

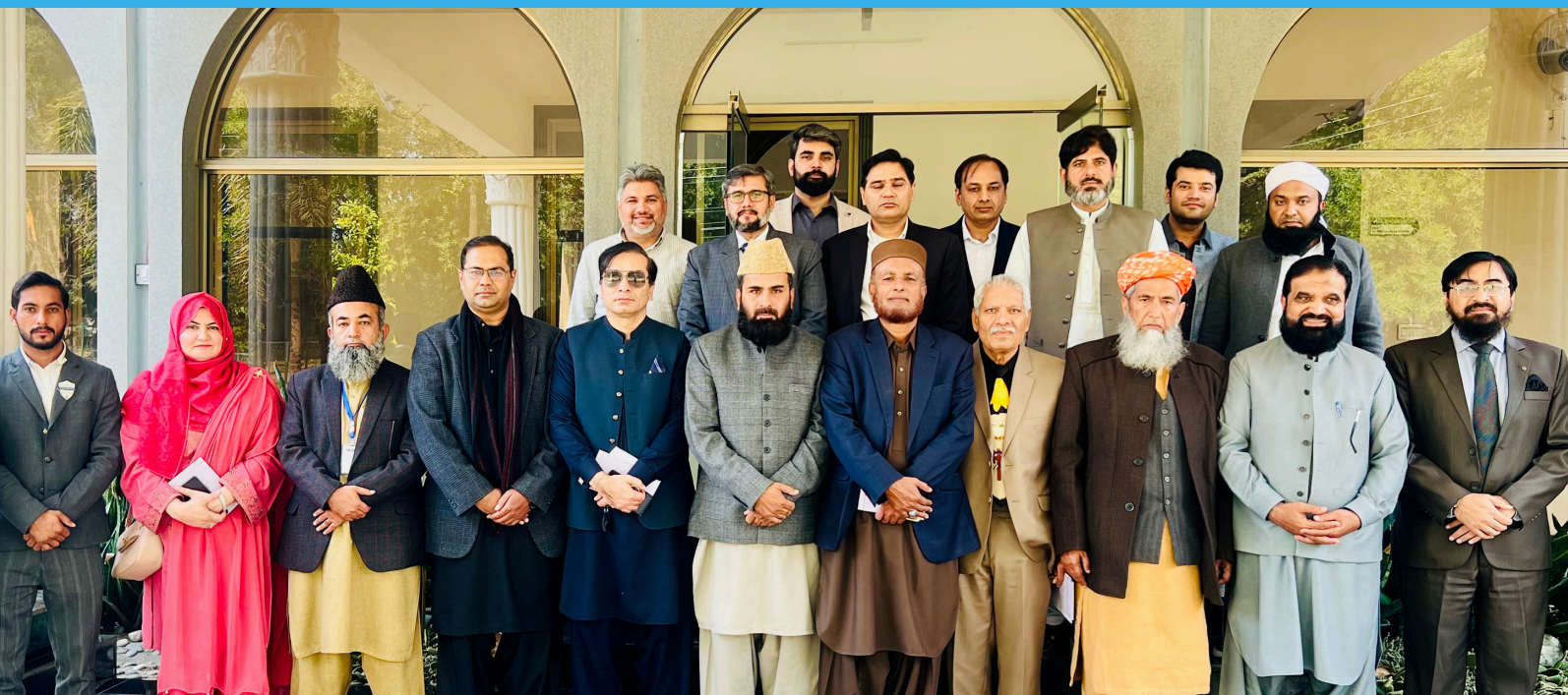
PIPS

# NEWSLETTER



QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

JAN - MAR, 2026



## PAKISTAN NEEDS CIVIC EDUCATION

It is pertinent to overcome social deficit of civil competence. Hence, civic education should be introduced as a separate subject in schools at all levels. Secondly, all political parties through their "Youth Fora's wings" should take on young their members to evolve their civic competency.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Media Training Workshop

Reporting Rights Violations and Faith-Based Persecution in Pakistan, Peshawar

### Social Action Plans

## PAKISTAN'S MINORITIES PROTECTION ACT

Pakistan's Constitution provides explicit safeguards for religious minorities; however, a persistent gap remains between formal guarantees and lived realities. This implementation deficit has left non-Muslim communities vulnerable to discrimination, violence, and unequal treatment. Over time, the disconnect became politically untenable, particularly following major incidents such as the September 2013 Peshawar church bombing and the Supreme Court's landmark June 2014 judgment, which directed the state to establish durable institutional mechanisms for minority protection. By 2024–25, sustained domestic civil society advocacy and increasing external scrutiny converged around the need for a statutory framework, generating the momentum that culminated in the enactment of the Minorities Protection Act.

## Pakistan's National Commission for Minorities Rights Act 2025

By Zain Zaigham Khan

### Executive Summary

Pakistan's Constitution provides explicit safeguards for religious minorities; however, a persistent gap remains between formal guarantees and lived realities. This implementation deficit has left non-Muslim communities vulnerable to discrimination, violence, and unequal treatment. Over time, the disconnect became politically untenable, particularly following major incidents such as the September 2013 Peshawar church bombing and the Supreme Court's landmark June 2014 judgment, which directed the state to establish durable institutional mechanisms for minority protection. Subsequent measures, including the May 2020 executive order-based commission under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, were widely criticised as inadequate due to limited authority, weak independence, and representational deficiencies, notably the exclusion of Ahmadi representatives. By 2024–25, sustained domestic civil society advocacy and increasing external scrutiny converged around the need for a statutory framework, generating the momentum that culminated in the enactment of the Minorities Protection Act.

The Act's principal institutional innovation is the creation of a permanent, statutory National Commission for Minorities' Rights (NCMR), mandated to operate nationwide. The NCMR is tasked with monitoring constitutional safeguards, reviewing laws and policies for discriminatory effects, receiving complaints, and conducting inquiries supported by civil court-like powers to compel information and participation. It is further expected to convert findings into reform proposals and report on minority rights conditions through formal parliamentary oversight mechanisms.

Nevertheless, the Act is subject to significant structural constraints. The NCMR lacks enforcement authority, cannot initiate prosecutions, and issues recommendations that are non-binding, rendering its effectiveness contingent on political will and institutional follow-through. Key implementation risks include politicization through appointments and resource allocation, inadequate or punitive budgeting, limited investigative capacity, and insufficient provincial reach. If these risks are not addressed, the commission risks functioning primarily as a documentation body rather than as an effective instrument for minority protection in practice.

### Background

Pakistan's Constitution contains explicit safeguards for religious minorities, including Article 20's guarantee of freedom of religion, Article 25's promise of equality, and Article 36's directive that the state protects minorities' rights and interests. However, the practical situation has long been defined by a persistent gap between constitutional guarantees and their implementation, leaving non-Muslim communities exposed to discrimination, mob violence, and unequal treatment within the legal system.<sup>1</sup> This disconnect formed the backdrop against which later reforms emerged, including calls for a statutory Minorities Protection Act.



This gap became especially hard to ignore after the September 2013 church bombing in Peshawar, which killed more than 120 Christian worshippers.<sup>2</sup> In June 2014, the Supreme Court issued a landmark minority-rights judgment under Chief Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani. The Court observed that “despite elaborate textual guarantees for minorities’ rights, empirical realities [presented] a dismal state of affairs,” and urged the creation of durable institutional safeguards. It also directed the state to establish a National Council for Minorities’ Rights to monitor rights implementation, promote tolerance, and advise the government on reforms.<sup>3</sup>

Implementation thereafter remained slow and uneven. A National Commission for Minorities was created by executive order in May 2020, but because it was non-statutory and placed under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, it was widely viewed as inadequate. Critics argued that it was “neither inclusive nor autonomous and [was] not likely to be able to effect substantive change,” pointing to weak authority, limited independence, and representational gaps. The most notable gap was the absence of Ahmadi representatives, reflecting entrenched political sensitivities.<sup>4</sup>

By 2024–25, pressure to move beyond ad hoc arrangements coalesced around legislation. Domestically, civil society groups and minority leaders argued that any new body should meet standards such as the Paris Principles, be operational across provinces, and include affected communities. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and others held consultations and pressed for the implementation of the 2014 judgment through media and legal avenues, emphasising that the 2020 commission “failed to meet the demands of minorities”.<sup>5</sup> Minority representatives from Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Bahá’í, and Ahmadi communities likewise argued that bodies without meaningful powers could not address recurring violations. In parallel, the Supreme Court’s follow-up through the Suddle Commission, headed by Dr Shoaib Suddle, underscored that meaningful institutional action remained outstanding.<sup>6</sup>

International scrutiny reinforced this assessment. Pakistan’s record on forced conversions, blasphemy-related violence, and structural discrimination has repeatedly been raised by human-rights actors. Commentary around the legislation also noted that European Union monitoring linked to trade preferences increased incentives for visible, durable reforms, and that the bill’s passage would help present a more credible institutional response to international observers.<sup>7</sup>

Political conditions also shifted. Earlier efforts stalled, including a 2023 government bill that lapsed when Parliament’s term ended.<sup>8</sup> In 2025, a coalition government linked to major parties such as the PML-N and PPP revived the initiative as “long-overdue,” aided by provincial groundwork. Article 144 resolutions passed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2021) and Balochistan (2023) enabled federal legislation on a matter otherwise intersecting with provincial jurisdiction.<sup>9</sup>

At its core, the Minorities Protection Act was intended to supply a missing bridge between rights guaranteed on paper and protection delivered on the ground, by creating a law-backed institution able to monitor violations, coordinate remedies, and provide minority citizens with a consistent route to protection and redress where existing systems fail.

## Policy Description

The Minorities Protection Act reorients Pakistan's approach to minority rights, shifting it from an improvised, politically contingent concern to a standing institutional obligation. The centrepiece is a permanent, statutory National Commission for Minorities' Rights (NCMR), intended to operate nationwide with representation across provinces and minority communities.<sup>10</sup> By embedding the Commission in law, the Act signals that minority protection should endure beyond any single government, and it provides the body with a clearer mandate than earlier non-statutory arrangements.

The NCMR is framed as both a watchdog and a reform-oriented advisory body. It must monitor implementation of constitutional safeguards for minorities and review existing or proposed laws and policies for discriminatory effects.<sup>11</sup> It can receive complaints from minority citizens, inquire into alleged violations, and carry out fact-finding to establish an official record.<sup>12</sup> During inquiries it may exercise civil court-like powers, including calling for documents and summoning participation.<sup>13</sup> Earlier drafts contemplated broader proactive authority, including suo motu inquiries, but the enacted version reportedly narrows this scope, orienting the Commission more towards matters initiated through complaints or referrals.<sup>14</sup>

Monitoring and inquiry are paired with an explicit reform mandate. The Act envisages the NCMR converting what it observes into recommendations for legal and administrative change at both federal and provincial levels.<sup>15</sup> This can include proposing measures to reduce discrimination and promote tolerance, suggesting regulatory revisions, curriculum improvements, and stronger operational protocols for institutions that interact with vulnerable communities. It can recommend that cases be pursued, that relief be provided, and that findings be published to enhance governmental transparency and inform public debate.<sup>16</sup>

Institutionally, the Act replaces ad hoc, executive-controlled committee models with a commission embedded in statute, thereby enhancing continuity and institutional authority.<sup>17</sup> Accountability is intended to operate through reporting mechanisms. The Act requires reports on minority-rights conditions and on the Commission's activities to be presented to Parliament, likely via relevant ministries or parliamentary committees, so that findings and recommendations enter the formal record for debate and follow-up.<sup>18</sup> Public reporting also departs from closed-door advisory practices by creating a predictable and publicly accessible information stream. The Commission's composition is structured to broaden representation (including provincial input and the mandatory inclusion of a woman member) and to provide stability through fixed terms; it includes minority representatives alongside government and other members drawn from relevant institutions.<sup>19</sup>

The Act's limits shape its likely impact. It does not override existing laws that profoundly affect minorities, including contested areas such as blasphemy statutes or constitutional provisions tied to religious identity, and an earlier overriding-effect clause was reportedly removed amid opposition.<sup>20</sup> The NCMR therefore cannot set aside statutes or invalidate regulations; it can only recommend change. Its recommendations are non-binding, and it is not a prosecutorial body: it cannot arrest, charge, punish, award damages, or



deliver direct legal remedies, relying instead on police, prosecutors, courts, and existing mechanisms for enforceable outcomes.<sup>21</sup> In effect, the Act creates a durable institutional channel for monitoring, complaint-based inquiry, and sustained reporting, but its effectiveness will ultimately depend on political will. Supporters view it as a meaningful institutional upgrade, while critics warn that it may become largely symbolic if its recommendations are routinely ignored.<sup>22</sup>

## **Stakeholder Reactions**

The government has presented the Minorities Protection Act as a major institutional improvement in Pakistan's human rights framework, and it has sought to demonstrate that minority protection is being shifted from slogans to durable structures. In official statements, the Act is framed as an overdue response to a long-running constitutional and governance gap, with ministers arguing that a permanent commission finally satisfies the Supreme Court's 2014 directive and better reflects Pakistan's constitutional commitments to religious freedom and equality.<sup>23</sup> During the parliamentary debate, the Law Minister also anticipated resistance and sought to neutralise it by arguing that the bill is compatible with Islamic principles, stressing that protecting minority citizens reflects both constitutional design and Qur'anic injunctions of justice.<sup>24</sup> This constitutional-religious framing allows the ruling coalition to portray the reform as restorative rather than disruptive: a fulfilment of Pakistan's foundational principles, not a departure from them.

Alongside this domestic argument, the government also highlighted the commission's relevance for Pakistan's external obligations and relationships. Officials linked the Act to international commitments and global norms, implying that a statutory commission signals seriousness to partners who monitor religious freedom closely.<sup>25</sup> In this view, the NCMR serves two purposes simultaneously. It is intended to function as a governance mechanism that mainstreams minority rights into routine state practice, and it is also a reputational instrument that may improve Pakistan's standing abroad.<sup>26</sup>

Reactions from minority communities, civil society, and human-rights actors were more mixed and cautious. Many welcomed the Act's symbolism and the possibility that it could create a standing platform for complaints and visibility, especially given the widely held view that minority protections have too often existed only on paper.<sup>27</sup> The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan endorsed the law "in principle," describing it as the fulfilment of a long-overdue constitutional obligation that the Supreme Court had strongly underlined in 2014.<sup>28</sup> Activists have also argued that a statutory commission can keep minority concerns in national view more consistently, because it creates a formal channel through which patterns of abuse can be recorded, presented before authorities, and pressed as an agenda item over time.<sup>29</sup> Some also point to design features that appear to improve legitimacy, including the representation of diverse religious communities and the inclusion of women, when compared to earlier arrangements.<sup>30</sup>

However, that optimism is constrained by fears that a new label could reproduce old weaknesses. The central concern is independence. Because appointments for the chairperson and members are routed through the Prime Minister, civil-society figures

worry that the commission could become an exercise in patronage or tokenism rather than a forum capable of confronting entrenched interests. Peter Jacob of the Centre for Social Justice, for example, emphasised merit-based appointments as essential for credibility and for the willingness to address abuses in politically sensitive areas, including blasphemy-related violence and hostility toward Ahmadis.<sup>31</sup> A related concern is enforcement. Many actors argue that a body without binding authority risks becoming a mechanism for documentation without consequence if state institutions treat its recommendations as optional.<sup>32</sup> This criticism intensified after reports that the enacted law weakened stronger tools that had been discussed in earlier drafts, including the ability to initiate inquiries more independently or compel officials to cooperate changes that critics say risk leaving the commission toothless precisely when leverage is needed most.<sup>33</sup>

Inclusivity and reach further complicate reactions. Ahmadis, despite being among the most targeted groups, have historically faced exclusion from minority bodies; while advocates stress that all minorities should be protected equally, without exception or hierarchy, scepticism remains about whether Ahmadi concerns will be taken up meaningfully in practice.<sup>34</sup> There are also practical concerns about geography and access. An Islamabad-centred commission, without a strong provincial presence and clear routes for local complaints, may struggle to reflect the lived realities of minorities outside major urban centres.<sup>35</sup>

Critics and opposition voices add that symbolism may outpace substance, and they raise jurisdictional objections. During the debate, some actors questioned how a federal body sits within Pakistan's devolved governance structure and warned of duplication or conflict with provincial minority welfare departments, especially where provincial jurisdiction is already engaged.<sup>36</sup> Taken together, these reactions reflect a shared view that minority protections require stronger institutions, but they also reveal a sharp divide over whether the commission's design is sufficiently robust to deliver real change.

## **Enforcement and Implementation**

Whether the Minorities Protection Act produces real protection on the ground depends on whether the National Commission for Minorities' Rights (NCMR) can translate formal authority into practical leverage. On paper, the commission is given a broad mandate to monitor constitutional safeguards, conduct inquiries, and request information. At minimum, these powers should allow it to document patterns of abuse and to place official scrutiny on institutions that have often avoided it.<sup>37</sup> The difficulty begins where the statute stops. The NCMR is not an enforcement agency. It cannot itself implement policy, prosecute offenders, or compel departments to adopt its recommendations, which means it must depend on the police, courts, ministries, and provincial administrations to act on what it finds.<sup>38</sup> This gap between mandate and coercive capacity explains why early assessments describe the body as symbolically important but structurally constrained, reflecting political compromise rather than maximal institutional strength.<sup>39</sup> In practice, its influence will depend on whether it can convert investigations into consequences through credible reporting, exposure, and sustained pressure, even when it must petition the very institutions whose inertia may itself be part of the problem.<sup>40</sup>



This makes political will the decisive variable. The same political energy that carried the bill through Parliament must continue once the commission begins producing uncomfortable findings, and it must exist not only at the centre but also across the provinces. Many of the areas the NCMR will inevitably touch, such as law and order, education, and local administration, are largely provincial, so cooperation from chief ministers and provincial departments will determine whether inquiries translate into follow-up or simply stall at the implementation stage. Parliament can strengthen the commission's leverage, or it can quietly neutralise it. If relevant committees treat NCMR reports as serious oversight instruments, question ministers about non-compliance, and keep the issue bipartisan, recommendations carry more weight; if interest fades after the initial publicity, reports risk becoming procedural exercises with limited practical impact.<sup>41</sup> Politicisation is also a long-term risk. Because appointments and resourcing depend on the government, a less committed administration can delay appointments, underfund operations, or select compliant leadership that avoids controversy, thereby eroding institutional independence and credibility.<sup>42</sup>

Even where political support exists, effectiveness will still depend on institutional capacity and reach. Funding is the foundation. The Act does not guarantee a protected budget, so the commission's work will depend on annual allocations and on whether its finances can be insulated from punitive cuts once it becomes inconvenient. Civil-society commentary has therefore stressed the need for a distinct and secure allocation so that the NCMR is not quietly constrained through resource starvation.<sup>43</sup> Capacity also means professional competence: a functional secretariat, investigators able to conduct fieldwork, legal analysts who can draft reform proposals, and staff trained in human-rights documentation. Pakistan's experience with comparable bodies shows that weak staffing or purely bureaucratic "reassignments" can reduce commissions to paperwork rather than investigation; merit-based recruitment is therefore as important as funding, because patronage hiring can erode output quality regardless of mandate.

Geography further tests the commission. Minority-related incidents are not confined to Islamabad, and access will shape whether affected communities consider the commission reachable. Provincial representation within the membership is a start, but meaningful reach usually requires a provincial footprint, such as offices, complaint cells, regular field visits, or designated focal persons, so victims can report abuses without navigating distant bureaucracy and investigators can gather evidence quickly and safely. Without decentralised infrastructure, the NCMR risks being slow and reactive, particularly in remote areas where intimidation and under-reporting are common.

Taken together, these factors point to an uneven trajectory. In the short term, impact is likely to remain limited while the commission is constituted and basic start-up tasks are completed (including appointments, rules, offices, and procedures). Over the medium term, the NCMR may have moderate impact if it builds credibility through rigorous, non-partisan work and if Parliament and civil society use its reporting to sustain pressure. Regular inquiries and public documentation of patterns, including forced conversions or targeted violence, could support incremental improvements in policing responses and protections for places of worship.<sup>44</sup> It could also sustain pressure for curriculum reforms aimed at reducing prejudice.<sup>45</sup> In the long run, the Act's legacy may depend on whether Pakistan

is willing to strengthen the commission beyond its advisory posture, potentially through future amendments that expand autonomy or make at least some directives harder to ignore.<sup>46</sup> The Act should therefore be understood as an initial institutional foothold: it creates a platform to spotlight abuses, but whether that spotlight translates into accountability depends on political will, resources, and the state's willingness to convert scrutiny into action.<sup>47</sup>

## **Policy Implications and Recommendations**

The Minorities Protection Act is best understood as an institutional foothold rather than a complete enforcement solution. It establishes a statutory National Commission for Minorities' Rights (NCMR) with powers to monitor safeguards, receive complaints, conduct inquiries, and place official scrutiny on institutions that have often evaded it. At the same time, it contains built-in limits that define what the Commission can realistically deliver in the near term. In other words, the Act creates an official mechanism for scrutiny and documentation, but it does not, by itself, guarantee outcomes.

A first implication is that the Act moves Pakistan towards a standing governance mechanism for minority protection, without conveying coercive enforcement powers in minority rights. The NCMR is not an enforcement agency. It cannot prosecute, implement policy, or compel government departments to adopt its recommendations. This means that enforceable outcomes will still depend on police, courts, ministries, and provincial administrations acting on the Commission's findings. Therefore, the Commission's influence will depend on whether it can convert investigation into consequence through credibility, reporting, and sustained institutional pressure.

A second implication is that political will becomes the primary constraint. The same political energy that carried the legislation will be tested once the Commission starts producing potentially contentious findings. In practice, cooperation by provincial governments will be decisive because many of the policy levers relevant to minority protection reside with provincial administrations. Parliament can strengthen the Commission by treating its reporting as a continuous oversight mechanism. However, Parliament can also neutralise it if attention fades after the initial political fanfare and the reporting process becomes a procedural formality rather than genuine scrutiny.

Independence and legitimacy form the third implication and, in practice, the decisive variable. The draft records sustained concern that appointments routed through the Prime Minister may encourage patronage or tokenism rather than leadership willing to confront entrenched interests. This matters because minority protection often touches politically sensitive domains, and a Commission perceived as politically managed will struggle to secure cooperation, attract credible staff, or retain public trust. Therefore, the credibility of the NCMR will largely rest on whether leadership appointments are merit-based and publicly perceived as such.

Fourth, capacity and reach will determine whether the NCMR becomes an accessible protection pathway or remains an Islamabad-centred formality. The Act does not guarantee a protected budget, which means the Commission will depend on annual appropriations and whether its resourcing is insulated from punitive cuts when it becomes outspoken.



Capacity is not simply office space and staff posts; it requires professional expertise, investigators, legal analysts, and staff trained in documentation. Otherwise, the institution risks becoming a paperwork exercise rather than a functional investigative body. Geography compounds these issues. Meaningful reach normally requires a provincial footprint and local complaint pathways so victims can report without navigating distant bureaucracy, and so investigators can gather evidence efficiently and safely.

Finally, the legal limits of the Act define the scope of potential reform. The NCMR cannot set aside statutes or invalidate regulations; it can only recommend change, and the draft notes that an earlier “overriding effect” clause was reportedly removed. This means that even a competent Commission will be structurally constrained when dealing with contested legal areas. In such cases, its role becomes primarily one of documentation, persuasion, and incremental institutional reform, rather than direct legal enforcement.

These implications point to a clear risk landscape and corresponding mitigations. The first risk is “documentation without consequence,” where recommendations are treated as optional and the Commission becomes symbolically significant but practically restrained. The mitigation is to build a disciplined follow-through mechanism: rigorous inquiries, findings that can be published and used, and a routine cycle of reporting that sustains pressure on implementing agencies.

The second risk is politicisation through appointments and resourcing, whether through delayed constitution, underfunding, or compliant leadership, which undermines independence and credibility. The mitigation is to embed merit, transparency, and performance visibility, so the institution cannot quietly be hollowed out while still existing on paper.

The third risk is resource starvation and thin staffing, reducing the NCMR to a bureaucratic desk exercise. The mitigation is a distinct and secure allocation and the recruitment of specialised staff tied to measurable outputs and field-ready capabilities.

The fourth risk is limited access beyond major cities, producing slow and reactive work and under-reporting in remote areas. The mitigation is decentralised complaint pathways and a regular field presence.

The fifth risk is an expectation gap, where public hopes of strong enforcement collide with the Act’s non-overriding, non-prosecutorial design. The mitigation is to communicate a realistic mandate while maximising indirect leverage through credible reporting and practical administrative recommendations. Against that backdrop, a balanced recommendations package should prioritise credibility, accessibility, and visible follow-through.

First, on capacity and resourcing, the government should establish a distinct and secure allocation for the NCMR to prevent “quiet constraint” through budget cuts. It should also build a professional secretariat with investigators able to conduct fieldwork and legal analysts capable of drafting reform proposals. This should be implemented through phased start-up milestones (appointments, rules, offices, procedures) so that early months are spent building a functional institution rather than producing performative outputs.

Second, the complaint and inquiry pathway should be operationalised as a victim-facing service rather than a purely legal mandate. The Act already frames the NCMR around complaint-based inquiry and fact-finding. The priority, therefore, is to standardise intake, triage, and documentation protocols, and to create clear pathways for local complaints so minorities outside major urban centres can access the institution without disproportionate risk or cost.

Third, transparency should be treated as the Commission’s primary leverage multiplier. The Act’s reporting function is designed to place findings in the formal record and create a predictable information stream. To realise that intent, reports should include clear outputs (complaints received, inquiries initiated, referrals made, and thematic patterns), so that sustained public and institutional pressure can be applied even where binding authority is absent.

Fourth, inclusivity and trust-building must be explicit, not assumed. The draft records continuing scepticism about whether all minorities, especially politically sensitive groups, will be protected equally, without exception or hierarchy. To reduce that legitimacy gap, the NCMR should adopt clear service standards on equal protection, embed outreach and accessibility beyond Islamabad, and demonstrate early case-handling credibility through non-partisan, rigorous work that is visibly attentive to communities historically excluded or marginalised.

## **Conclusion**

The Minorities Protection Act addresses a long-recognized governance deficit by replacing ad hoc arrangements with a statutory platform intended to bridge the gap between constitutional guarantees and the protection delivered on the ground. Yet the Act is also clear about its limits. The NCMR is not an enforcement agency; it cannot prosecute, nor can it compel departments to adopt its recommendations. This means practical outcomes will still depend on whether police, courts, ministries, and provincial administrations act on the Commission’s documented findings.

This design makes political will the decisive variable. If provincial cooperation is weak, or if Parliament and relevant committees do not treat NCMR reporting as an oversight tool, the Commission risks becoming a mere documentation mechanism without consequences. Equally, credibility will depend on whether the Commission is protected from politicization through appointments and resourcing, and whether it is equipped with professional capacity and geographic reach beyond Islamabad. The draft’s implementation assessment is therefore appropriately cautious: impact will be limited in the short term while the institution is constituted, but it could increase to a moderate level over time if credibility is built through rigorous work and reporting is used to sustain pressure.



Taken together, the Act should be treated as a foundational institutional foothold. Its long-term legacy will depend on whether the state is willing to convert scrutiny into action through sustained political backing, secure funding, and administrative follow-through that translates findings into tangible protection, and, if necessary, strengthens the Commission beyond an advisory role through future reforms.

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# Pakistan Needs Civic Education

By Muhammad Murtaza

Since its inception, Pakistan has witnessed multiple forms of government; weaved out of either democratic or authoritarian fabric. The decade of democracy (2008-2018) was considered as a triumph of democracy followed by another successful democratic transition in 2018. Yet over the course of past seven decades, Pakistan has not been able to strengthen its democracy. Why are we unable to consolidate democratic values, over such a long period?

As Abraham Lincoln stated "Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people." Are people justly represented in Pakistan? In Pakistan, the youth is defined within the age of 15-29 years. According to 2023 census data, the total population of Pakistan exceeds 241 million, of which 26 percent comprises youth, the officially defined age bracket 15 to 29.. At the age of 18, every citizen is eligible to vote and at 25 can contest elections. The census data portrays, that a huge number of voters in the upcoming elections would be young women and men.

Whether Pakistani youth possess civic sense and competence? According to Gallup, the participation of youth in the political process has decreased over the years. The reasons for such low turnout ranges from lack of information and knowledge about the electoral process, civic responsibilities, high cost of travelling to the respective constituencies and the murkiness of the political system. The recent political tumult in the country depicts, if youth is not sufficiently educated about civic responsibilities, it would further weaken the democratic culture of Pakistan.

Is youth equipped with tools of critical thinking or merely gusts of information and communication technologies set trends and incites their political activism. On one hand, the information age, revolutionized by social media calls for digital literacy. The excessive influx of the information at times, even blanks the sane minds-let alone incognizant youth. On the other hand, to distinguish information, that is authentic and matters most, merely comes with lucidity of politico-philosophical sense.

In age of global citizenship, inclusion rather exclusion of young women and men can lead a country towards sustainable growth and development. The United Nations Agenda for 2030 considers youth as the key players of change. There are twenty targets out of six Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that address youth. The Sustainable Development Goal no. 4 pertains to "Quality Education". The mandate of this goal, specifically its target 4.7 emphasizes issues such as human rights, gender equality, cultural diversity and culture of peace and non-violence.

Deplorably, the concept of civic education barely exists in Pakistan. In any nation building, its youth plays an indispensable role. Civic education enables politico-philosophical sense. of youth, that helps them to learn and develop intellectual tools, to engage in constructive political, social and cultural activities. Therefore, stakeholders in power corridors, political entities in particular, must engage with youth, as they would navigate the course of a country in years to come. It is pertinent to overcome social deficit of civil competence. Hence, civic education should be introduced as a separate subject in schools at all levels.

Secondly, all political parties through their “Youth Fora’s wings” should take on young their members to evolve their civic competency of youth, that helps them to learn and develop intellectual tools, to engage in constructive political, social and cultural activities. Therefore, stakeholders in power corridors, political entities in particular, must engage with youth, as they would navigate the course of a country in years to come.

It is pertinent to overcome social deficit of civil competence. Hence, civic education should be introduced as a separate subject in schools at all levels. Secondly, all political parties through their “Youth Fora’s wings” should take on young their members to evolve their civic competency. For instance, their voice should be heard within the rank and file and participation in decision making process should be encouraged. Thirdly, the government should devise institutional mechanisms for capacity building. It can initiate effective consultations with socio-political scientists, members of civil society, including national and international partners and by setting short and long-term targets. Furthermore, trainings, seminars at different levels (local, district and division) and technology-driven policies for students and young professionals should be devised to strengthen democracy. Last but not least, the provincial governments of four provinces should legislate the bill for mandatory Civic Education in respective provinces. In addition, National Civic Education Commission Act 2018 should be implemented in its spirit to foster the framework of civic education in Pakistan.



# Building Bridges: A Stakeholder Consultation on Tolerance and Inclusivity

Bahawalpur



Prof. Dr. Zia ur Rehman, Chairperson, Department of Qur'ānic Studies, IUB, opened the consultation by emphasizing the importance of dialogue grounded in Islamic principles. He noted that Islam advocates moderation and coexistence, warning that extremism undermines social harmony. Drawing on the model of the society established by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he stressed that pluralism and acceptance are essential for a livable and inclusive society.

Prof. Dr. Abdul Ghaffar, Chairman, Department of Islamic Studies, stated that while every religion rests on immutable ideological foundations, all faiths promote tolerance and inclusivity. He emphasized the need to critically examine social behaviors and identify root causes of intolerance, warning that certain laws are sometimes misused to exploit vulnerable communities.



Ms. Sajeela Kausar stressed the importance of mutual accountability in society and asserted that respect should be based on shared humanity rather than religious association.

Dr. Munawar Shahzad noted that the general public often lacks access to the true understanding of Islam. He stressed the importance of introducing Quranic translations in madrassahs to help students better comprehend religious teachings and foster informed engagement.



Dr. Muhammad Saeed Sheikh underlined that the true essence of Islam lies in peace, affection, balance, and respect for human dignity. He emphasized that all religions promote tolerance and that legal action should focus on individuals who exploit religion, rather than altering existing laws. He called for strengthening social cohesion by focusing on shared values among citizens.

## Building Bridges: A stakeholders' consultation on Tolerance and Inclusivity

Quetta

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) convened a multi-stakeholder consultation on November 20, 2025 in Quetta. The dialogue brought together political leaders, civil society representatives, academics, and religious scholars to explore pathways toward social harmony, tolerance, and inclusivity. Muhammad Amir Rana emphasized that extremism is primarily a social attitude rooted in local conditions, not merely a product of foreign influence. He stressed the importance of moving beyond denial and ensuring political rights as the foundation for social cohesion and peace.



**Muhammad Amir Rana**  
President PIPS



**Mr. Sanjay Kumar**  
Member Balochistan Assembly, PPP



**Younas Aziz Zehri**  
Leader of the Opposition



**Maulana Ismael Hussaini**



**Moulana Hidayat ur Rehman Baloch**  
Member Balochistan Assembly



**Dost Muhammad Barrech**  
Chief Coordination Officer,  
Centre of Excellence  
Government of Balochistan



**Dr. Ishaq Baloch**  
National Party



**Sanaullah Baloch**  
Former Senator



**Mr. Rafiullah Kakar**  
Former Member Social Sector &  
Devolution Planning Development



**Moulana Abdul Qadir Luni**  
Jamiat Ulma-e-Islam (Nazryati)



**Moulana Abdul Qadir Luni**  
Jamiat Ulma-e-Islam (Nazryati)



**Sakina Abdullah Khan**  
Pakistan People Parliamentarian



**Dr. Shahida Habib**  
University of Balochistan



## Reporting Rights Violations and Faith-Based Persecution in Pakistan

Media Workshop, Quetta

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organized a media training workshop titled "Reporting Rights Violations and Faith-Based Persecution in Pakistan" on November 19, 2025, at the Quetta Press Club. The workshop brought together journalists and social media content creators, including YouTubers, to enhance professional capacities for ethical, responsible, and fact-based reporting in an increasingly polarized digital media environment.



Safdar Hussain, Director at PIPS, briefed participants on existing state policies and legal frameworks aimed at countering extremism in Pakistan. He cautioned that fake news and hate speech on social media could translate into real-world violence by mobilizing youth and glorifying acts of extremism.

Shahzada Zulfiqar, stressed the need for heightened caution while reporting incidents of human rights violations and faith-based persecution. He reiterated that responsible journalism requires rigorous fact-checking and that mainstream media must actively counter misinformation circulating on social media.





# Reporting Rights Violations and Faith-Based Persecution in Pakistan

Media Workshop, Lahore

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organized a media training workshop titled "Reporting Rights Violations and Faith-Based Persecution in Pakistan" on December 16, 2025, at a local hotel in Lahore. The workshop brought together journalists and social media content creators to enhance their capacity for ethical, objective, and data-driven reporting on human rights violations and faith-based persecution in Pakistan.



Habib Akram shared insights from his professional journey, highlighting the responsibility of journalists to report societal irregularities. He noted that any action that goes beyond the law and the Constitution falls within the domain of journalistic scrutiny and stressed that maintaining credibility and ethical standards is crucial, particularly during challenging times for journalism in Pakistan. Imran Mukhtar digital platforms have democratized information flow and influenced mainstream media agendas, they have also amplified misinformation, disinformation, and emotionally charged narratives, which can fuel social tensions and faith-based conflicts. PIPS President Muhammad Amir Rana underscored the importance of learning from regional experiences, citing the cases of Bangladesh and Nepal, where alternative and mainstream media have played a transformative role. He emphasized the need for journalists to use data in human rights reporting and reiterated that covering rights violations from multiple perspectives is essential to uphold objectivity and credibility in journalism





## Building Bridges: A stakeholders' consultation on Tolerance and Inclusivity

Khairpur

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organized a media training workshop titled "Reporting Rights Violations and Faith-Based Persecution in Pakistan" on December 16, 2025, at a local hotel in Lahore. The workshop brought together journalists and social media content creators to enhance their capacity for ethical, objective, and data-driven reporting on human rights violations and faith-based persecution in Pakistan. The initiative was designed in response to growing challenges faced by media professionals, including misinformation, hate speech, and increasing constraints on journalistic independence.



## About PIPS

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an Islamabad-based research and advocacy organization. The Institute offers a range of consultancy services through a combination of independent research and analysis, Innovative academic programs, and hands-on training and support that serve the following basic themes Conflict analysis and peacebuilding, dialogue, prevent/counter violent extremism (P/CVE), internal and regional security: and media for peace and democracy PIPS conducts structured dialogues, focused group discussions, and national and international seminars to understand the issues listed earlier and also strengthen partnerships. The outcomes of PIPS research and planned events have extensively been reported in the mainstream media which adds to its credibility as an active and well networked civil society organization. PIPS policy reports and recommendations on security and CVE have frequently been cited in various works and included in state policy debates and documents. Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) conducted a research study in 2024-25 under the title "Building Bridges, Fostering Tolerance and Inclusivity among Youth". The program was particularly designed to engage Pakistan's youth from diverse backgrounds. The participants belonging to Madrassas, universities, media and social activists were engaged to improve in them, support for freedom of faith, and religious tolerance and harmony. It builds upon the philosophical approach that youth is part of a solution to challenges thrown by violent extremism and communal and sectarian discord.



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