

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS)
Islamabad

QUARTERLY SOCIAL MEDIA REPORT

SEP-NOV 2022

Pak Institute for Peace Studies undertakes a quarterly monitoring of the social media in Pakistan for hate speech and violations of the freedom of religious beliefs. The monitoring task is carried out by two groups of external and internal 'Observers'. The external observers comprise young university graduates from across Pakistan who have been trained by PIPS in social peace and cohesion. These young volunteers monitor social media for the afore-mentioned issues and report such incidents to internal observers based at PIPS. In addition, the internal Observers also screens the Pakistani Twitter space on daily basis to note FoRB violations and hate speech. The collected data are analyzed and prepared into quarterly social media report.

Hate speech

Social media provide a global megaphone for hate speech.

- Antonio Guterres
UN Secretary General

The monitoring of the Twitter revealed a disturbing rise in incidents of hate speech. The usual targets included the Ahmadis, Shias, and other religious minorities. In October, the banned sectarian outfit Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) held a *“Martyrs of Islam and Stability of Pakistan Conference”* at Hockey Ground, right at the heart of nation’s capital. Not unexpectedly, the Hockey Ground resounded with anti-Shia slogans after ASWJ’s firebrand cleric Maulana Ludhianvi delivered a fiery speech against the Shia. The gathering was symbolic of the state’s tendency to defer to religious extremists, even though the outfit is actively banned by the Ministry of Interior and allowing the so-called *“conference”* directly undermined the government’s declared policies and resolution on countering extremism and militancy.

The falling of Kabul in Taliban’s hands alarmed experts in Pakistan as they foresaw repercussions for Pakistan’s internal security. Independent think tanks with an eye on security such as PIPS had warned in 2022 that local and foreign militants straddling the Pak-Afghan border regions tended to get inspiration from Taliban victory in Afghanistan. And the growing resurgence of militancy in Pakistan only support experts’ fears. The fall of Kabul has already emboldened groups like TTP which has been committing terror acts in recent months. The resurfacing of sectarian outfits like ASWJ can also be seen in the context of Taliban victory next-door.

Video clips of ASWJ’s Islamabad rally was also shared on the Twitter with users both supporting and opposing the public hatemongering by the outfit. Some users supported the apostatizing slogans, using slurs like *‘Shia infidel’* etc. and calling for social boycott with Shias. Users also termed the followers of Shia faith as blasphemers and called for the expansion of the blasphemy law to cover prosecution for disrespecting the *Sahaba*. However, on the other hand, other users censured the local administration for allowing such an open expression of sectarian hatred. Some questioned the government’s conduct, asking if the state was functioning at all in the country. A particular user tweeted that people who should have been behind bars were holding rallies right under the nose of the federal government.

Apart from this, other incidents of hate speech were also recorded on the social media. Many users – mostly young men – used abusive words about the Shias. Other tweets and comments declared that *“gustakh-e-Sahaba”* (those disrespecting revered figures) would not be tolerated. Sectarian trends like *“Sahaba hamari red line”* remained on the Twitter. Authorities like the FIA and PTA that are supposed to monitor the internet for cybercrimes including hate speech are largely indifferent to propagation of hate against religious minorities. For instance, an anti-Shia Twitter handle called *“Haideri Media”* runs several sub-handles specific to various regions in Pakistan. These handles openly disseminate anti-Shia hate material on the Twitter. It also compiles a list of its top ten most active followers and congratulates them for their sectarian activism.

The proliferation of hate speech on Pakistan social media spaces indicates a sense of impunity regarding hate speech prevails among users. For instance, a social media influencer Dr Taha Cheema with over 114k followers on the Twitter shared a picture of a Shia cleric with the caption “*barking dog*”. He is hailed by his followers. Likewise, another user wrote that trademark hate slogan of ASWJ “*Kafir kafir Shia kafir, jo na maanay woh bhi kafir*”. However, users critical of the state’s policy of appeasement towards sectarian groups called for the enforcement of ban on outfits like ASWJ. Some called it a product of the state.

Allowing outfits like ASWJ to pronounce itself right in the heart of the federal capital and tolerating its malicious rhetoric sets the wrong example for a country that saw its previous decade as the bloodiest in its history of sectarian bloodbath. The Shias were subjected to mass murders through massive bombings and targeted killings in Pakistan over the last decade. Pakistan sectarian militant groups have had a nexus with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in the past, and if these groups find inspiration from a resurgence of Taliban or TTP, it should not be a surprise. The glaring contradiction in government’s declared policies and its actual practice viz-a-viz violent extremism and terrorism has created immense confusion both within the state machinery and the populace, making it hard to track where the declared policies are implemented and where flouted by the law enforcers.

However, the Shia are not the lone target of faith-based hate speech in Pakistan. The Ahmadi community and the Hindus are equally targeted for their faith by fanatics. More worryingly, public figures including political leaders also indulge in hate speech against minorities. For instance, in late September, Punjab Chief Minister Pervez Elahi announced that his government was planning to build a replica of Istanbul’s Blue Mosque where the entry of “*Qadyanis*” will be banned. The chief minister used the slur “*Qadyani*” instead of Ahmadi as reference to the community. Little wonder that members of the community are routinely apprehended and charged for criminal offence for practicing Islamic rituals like animal sacrifice on Eid.

Similarly, PMLN senior leader Javed Latif claimed that the previous PTI government had attacked the basic tenets of Islam by supporting the “*Qadyanis*”. The reaction to Latif’s statement on social media was mixed. Some users abused the Ahmadis, saying their faith was ‘mutinous’ and that it was manufactured by the British colonialists. Others commented that the “*Qadyani*” faith had to be eliminated for Islam to rise and shine. Users also criticized Latif for his disparaging statement about the Ahmadis, saying the community was already a victim of persecution by the government and the extremist lots in Pakistan.

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for Pakistani politicians and other public figures to resort to religious bigotry in their speech in attempts to create fear and rally mass support against an *out-group*. There are plenty of instances in which political leaders used anger, fear, and distrust against the Ahmadis. Such tactics have been used to garner political or religious support from *in-group* and further a political agenda. And religious faith remains a tool of manipulation at the disposal of politicians and other influential figures in Pakistan. Hate is also used to garner votes during elections by stirring resentment against certain social groups such as religious minorities. This may help leaders unite voters in opposition to a common enemy. Leaders capitalize on the “us vs. them” mindset to gain political power.

During the monitoring period, however, the worst form of hate speech directly inciting violence against the Ahmadis came from a TLP cleric Muhammad Naeem Chatta Qadri. In a video shared widely on social media in Pakistan, Qadri is heard delivering a hate sermon to his followers, inciting them to carry out attacks against the Ahmadis particularly their pregnant women so as to stop them from giving birth to Ahmadi babies. He further says, “we are the descendants of Mehmood Ghaznavi...whose horse’s galloping sound would cause the miscarriage of Hindu women.” The sense of impunity among hatemongers is incredible. It remains unknown if the authorities took any action against the cleric for that incitement to violence. Pakistan’s Human Rights Minister Pirzada admitted that Ahmadi members were being stabbed in the country. Pointing to the level of radicalization in society, Pirzada said people avoided even mentioning the name of Dr Abdus Salam – Pakistan’s Nobel laureate and an Ahmadi.

Hate speech has had a significant impact on the social fabric in Pakistan. It has been a factor behind the prevailing atmosphere of fear, mistrust, anger, and violence among different religious communities. The UNESCO recognizes hate speech as an early warning of violence including atrocity crimes. Hate is perpetrated through fiery rhetoric and distortion of facts about vulnerable communities. Almost always, hatemongering has preceded social unrest such as mob violence etc. Absence of check on hate speech in a socially fractured society like Pakistan is alarming because there is evidence from recent world history that hatemongering has resulted in genocidal violence, in worst case scenarios.

Forced Conversions

The unending crisis of forced conversion of Hindu women exposes the failure of rule of law in the country. During the reporting period, several cases of abduction and forced conversion of Hindu minor girls and women surfaced on social media. On Sep 22, a minor girl, 13, was abducted in Karundi, Faiz Gunj, in Sindh. The girl’s father Gullo Mal Bheel accused a Muslim man Arif Mallah – a married man with children – of taking his daughter. Just the next day, another minor Hindu girl Rekha was taken from Kunri, Sindh. Reports claimed she was converted and married off to a Muslim man whose youngest daughter was elder to Rekha. Similarly, on the same day, Sep 23, *The Rise News* reported the abduction and forced conversion of a married Hindu woman and a mother of three. It was claimed that the police had refused to lodge an FIR against the accused.

On Sep 26, two women of the Hindu’s Bheel community Karo Bheel and Pathani Bheel, aged 34 and 32, were converted in Sindh’s Umerkot. Another married woman Gudo, wife of Dayaram, was reportedly kidnapped from a flood-hit village in Badin. The victim’s family blocked a highway in protest, leading to a police crackdown on the protestors. Later, it emerged that Gudo was converted and married off to her abductor Ali Gul Thahim. The victim was named Gulnaz after





conversion. Furthermore, in October, the incidents of kidnapping and conversion continued to happen. On Oct 11, a Hindu girl Chanda Mehraj went missing in broad daylight from Fateh Chowk in Hyderabad, reportedly kidnapped. Later, Mehraj was presented before a court where a medical report declared her a minor, but the court ordered her to be sent to a shelter house. Commenting on this incident, a user said, “even the law cannot protect Hindu girls.” Another user, however, said the forced conversion issue was blown out of proportion, adding that Mehraj did not want to go with her parents. The user disregarded the fact that Mehraj was a minor.

In another incident, a woman of Sindh’s Meghwar community registered a complaint with the local police, stating that her daughter had been kidnapped and forcibly converted by

Muslim men. The victim girl Sheela Meghwar was renamed as Saida after the alleged forced conversion. Likewise, on Oct 14, a Hindu girl Hina, daughter of Ramji Kohli, was converted in Tando Ghulam Ali and married to Mustafa Dahokar.

In mid-October, a Twitter handle ‘Voice for Pakistan Minority’ warned of an uptick in cases of forced conversions in the wake of Diwali festivities in Sindh. In Tharparkar, a minor Hindu girl Jamsi Meghwar, 14, was reportedly kidnapped and converted and married to her abductor named Shoukat on Oct 18. Similarly, on the same day, Salma Meghwar was kidnapped by a Muslim man Shahid Umar and his friends in Dhandhari near Gharo in Sindh. A day later, two minor girls of the Hindu’s Oad community were taken in Sukkur. The police were accused of refusing to lodge complaint. On Oct 21, Shanti Meghwar was kidnapped by Manzoor Shaikh and others. The girl was converted. The family complained that the police took rupees 5000 from them for registering an FIR, but still refused to do so.

Incidents of kidnapping and forced conversions of Hindus continued throughout the reporting period. In Oct, a minor girl Maria Meghwar, 10, from Kunb was abducted while she was fetching water from the well. A month later, it emerged that she had been converted to Islam and married off to a Muslim man in Islamkot, Tharparkar. Reportedly, a video of the girl surfaced on social media in which she is heard saying that she was taken against her will. Maria’s parents Bagh Meghwar and Radha Meghwar protested outside the local press club, complaining that the law enforcement was not helping them recover their child. The parents also identified the culprit as Wazir Hassan.



Likewise, in Nov, a married Hindu woman Hatki was subjected to abduction and forced marriage in Sindh. In Hatki's case too, the culprit was identified as Mustafa Khaskheli. In yet another case, a married Hindu woman, mother of three, was abducted, converted, and married to a Muslim man Ashiq Ali in Mirpur Khas. Her faith conversion certificate was issued by 'Anjuman-e-Ghulaman-e-Mustafa Pakistan' and signed by cleric Mohammad Ayub Jan Farooqi. In the same city, on Nov 26, another married woman Shrimati Valki, wife of Chetan Meghwar and mother of four, was abducted, converted, and married to a Muslim man. As usual, the authorities were accused of inaction by the victim's family. Similarly, in Nov, a Hindu activist and Chairman 'Pakistan Darawer Ittehad' Faqir Shiva accused the *Badin Indus Hospital* of doctoring medical reports in cases of forced conversions of minor Hindu girls. Shiva accused the hospital of showing a Hindu minor girl's age as 19 when she was only 13.

Forced conversion is a byproduct of the failing rule of law in Pakistan, and it has devastating impacts on the Hindu community and the broader society. The state's failure to check this onslaught against the Hindus has weakened the community faith in the government. There has been little effort to understand the physical, mental, and emotional impacts of kidnapping and conversion on the victims and their families. Victims of abduction often suffer from physical injuries and trauma. Such crimes can also leave the victims feeling isolated and ashamed. These aspects of the forced conversion are mostly overlooked in the analysis of the problem.

Forced conversion and marriage directly undermines human rights as it denies an individual the freedom of choice in faith and marriage. Women in forced marriages are highly likely to be subjected to physical and emotional coercion, abuse, and violence. Forced marriages also deprive women of the opportunity to pursue education and career and deny them their reproductive and economic rights. This may lead to economic hardships and more poverty. In addition, forced conversion and marriage can have destructive impact on the victim community because these cause a breakdown of social norms and customs, worsening the sense of insecurity among the vulnerable Hindu community.

Rape and Violence

Apart from kidnapping and forced conversions, members of minority faiths are also subjected to rape and violence. The frequency of such crimes against minorities is alarming. In early Sep, a Hindu girl Baghwati was reportedly raped in the flood-hit Shahdad Kot. The girl was allegedly lured in on promise of food ration and raped. It was observed on the social media that many members of the majority faith lacked empathy for the minorities. Commenting on this rape incident, a Twitter user wrote that there was no need to mention the victim's religious faith. He criticized the Hindus for being over-sensitive and seeing religion in everything.

Likewise, on Oct 4, two culprits identified as Mushtaq and Nabi Bakhsh broke into a Hindu household at night in Tharparkar, took a minor girl Kamli and subjected her to gang rape. In Jacobabad, a minor Sikh boy Sajeel Singh, 13, was gang raped by two Muslim adults identified as Mohsin Jamali and Takri. The culprits were apprehended, but they managed to escape from Civil Line Police Station. Similarly, a Christian student of class 12 was drugged and raped in Pakpattan, Punjab. The victim was also filmed and blackmailed into more rape by eight Muslim men. In late Nov, a married Hindu woman Geni, wife of Krishan Bheel, was kidnapped and kept in captivity for four months where she was subjected to gang rape in Umerkot, Sindh. The main culprit was identified as Ali Gul Kapri.

It must be noted that gang rape is often used as a weapon against the weak in socially fractured and failing societies. It can be used as a form of group violence, intimidation, and systematic oppression which seeks to degrade and humiliate people considered powerless in society including women, minorities, and other marginalized sections. In case of Pakistan's minorities, this weapon has been used for coercion and control. The psychological impacts of gang rape such as humiliation and depression can devastate victims' lives forever. In cases of rape and violence against minorities, the law enforcement is often accused of siding with the powerful instead of the weak. This may be because the law enforcers avoid risking a backlash from the powerful. Additionally, there may be biases within the law enforcement, leading to bias in enforcement.

Besides the crime of rape, religious minorities also face organized physical attacks. For instance, on Sep 6, the Muslim Babar community attacked the Hindu Kohli community with axes, leaving several Kohli people critically injured. On Sep 16, a Hindu couple Gino Kohli and his wife were attacked and injured by one Abdur Rehman Pathan. The couple was admitted to hospital for injuries. The victims' family blocked a road in protest, complaining about police inaction in the case. Likewise, on Nov 3, several homes of the Hindu community of Islamkot were set ablaze by unknown miscreants. The victims complained that their valuables including their daughters' dowries were burned in the fire. In a similar fashion, homes of Kohli community were burned and women and children were thrashed in Umerkot, Sindh. The attackers also hurled death threats at the victims. As usual, the victims staged a protest.

In Naukot, a Hindu temple was broken into and ravaged by unknown persons. The donation box was looted, and Hindu idols were shattered. There is a recurring pattern of temples being attacked and damaged in Sindh. Convictions in such crimes have been extremely low, which adds to sense of impunity among culprits. In Sanghar, six armed men stormed Hindu homes and looted money and other valuables. Likewise, during the Shia ritual of Chehlum on Sep 18, some sectarian extremists attacked the traditional Shia procession in Sialkot. Users on social media termed the incident an act of terrorism and demanded action. And on Sep 20, a Sunni religious procession was attacked in Sargodha which was blamed on Shias. This caused a sectarian hate speech from the followers of both sects on the social media.

Blasphemy and Faith-based Persecution

Pakistan is becoming more religious as a state, and its laws are progressively being informed by religious beliefs of the majority. Increasingly, decisions made by the government are largely motivated by religious principles, and political leaders prioritize faith over secular values of democracy and rule of law. In the process, they are creating restrictions not only on basic rights and freedoms but also on social behaviors

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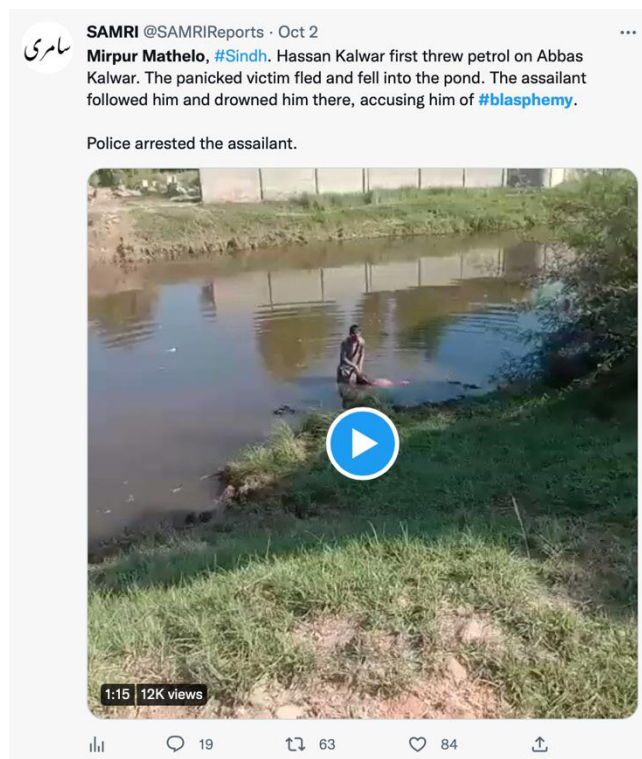
etc. The country's experiences with Zia's Islamization led to radicalization on mass level. However, the state elite refuse to learn from past experiences. For instance, the blasphemy law has been abused umpteen times in Pakistan, yet there is no hint that rectification of the same is on horizon. People have been lynched on mere rumors of blasphemy.

Even members of Pakistan's powerful elite have not been spared from the sword of blasphemy. The latest high profile victim is the country's former prime minister Imran Khan. In early Nov, the ex-prime minister suffered an attempt on his life while he was leading a political rally in Punjab. The suspect was arrested who confessed that he wanted to assassinate Khan because he believed Khan had committed blasphemy in his political speeches. Previously, a governor and cabinet ministers were

assassinated and injured on accusations of blasphemy.

In Sindh's Mirpur Mathelo, a young fanatic brutally murdered a handicapped person after accusing him of having committed blasphemy on Oct 1. The culprit Hassan Kalwar first poured petrol on the victim which made the later flee to a nearby water pond. There, he was grabbed again by the culprit and murdered. The video of the gory incident was shared widely on the social media in Pakistan.

Similarly, in another incident in Layyah, a Christian sanitary worker James Masih, 42, was accused of blasphemy by a Muslim female patient identified as Nazir at THQ hospital in Chaubara on Oct 5. Masih has been working at the hospital for 12 years. As per reports on social media, Masih was falsely accused of blasphemy after he refused to give priority treatment to Nazia. He was accused of uttering disrespectful words about the sacred figure of Islam. This incident forced Masih and his family to flee their home and go into hiding, fearing for their lives. And it is not uncommon for people to get lynched at slightest accusation of blasphemy. In another case, a Christian man was allegedly tortured into confessing that he had posted blasphemous contents on Whatsapp.





Youth for Interfaith Harmony @for_interfaith · Oct 12 ...

A Christian sanitary worker & his family have been forced to leave their home in district **Layyah** & go into hiding out of fear for their lives after he was accused of **#blasphemy**. @GovtofPunjabPK @CMPunjabPK @HRCP87 @nchrofficial pakchristiannews.com/details/483

12 16



Faraz Pervaiz @FarazPervaiz3 · Oct 13 ...

A Pakistani Christian man, James Masih, 42, from **Layyah**, Punjab has been accused of committing **#blasphemy** by a Muslim patient Nazia.

The incident occurred on Wednesday 5th in Tehsil Headquarter (THQ) hospital Chauraba, **Layyah**, Punjab.

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Show this thread

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Peshawar High Court acquitted Ehsanullah, a young man accused of killing an Ahmadi doctor in Feb 22. The accused was given the benefit of the doubt in the case and set free. On the other hand, the grave of an Ahmadi child was desecrated in Faisalabad, Punjab. Later in Nov, more Ahmadi graves were destroyed in Wazirabad. The culprits also wrote the word "dog" on the tombstones.

In yet another bizarre case of Ahmadi persecution, an Ahmadi lawyer was booked by Karachi police for using the surname 'Syed'. As per law, an Ahmadi cannot pose as a Muslim. The move was widely condemned on the Twitter. An investigative journalist Bilal Farooqi also shared a screenshot of the FIR against the Ahmadi lawyer. The anti-Ahmadi sentiments run deep in society, and they sometimes even seep into institutions. In late Sep, four Ahmadi children were expelled from an elite school in Attock. After severe backlash on social media, the *Educators* school administration reversed their decision and re-

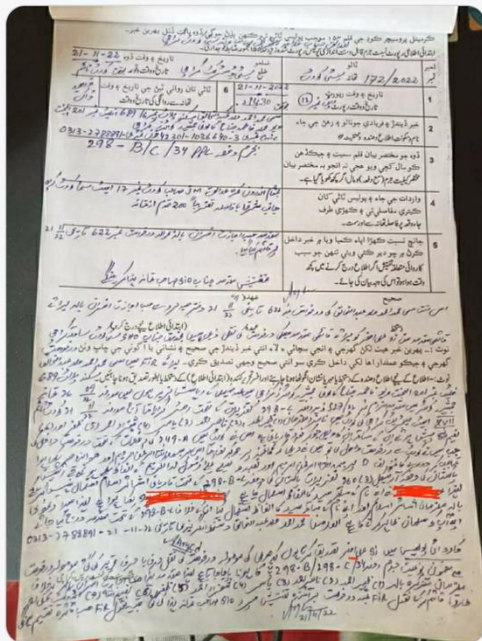
admitted the children. However, many users also supported the expulsion decision, saying that Ahmadis had to abide by the Constitution of Pakistan and stop posing as Muslims. Likewise, in Sindh, the body of a Hindu laborer was denied burial at a cemetery by Muslims in Nov.



Bilal Farooqi @bilalfqi · Nov 22 ...

Ahmadi lawyer booked for having the word "Syed" in his name. This is the state of **#Ahmadiyya** persecution in Pakistan.

Report and pic via @IamAmirMahmood



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