man Ravi Kumar was shot and critically injured by unknown persons. Images of reportedly showing Kumar in an injured state surfaced on the Twitter. Likewise, in Nankana Sahib, a Sikh family was reportedly attacked by land grabbers.

BLASPHEMY-RELATED CRIMES

Blasphemy has long been weaponized in Pakistan, used by religious extremists to target minority faith groups as well as by mainstream politicians to target their political rivals. Oftentimes, mere allegations of blasphemy lead to mob vigilantism and lynching. During this quarter, there was a rise in use of blasphemy by politicians against their opponents.

Pakistan's internal political rift was projected beyond the borders as a government delegate was surrounded and harassed by PTI supporters within the premises of the Holy Mosque in Madina, Saudi Arabia. The footage of PTI workers assaulting some delegate members and chanting political slogans in the Holy Mosque surfaced on the social media, triggering an unprecedented rage among Pakistani users. The PTI workers' behaviors were termed "blasphemous" and calls were made to charge them under Pakistan's blasphemy laws upon their return from Saudi Arabia. Users also held ex-PM Imran Khan responsible for the "blasphemous" act of his followers.

Likewise, Pakistan's Finance Minister Miftah Ismail was accused of blasphemy by ex-PTI minister Shireen Mazari after the former criticized the PTI's use of religion in politics during a conversation at the Atlantic Council. The wanton exploitation and weaponization of the blasphemy by mainstream political leaders indicate the dangerous trajectory the country is treading on.

On the other hand, a man was arrested for desecrating the Holy Quran in Multan. Another one named Gadaa Hussain was reportedly charged under Article 295-C for allegedly insulting the Prophet (PBUH).

HATE SPEECH

Hate speech including use of obscene language and derogatory terms against religious minorities was seen on the Pakistani Twitter space during the quarter. Disturbingly large number of tweets and numerous trends targeting the persecuted Ahmadi community were noted. Highly insulting terms such as kafir, cursed, hypocrites, terrorists etc. were used for the community.

Similarly, many anti-Semitic and Hindu-phobic tweets were posted in the last three months, ranging from labelling political leaders as "Jews" to their actions as "Jewish conspiracy". Hindu sacred figures are routinely mocked on Pakistani social media.

However, hate speech is not targeted at non-Muslims alone. The Shias too face hate speech on social media. They have been degraded while criticizing Iran and criticizing their Zakat exemption.

Trends Analysis

The trend analysis entails review of top trends at a specific time (4:00 pm) on daily basis to pick ones relevant to freedom of religious beliefs . In this quarter the review scope was increased from top 20 trends to top 50 trends. Each trend was individually reviewed to determine its relevancy with the subject under consideration. Instead of just relying on the terms used in the trends, which are mostly very general, the top tweets made under each trend and comments on these tweets were analyzed.

Of the total 4600 trends reviewed during the period, 60 trends were found to be strongly relevant [Shown in figure below] while 37 were partially relevant to issues under consideration. However, it must be clarified that some of these trends were an attempt by Twitterati to highlight an incident or issue linked to the mentioned theme. Hence, the section ends with a sentiment analysis of twitter trends based on average tone of the tweets made under this trend.



Shia Genocide

In response to a terrorist attack on a Shia mosque in Peshawar in March, Twitterati campaigned for highlighting the atrocities faced by Shia Muslims in Pakistan under #ShiaGenocide. As evident from the hashtag itself, most tweets under this trend claimed that the intensity and frequency of targeted Shia killings have gone far to the degree of genocide.

Although the backdrop of this trend was a brutal killing of over 62 humans with almost 200 others injured that demanded an empathetic response, sectarianism was widespread in the comments section. Some users accused Shias of spreading sectarianism and claimed that Sunni Muslims, despite being the majority sect in Pakistan, have also suffered genocide. Some showed extreme insensitivity by claiming that Shias are playing victim card to create division and divergence in society.

This method of downplaying minority issues in Pakistan in the name of promoting unity is very common. Minorities should be able to safely speak up about their experiences. A better approach for promoting unity is through empathizing with the minorities, particularly around such incidents.

Other top trends on Peshawar Blast such as #Peshawar and ISIS had mostly positive tweets. Most Pakistanis shared condolence messages and, irrespective of sect, declared such acts to be inhumane and against the spirit of Islam. A campaign was also launched for state custody of an Afghan child injured in the blast. However, the poor response to the issue of Shia genocide cancelled out the positive message of unity shown under these trends and showed the hollowness of the claims of Shia-Sunni unity in the country.

UN Day on Islamophobia

On March 15, the United National General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that proclaims March 15 as International Day to Combat Islamophobia. For three consecutive days, #Islamophobia remained a top trend in Pakistan. The trend was positive on the whole with most Pakistanis celebrating the declaration and praising the efforts of the Prime Minister in raising voices on multilateral forums against Islamophobia. Then Prime Minister Imran Khan himself congratulated the “Muslim Ummah ... as our voice against the rising tide of Islamophobia has been heard.”

The trend also generated a positive debate around the rights of non-Muslim communities in the country. Some pointed out that the UN resolution called for “tolerance and peace centered on respect for human rights and the diversity of religions and beliefs” and inquired the government of its possible actions against similar atrocities against Ahmadis, Hindus, Christian, Shias and other minorities in Pakistan.

Blasphemy Politics

The quarter saw an ugly face of political polarization where different political parties accused each other of committing blasphemy. Despite the utmost sensitivity of the topic, the use of blasphemy card by political leadership to incite public sentiment against their opponents and to win popular support is a concerning trend. After the incident of assassination of then Governor Punjab, Salman Taseer, by his security guard, and several other incidents of extra-judicial killings of people accused of committing blasphemy, the use of blasphemy accusation by political leadership only display their insensitivity and disregard to religious extremism.

On 23 April, Former Minister of Human Rights, Shireen Mazari accused the Finance Minister Miftah Ismail of making fun of Islamic concept of *Amar-bil-Maruf* – the recent slogan adopted by ousted PTI government for political campaigning. The tweet by Mazari included a video clip where Miftah could be heard telling journalists in an event organized by Atlantic Council at Washington DC, that the political slogans of PTI divide society along good versus evil lines with opposition marked as evil. He held that the same slogan was raised by the Taliban earlier, subtly comparing the extremist conservatism of PTI and the Taliban.

Most on twitter condemned Mazari for using religion card and accusing a minister of “mocking Islamic concepts” without any basis. Many pointed out that being a former Human Rights Minister, she was expected to have better sensitivity towards the growing religious radicalization in the country and should have avoided inciting religious sentiments as they can easily lead to allegations of blasphemy or even vigilante violence.

Just two days after Miftah’s incident, some hurled abuses to the government delegation visiting Masjid-e-Nabwi. The incident created several trends, such as #توپین_مسجد_نبوی_نامنظور, Blasphemy and Roza-e-Rasool, which remained on top for almost a week. Many condemned PTI for polarizing society to the degree that people have started disrespecting the holy sites. Many pointed out that since the area is deemed sacred, it is impressible in Islam to even wage a war against non-Muslim army and, hence, such incident is against the spirit of Islam. Other shared that the incident hurt their religious sentiments. Some went further of accusing the PTI leadership of pre-planning the sloganeering against PMLN leadership at the holy site.

One serious and very negative strand of tweets emerged in April as Twitterati accused the PTI of committing blasphemy. Saudi authorities arrested those involved in the incident but did not file blasphemy cases against the ones arrested. However, in Pakistan, FIRs against PTI leadership were registered under infamous section 295. The move, however, opened up the debate on whether an incident that took place in another country should have led to the registration of cases in Pakistan, especially when the evidence linking the incident to those nominated in the cases is not conclusive.

The issue of blasphemy remained the center of discussion among the Twitterati community in the month of May. While the accusations against PTI for committing blasphemy continued, several tweets were also raising alarm against the use of religion and blasphemy allegations to settle political means. Some reminded the political leadership of how a similar politically motivated blasphemy allegation against Salman Taseer led to his assassination.

Instead of avoiding this blasphemy politics several PTI supporters started alleging the interior minister Rana Sanallah of being blasphemous, making him the top trend on May 2. Ironically, some shared his statements where he called Ahmadis as Muslims and based this to declare him an infidel.

No discussion on blasphemy law in Pakistan is complete without reference to Salman Taseer, the former governor of Punjab who lost his life after being accused of blasphemy. While some connected the politics on blasphemy law with his assassination, many again abused Salman Taseer and justified his assassination.

Muhammad Bin Qasim vs Raja Dahir

On 10th Ramadan, which fell on 12 April this year, one of the top trends in Pakistan was #ہمارا_پیرو_محمدبن_قاسم. The trend was to commemorate the attack of Muhammad Bin Qasim in Sindh, which many on Twitter celebrated as the entry of Islam in the sub-continent. Apart from being factually incorrect, as there were Muslim settlements with mosques in the sub-continent since the time of Prophet Muhammad, the trend had a hint of anti-Hindu oratory. A day earlier, some Sindhi nationalists launched a trend to support Hindu monarch Raja Dahir as a national hero and presented Muhammad Bin Qasim as an Arab invader. The trend on Muhammad Bin Qasim was a response where many abused Raja Dahir and asked people defending Raja Dahir to leave the country and get settled in India. Some went further and questioned the religiosity of Muslims talking about the atrocities committed by Muhammad Bin Qasim.

Exchange of Wishes on Religious Festivals

In the quarter under observation, three key religious celebrations took place. The first was Holi celebrated in March, the second one was Easter on 16 April, and the third one was Eid-ul-Fitr celebrated in May. In all religious festivals, mostly positive trends topped the Twitter chart with Pakistanis, irrespective of their religious affiliations, sharing the festivities with each other and passing on good wishes and prayers.

As Hindus, all over Pakistan, celebrated the festival of Holi on 17 March, Pakistani Twitterati community, including celebrities and social media activists, shared Happy Holi messages on their walls. In some places, public events were organized to celebrate the festival where non-Hindu Pakistanis also joined their Hindu friends in the celebrations of colors.

Similarly, in April during Easter celebrations, happy easter remained a top trend with positive tweets of Pakistanis wishing their Christian fellows. Same positive vibes remained on top during Eid-ul-Fitr in May when many non-Muslims also wished their Muslim fellows Happy Eid.

Sectarian Hate Speech

In this quarter, several top trends in Pakistan were either strongly or partially related to sectarian hate speech. In most cases, either Shias or Sunnis initiated these trends to celebrate birth or death anniversary of any religious personality such as Imam Hussain (grandson of Prophet (PBUH) and third Imam in Shia Islam) or Hazrat Abu Bakr (First Caliph and a companion of Prophet PBUH) or to remember any particular event in the Islamic history but soon the Pakistan Twitter space was filled with heated arguments along sectarian lines.

On 5th April, #EnemiesofSahaba (enemies of the companions of Prophet) was a top trend in Pakistani Tworld where many raised questions on the beliefs of Shias and called them enemies of Sahaba for their beliefs. The context of this hashtag was the death anniversary of Bibi Fatima and Shia were running a hashtag to propagate their beliefs. Some pointed out discussion on such controversial issues should be avoided on social media platform as it often leads to hate speech.

On 13 May, Boycott Enemies of Sahaba and Abu Bakr again topped the trend chart in Pakistan with harsher tweets against Shias, calling for their social boycott.

The sectarian hate speech continued in May as several tweets were exchanged between Sunni and Shia users of Twitter having heated commentary against each other's beliefs. The main bone of contention remained the companion of Prophet – Sahaba – with Sunni accusing Shias of insulting Sahaba while Shias sending references to prove their stance. Consequently, trends such as *Wah Sahaba Wah*, *Mayer e Haq Sahabah* remained on top. In these trends, although the main objective was divinity, and holiness of religious figures was discussed but, some replies to such tweets were instigating hate speech between the two sects.

In May, the hashtag “یونیورسٹی میں مداخلت نامنظور” was used to condemn Shia community for allegedly indulging with universities, something that goes against the constitutional rights granted to all faith groups. Another sectarian trend was “امتیاز مروت ایرانی ایجنٹ#” in which a Deobandi cleric was condemned for stating that it is permissible to criticize prophet's companion.

Auctioning of Khak-e-Shifaa

In late March, an event was organized somewhere in the UK where renowned Shia scholars and reciters were invited. During the ceremony the soil of the grave of Imam Hussain, believed by Shia Muslims to be sacred, was auctioned. In Pakistan, the video footage of the auctioning ceremony created an uproar with many sharing their rage and disappointment on the social media. On 24 March, two top trends in Pakistan, “Imam Hussain” and “Allah and AhleBayt,” were related to this incident. This intra-sect debate on whether auctioning is apt or not led to heated arguments among mostly Shia users of Twitter, and in many instances, hate speech was observed with some Shia users cursing the organizers of the event and declaring them as *Kufi*. Some Sunni users also joined the bandwagon and started joking around the issue.

To mitigate the negativity spread through this event, a campaign to promote the sanctity of Khak-e-shiffa was launched by some Shia activist, resulting in Karbala E Mu'alla and #عظمت تبرکات حُسیّی becoming top trends on 31st March. The trends mostly had positive tweets where quotes, hadiths and Quranic verses in support of the family of Prophet and the objects associated with them was promoted. Some tweets just promoted the objects related to Karbala or Imam Hussain as being holy objects for Shia Muslims. No particular comment promoting sectarian hatred was observed under these trends.

TARGETTING AHMADIS

After the murder of TLP member, Zain Rizvi, trends were started mainly by the TLP members such as #ریاستی ادارے قادیانی نواز, # and #قادیانی دہشتگرد calling out government institutes serving Ahmadis and Ahmadis as terrorists. TLP demanded the arrest of Ahmadis who were allegedly involved in the murder of Zain Rizvi. Subsequently, eight Ahmadis were arrested in Shiekhupura.

Sentiment Analysis of Trends

Based on the tone of majority of tweets made under each top trend, the sentiment analysis was conducted to determine how many negative trends were observed on Twitter during the three months (Mar-May). Negative trends refer to trends that promote hate speech, curb on freedom of belief and hatred and violence against faith-based minorities. Positive trends, in contrast, refers to trends highlighting any incident of violence and hate speech or promoting any movement for civil rights and liberties of minorities.

The graph below plots the percentage of tweets in each trend category. As shown, the majority of tweets made under relevant twitter trends were negative as both sectarian and faith-based hate speech and blasphemy allegation against each other were quite widespread throughout the quarter. More than 50 percent of tweets under partially relevant trends were also negative, as even on trends meant to mark any Islamic historical event, some users post abusive tweets. All irrelevant trends were automatically marked as neutral for the chances of having a negative or positive tweet under these trends was minuscule.

