

A SPECIAL REPORT ON
PAKISTAN'S SARGODHA
BLASPHEMY INCIDENT

INTRODUCTION

MISUSE OF BLASPHEMY LAWS AGAINST MINORITIES

Blasphemy laws in Pakistan are frequently misused, particularly targeting religious minorities such as Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and Shia Muslims. False accusations often arise from personal vendettas, sectarian hatred, professional rivalries, personal grudges, and disputes over land. These false accusations can lead to severe repercussions, including social ostracism, economic hardships, and even violent outcomes. For instance, in 2014, Shama and Shahzad Masih, a Christian couple, were lynched by a mob following false blasphemy allegations.

The misuse of these laws has led to extrajudicial killings and mob violence. The judicial system in Pakistan is heavily influenced by fear and intimidation, which hinders fair trials and due process. Judges, lawyers, and police officers often avoid involvement in blasphemy cases due to threats and potential violence, resulting in many accused individuals being left without adequate legal defense. The Supreme Court of Pakistan has acknowledged that numerous blasphemy cases stem from false accusations motivated by personal or political gains.

Particularly vulnerable groups, including children and individuals with mental disabilities, face significant risks under these laws. A notable example is Rimsha Masih, a Christian girl with a learning disability, who was falsely accused of blasphemy.

Reforming these laws is essential to prevent their abuse and to protect human rights in Pakistan. Such reforms would ensure equitable treatment for all citizens and prevent the exploitation of these laws for personal or political motives.

Internationally, Pakistan has faced significant criticism for failing to address the brutal atrocities committed against minority communities. This highlights the urgent need for accountability and the protection of the rights of these vulnerable groups.

WHAT IS BLASPHEMY LAWS??

Blasphemy laws in Pakistan are enshrined in Sections 295-298 of the Pakistan Penal Code. These statutes criminalize actions deemed insulting to religion. For instance, Section 295-B prescribes life imprisonment for defiling the Quran, while Section 295-C mandates the death penalty or life imprisonment for any derogatory remarks about Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, these laws severely restrict the religious practices of the Ahmadiyya community, effectively criminalizing their expression of faith.

Accusations under these blasphemy laws often lead to severe consequences, including lengthy imprisonment, mob violence, and targeting of religious minorities to settle personal scores. False accusations are not uncommon and are frequently used to resolve personal disputes, professional rivalries, and land conflicts. These accusations can prompt immediate and violent reactions from mobs, leading to extrajudicial killings and widespread fear among the accused.

The implementation of these laws has led to significant human rights abuses. Those accused often face long jail terms without fair trials, as the judicial process is heavily influenced by societal pressures and threats. Many judges, lawyers, and police officers are reluctant to engage in these cases due to fears for their safety, resulting in inadequate legal defense for the accused.

Despite substantial international criticism, Pakistan's blasphemy laws remain rigorously enforced. Global human rights organizations and numerous countries have called for the repeal or reform of these laws, highlighting their misuse and the severe human rights violations they engender. Nevertheless, these laws continue to be a significant tool of oppression against religious minorities and a means for individuals to exploit legal mechanisms for personal gain.

***Here is the detailed view of recently happened incident that shows how Pakistan uses blasphemy laws to settle personal scores, especially against minority groups-
“Sargodha Incident”***

WHAT HAPPENED

On May 25, 2024, a violent mob attacked Nazir Masih, a Christian factory owner, and his family in the Mujahid Colony area of Sargodha. The assault was triggered by false rumours that Masih had burned pages of the Holy Quran. The incident began early in the morning when misinformation spread that Masih had desecrated the Quran while burning garbage. This baseless accusation quickly incited a mob, which brutally assaulted Masih, dragged him into the street, and set his house and shoe factory on fire, destroying all raw materials and packaging.

Eyewitnesses described the mob as highly charged, with children actively participating in the destruction and women filming the incident on their phones. The attack was reportedly incited by Masih's neighbor, Ayub Gondal, who harboured jealousy towards Masih's business success. A few days prior, an altercation between the children of both families had further fuelled tensions. Gondal seized the opportunity to incite violence by falsely accusing Masih of burning the Quran when he saw the family burning old and useless papers.

According to Masih's nephew, Irfan Gill, an unknown individual threw a copy of the Quran into the fire. A Muslim neighbor, Jahangir Jamal, a member of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, accused Gill of desecrating the Quran. These accusations were amplified through announcements from a mosque loudspeaker, which incited local residents to violence. Fuelled by the inflammatory rhetoric, a mob, including members of Tehreek-e-Labbaik, gathered and attacked Gill, targeting his home and shop in a wave of destruction and violence. The mob proceeded to burn down both his home and shop.

As the mob gathered, it grew increasingly violent, attacking Masih's property without attempting to verify the facts. The attackers torched Masih's house and factory, reducing them to ashes. Following the violence, Christian leader and former Punjab MPA Tahir Naveed Choudhry confirmed that no Quran pages were burned and that the family was merely disposing of waste. Despite this, the incident highlights the dangerous consequences of false accusations and the deep-seated sectarian tensions that continue to plague Pakistan.¹



2

	Name: Nazir Masih
	Identity No: [REDACTED]
	Date of Birth: 01/01/1950
	Father Name: Sadiq Masih
	Mother Name: Sardaran Bibi
	Relation With Applicant: Brother

پورا نام: نذیر مسیح
والد کا نام: صادق مسیح
والدہ کا نام: سرداراں بی بی

¹ <https://x.com/FarazPervaiz3/status/1794374597615505646/video/1>
<https://x.com/SadiaTheSadia/status/1794322561846923285/video/1>



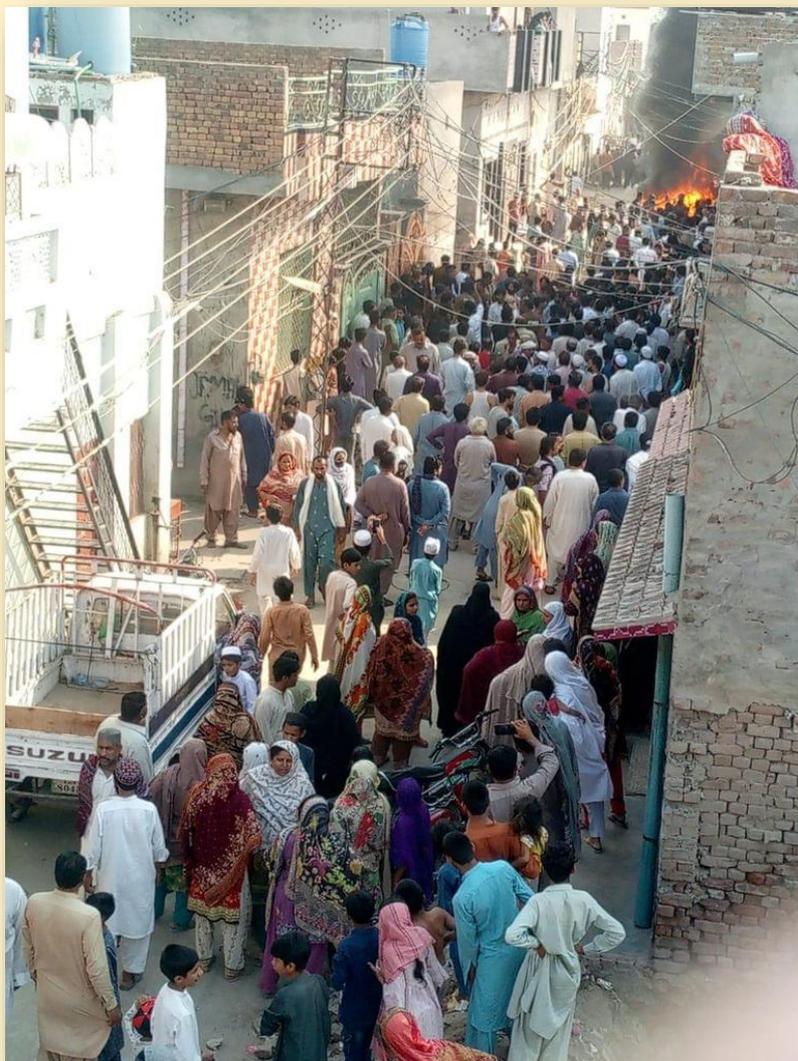
ROLE OF POLICE AND ADMINISTRATION

The police were alerted to the situation and responded promptly. Inspector Shahid Iqbal and his team from the Sargodha Urban Police Station were among the first to arrive at the scene. Despite their efforts to disperse the mob and rescue Irfan Gill, the situation quickly escalated. The police managed to save Gill from his burning home, but the mob forcibly took him from police custody and continued to beat him. During the chaos, at least 10 policemen were injured while trying to protect Gill and control the rioters.

Subsequently, the police arrested 26 individuals involved in the attack and registered a case against 44 named suspects and an additional 300 to 400 unidentified rioters. The charges included attempted murder, obstructing public officials, assaulting a public official, and mischief by fire or explosive material with intent to destroy property or cause harm. Inspector Iqbal emphasized the police's commitment to arrest and prosecute those responsible, asserting that no one would be allowed to undermine the law. Despite criticisms of the police's inability to prevent the violence, the injuries sustained by the officers underscored their determination and efforts to manage the situation.

Inspector Iqbal highlighted the challenges faced by law enforcement in such volatile circumstances. The police were significantly outnumbered and had to act swiftly to prevent further loss of life and property damage. The incident has raised serious concerns about the effectiveness of local authorities in dealing with mob violence and protecting minority communities.

This incident serves as a stark reminder of the volatile and dangerous environment in which law enforcement and minority communities operate in Pakistan. It underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to address the root causes of such violence and to ensure the protection and safety of all citizens, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.²



² <https://x.com/FarazPervaiz3/status/1794349883438383153/video/1>
<https://x.com/FarazPervaiz3/status/1794374597615505646/video/1>
<https://x.com/FarazPervaiz3/status/1794378256772399413>

An emergency meeting was held in the Deputy Commissioner's office to address the tragedy of Mujahid Colony. Discussed the causes of incidents like the Mujahid Colony tragedy and measures to prevent such occurrences. The discussion took place in the presence of RPO, DPO.



سرگودھا۔ ڈپٹی کمشنر کیپٹن ریٹائرڈ اورنگزیب حیدر خان ضلعی امن کمیٹی کے ہنگامی اجلاس کی صدارت کر رہے ہیں۔
اجلاس میں ڈی پی او ڈاکٹر اسد اعجاز مہدی بھی شریک ہیں۔ (25 مئی 2024)

To restore order, the Sargodha district administration imposed Section 144 to prohibit public gatherings and deployed additional police forces till May 31. Additionally, the administration has deployed additional police personnel to maintain law and order. Despite the police's promises of safety, only a few families have gone back home. Many left because they feared for their lives, and even with assurances from the authorities, the community still feels uneasy.³

CURRENT STATUS OF THE VICTIM

Nazir Masih, a Christian man attacked by an Islamist mob in Sargodha over false blasphemy allegations, was critically injured and immediately taken to the hospital. He suffered severe internal injuries and breathing difficulties due to the brutal torture inflicted by the mob. Despite medical efforts to save him, Nazir Masih succumbed to his injuries in the early hours of June 3, 2024. His death highlights the tragic consequences of mob violence and the urgent need for protection and justice for minority communities in Pakistan.

GROUND VISIT

Punjab Minister for Minorities Affairs, Ramesh Singh Arora, visited the Mujahid Colony site to assess the situation of the Christian family first-hand. Accompanying

³ <https://x.com/SanawarBalam/status/1795016022988059013>

him were Commissioner Mohammad Ajmal Bhatti, Regional Police Officer Shariq Kamal Siddique, Deputy Commissioner Retd. Capt. Aurangzeb Haider Khan, MPAs-Ijaz Alam Augustine, Sonia Ashar, and Shakeela Ather, along with Christian leaders and religious figures.

ORGANIZATIONS WHO RAISED THEIR VOICES

- The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expressed serious concern about the unfolding situation in Sargodha, particularly in Gillwala village, where the Christian community was reportedly at grave risk. “There are unconfirmed reports of a man being lynched,” HRCP stated on X.
- The Joint Action Committee for People’s Rights (JAC) condemned the mob attack on the Christian community in Sargodha, demanding the immediate arrest of those involved. At a Lahore Press Club conference, JAC representatives called for the withdrawal of the FIR against the victim and the establishment of an inquiry commission. They also urged the Punjab government to take action against TLP and other religious groups involved in such incidents.



JAC Joint Action Committee for People’s Rights

House# 59-G, Gulberg III, Lahore – Pakistan. Phone: 0300-8480822, 042-35311701. Email: jaclahore@yahoo.com

- AGHS Legal Aid Cell
- Ajoka Theater Workshop
- All Pakistan Minorities Alliance
- All Pakistan Trade Union Federation
- ASR Resource Centre/WSL
- Aurat Foundation
- BLF
- Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)
- CLAAS
- Community Support Concern (CSC)
- DASTAK
- DCHO
- Democratic Women’s Organization
- Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)
- Labor Education Foundation (LEF)
- Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)
- Institute for Peace and Secular Studies (IPSS)
- Interactive Resource Centre (IRC)
- Justice & Peace Commission (MSLCP)
- Punjab Lok Sujag
- National Commission for Justice & Peace (NCJP)
- Nawa-e-Khawateen
- Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC)
- Saahj Publications
- SAHE
- Shirkat Gah
- Simorgh
- South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP-PK)
- Tameer-e-Nau Women Workers Organization
- War Against Rape (WAR)
- Women Action Forum (WAF)
- Woman in Struggle for Empowerment (WISE)
- Woman Workers Helpline
- Commission for Peace and Human Development
- Punjab Union of Journalists (PUJ)
- Caritas Pakistan Lahore

Joint Action Committee for People’s Rights (JAC) strongly condemns Incident of mob attack on Christian Family in Sargodha and demands immediate arrest of all those involved in Mob attack

Issued on Tuesday 28 May, 2024 in Lahore

Joint Action Committee for People’s Rights (JAC) strongly condemns the recent mob attack on a Christian family in Mujahid Colony Gillwala Sargodha. JAC is shocked to learn that law enforcement agencies, once again, miserably failed to protect the innocent citizens belong to Christian community against brutal act of religious extremists. Committee is apprehensive of the rising trend of mob-violence against religious minority communities on baseless and false blasphemy charges. In the incident of Mujahid Colony the victim family also faced false charges from a local Muslim family who had other grievances and used blasphemy allegations to target them.

JAC takes serious note of the fact that Blasphemy laws of 295-B and C are repeatedly misused to target citizens especially minority communities to settle other petty social and financial disputes. It seems these laws are becoming tool to malign opponents as these can be easily misused to instigate religious and sectarian sentiments of citizens especially extremist religious groups.

JAC also expresses its deep concern on the fact that local police didn’t take concrete actions to avert the incident or discourage the mobsters. Failure of law enforcement agencies in such incidents in the past indicates that either state is complacent to the forces using fear and violence against religious minorities or show its inability to handle such situations. In whatever case it is the responsibility of state to protect its citizens belong to any religion, faith or sect. Repeated incidents of mob violence in the country from Shanti Nagar to Gojra, Lahore, Sambrial, Jaranwala and several others incidents show that state’s inaction has only strengthened these forces using violence and mobs against weaker sections of society.

JAC therefore demands that government must take immediate, comprehensive and targeted actions against all those involved in these incidents and bring the facts behind these incidents to the public. By taking punitive actions against those groups inciting violence, any such future incident can be effectively prevented.

JAC also demands that Punjab government shall restore the confidence of Christian families in Mujahid Colony Sargodha through community-lead initiatives for those who are living in fear and uncertainty since this incident. The government shall also withdraw FIR against the victim and shall also compensate for loss of properties. Punjab Chief Minister shall take direct and personal notice of the incident and control further damages.

Convener
Joint Action Committee (JAC)

- ⑩ Provincial Peace Committee members visited Sargodha to extend solidarity with Christian Community. Meeting with DC Sargodha and District Peace Committee members.



PROTEST DEMONSTRATIONS

- 1 Protest demonstrations at Karachi press club to express solidarity with the victims of the Mujahid Colony Sargodha by PPP Minority Wing Karachi Division Official (@PPP_m_wing_khi) and Pastors Network Pakistan. MPA Sindh Advocate RoomaMushtaq (@RoomaMatto) addressed a protest demonstration at Karachi press club.⁴
- 2 A protest was held outside the Karachi Press Club where civil society members, particularly from the religious minority community, voiced their condemnation of the Sargodha incident. They demanded that the government provide them with security and ensure the immediate arrest and punishment of the attackers.⁵
- 3 Minorites Alliance Pakistan (MAP) (@AllianceMap) organized a protest demonstration to condemn the brutality inflicted upon Christian man Nazir

⁴ <https://x.com/NehaAngle17/status/1795926255864365155>

⁵ <https://x.com/voicepkdotnet/status/1795061125387604224>

Masih and his family in Sargodha. The protest saw diverse participation, including Mapian women who, in a symbolic gesture, burned their headscarves to signify the escalating insecurity faced by minorities. The protest aimed to demand justice for the persecuted minorities.⁶



⁶ <https://x.com/AllianceMap/status/1795491076155015546>



Pic26-056
FAISALABAD: May26 – Minority Alliance Pakistan protesting against the Sargodha tragedy at the District Council Chowk in the city.
ONLINE PHOTO by Haji Ibrahim

INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM

1. **Farrukh.H.Saif**, @Farrukhhsaif a Christian rights activist and Co-Founder of ECSPE, voiced his condemnation of the incident.

 **Farrukh.H.Saif**  @Farrukhhsaif · May 25

URGENT UPDATE: Nazir Masih, the Christian man brutally attacked by an Islamist mob in **Sargodha** over false **blasphemy** allegations, is now in critical condition with internal injuries & breathing difficulties due to the severe torture. A cardiac & asthma patient, his life hangs by a [Show more](#)



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2. Lord (David) Alton (@DavidAltonHL) advocate for human rights and religious freedom.

 **Lord (David) Alton** @DavidAltonHL · May 26

Pakistan Minorities Fearful As Mob Torch Home & Factory. Condemnation from Police Commissioner Muhammad Ajmal Bhatti—promises transparent investigation—those responsible for spreading false accusations & inciting violence to face consequences @tariqahmadbt davidalton.net/2024/05/26/pak...



APPG Pakistani Minorities and 9 others

3 17 26 1.5K

3. The Washington post

The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

WORLD War In Ukraine Africa Americas Asia Europe Middle East

A mob in Pakistan burns down a house and beats a Christian over alleged desecration of Quran

Police say hundreds of Muslims in eastern Pakistan went on a rampage over allegations that a Christian man had desecrated the pages of Islam's holy book, ransacking and burning his house and beating him before police officers rescued the man and his father

By Babar Dogar | AP
May 25, 2024 at 8:34 a.m. EDT

4. Herald Malaysia Online

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Christian seriously wounded in Sarghoda in the latest blasphemy incident

The victim, 72-year-old Nazir Masih, was beaten by an angry mob. His business and home were set on fire, as police failed to intervene. His family is on the run, while he lays in hospital in critical condition. Nine months after violence in Jaranwala, the Christian community in Punjab province continues to be the victim of the same hostility.

May 28, 2024

5. International Christian Concern

PERSECUTION.ORG
INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN ABOUT ▾ PRO

BREAKING NEWS Mob Brutally Attacks Elderly Christian Man after False Blasphemy Claims Circulate



6. Asia News

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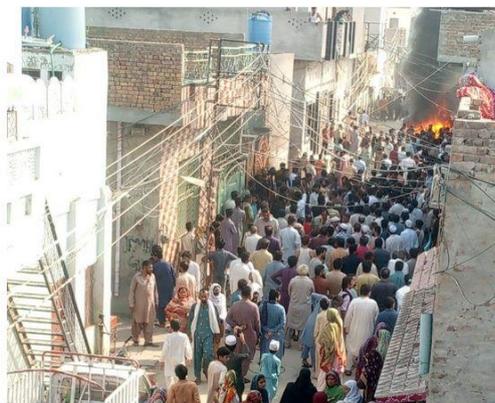
CENTRAL ASIA | NORTH ASIA | EAST ASIA | SOUTH WEST ASIA | SOUTH EAST ASIA | SOUTH ASIA | MIDDLE EAST | OC

05/27/2024, 15:56 | PAKISTAN Send to a friend

Christian seriously wounded in Sarghoda in the latest blasphemy incident

by *Shafique Khokhar*

The victim, 72-year-old Nazir Masih, was beaten by an angry mob. His business and home were set on fire, as police failed to intervene. His family is on the run, while he lays in hospital in critical condition. Nine months after violence in Jaranwala, the Christian community in Punjab province continues to be the victim of the same hostility.



7. Voice of America

VOA

May 25, 2024 4:18 PM
By Ayaz Gul

Alleged blasphemy triggers violent Muslim mob attack on Pakistani Christians

Share



Sargodha, Pakistan

8. Vatican News

The screenshot shows the Vatican News website interface. At the top, there is a red navigation bar with the 'VATICAN NEWS' logo, menu items for 'POPE', 'VATICAN', 'CHURCH', and 'WORLD', a search icon, and a language dropdown set to 'English'. Below the navigation bar, there are links for 'Radio Vaticana', 'Variazione VI', 'Podcast', and 'Programs'. The main content area features a large photograph of a group of people, including men and women, gathered around a large wooden crucifix. Below the photo is a caption: 'Members of the Christian community in Pakistan protesting against attacks on churches and houses in Punjab'. The article title is 'Christians in Pakistan protest yet another attack over blasphemy'. The sub-headline reads: 'Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) expresses solidarity to Christians protesting in Pakistan after the latest mob attack on a Christian family accused of blasphemy against the Quran in Sargodha, Punjab.' The author is listed as 'By Lisa Zengarini'. On the right side of the article, there are several social media sharing icons (Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram, RSS) and a 'SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTERS' button. Below the main article, there are three smaller featured articles: 'ANGELUS', 'PAPAL AUDIENCES', and 'DAILY READINGS'. A 'LISTEN TO OUR PODCASTS' button is also visible.

9. Associated Press News

The screenshot shows the Associated Press (AP) website article. The URL in the browser address bar is 'https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-blasphemy-mob-christians-60362eafebbd9ef76ea1f5b97b3e66b3'. The AP logo is in the top left corner. The navigation bar includes 'WORLD', 'U.S.', 'ELECTION 2024', 'POLITICS', 'SPORTS', 'ENTERTAINMENT', 'BUSINESS', 'SCIENCE', 'FACT CHECK', 'ODDITIES', 'BE WELL', and 'NEWSLETTERS'. Below the navigation bar, there are several news snippets: 'Trump hush money trial', 'Israel-Hamas war', 'French Open', 'Giant pandas return', and 'Texas weather'. The main headline is 'A mob in Pakistan burns down a house and beats a Christian over alleged desecration of Quran'. The author is 'BY BABAR DOGAR' and the article was updated on '5:33 PM GMT+5, May 25, 2024'. There is a 'Share' button. The article text begins with: 'LAHORE, Pakistan (AP) — Hundreds of Muslims in eastern Pakistan went on a rampage over allegations that a Christian man had desecrated the pages of Islam's holy book, ransacking and burning his house and beating him before police officers rescued the man and his father, officials said.' The article continues with details about the incident in Sargodha, Punjab province, and mentions that the incident occurred on Saturday in the Mujahid Colony residential area. It also notes that the district police chief Ijaz Malhi said police quickly responded and saved the lives of the two men. The article concludes by mentioning that the situation was under control and officers were investigating the allegations. It also provides context by mentioning a similar attack in August 2023 in Jaranwala and another in 2009 in Gojra.

CONCLUSION -

Blasphemy persecution in Pakistan remains a critical human rights issue that reflects the broader challenges of religious intolerance and legal misuse within the country. The blasphemy laws, intended to protect religious sentiments, have often been manipulated to target religious minorities, settle personal scores, and suppress dissent. These laws disproportionately affect marginalized communities, including Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis, leading to severe social, economic, and legal consequences for the accused.

The societal impact of blasphemy accusations is profound, often resulting in mob violence, extrajudicial killings, and widespread fear. The legal framework provides little protection to the accused, who face long periods of pre-trial detention, biased judicial processes, and harsh sentences, including the death penalty. The pressure on the judiciary and law enforcement agencies, stemming from societal and political influences, further exacerbates the issue.

Efforts to reform these laws have been met with significant resistance from conservative religious factions, who view any changes as an attack on Islamic principles. This resistance underscores the deep-seated religious and cultural sensitivities surrounding the topic. International human rights organizations and local activists continue to call for legal reforms and greater protection for those accused of blasphemy, highlighting the need for a more just and equitable legal system.

In conclusion, blasphemy persecution in Pakistan highlights the urgent need for legal and societal reforms to address religious intolerance and protect human rights. It calls for a balanced approach that respects religious sentiments while safeguarding individuals' rights and freedoms. The path to reform is fraught with challenges, but it is essential for fostering a more inclusive and just society in Pakistan.