Portrayal of Pakistan's Religious Minorities on Regional Social Media: Narratives vs. Reality

Heman Das
Senior Research Associate, South Asia Research Institute for Minorities
Karachi, Pakistan

hemandas246@gmail.com
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Abstract

This study examines how religious minorities in Pakistan are depicted on South Asian social media especially in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal and contrasts those portrayals with Pakistan's actual legal and social context. Across regional digital platforms, negative or sensational narratives about Pakistani Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, etc., often circulate unchecked. However, Pakistan's constitution and institutions formally guarantee minority rights, and recent government initiatives have sought to strengthen interfaith harmony and rebuild minority religious sites. Using comparative analysis and case studies, this article shows that online portrayals frequently misrepresent Pakistan's on-ground realities. We document Pakistan's constitutional safeguards (e.g. Articles 20, 25, 36–38), reserved political representation, and affirmative action's such as a PKR 1 billion plan to restore temples and Gurdwaras (February 2025). These facts counter simplistic social-media narrative. By highlighting both the distortions in cross-border discourse and Pakistan's genuine protections and reforms for minorities, the article presents an evidence-based perspective to refute widespread misinformation and advocate for a balanced understanding.

Keywords: Religious minorities, interfaith harmony, digital narratives on minorities, minority rights activism Pakistan, online misrepresentation of Pakistani minorities

1. Introduction

In recent years, social media platforms in South Asia have become battlegrounds for national narratives. Online networks in the region often amplify stories about Pakistan's internal affairs, including the treatment of religious minorities. These accounts tend to highlight incidents of violence, discrimination, or intolerance, creating a one-

sided image of Pakistan as uniquely hostile to non-Muslims. Yet such portrayals frequently overlook constitutional guarantees and positive developments in Pakistan. In many cases, regional actors including some South Asian countries have been observed inciting or amplifying discriminatory incidents in Pakistan through digital platforms. While these actions are not state-sponsored, they often influence public sentiment and provoke mass-level involvement, further deepening communal divisions. In reality, Pakistan's founding documents and laws explicitly protect minority rights (for example, the constitution ensures that all citizens are "equal before the law" and entitled to "adequate provision" to freely practice their religion).[1] Pakistani leaders emphasize pluralism for instance, they publicly greets Hindus on Diwali, Christians on Easter and Christmas which affirms that non-Muslim rights are "enshrined in the Constitution."[2] This article critically revises the prevailing narrative by systematically contrasting social-media discourses with Pakistan's on-ground reality. It shows how digital misinformation and biased media in the region distort the picture of Pakistani minorities, and it presents evidence of Pakistan's legal protections, institutional reforms, and inclusive practices that counteract those distortions. The goal of this paper is to document the facts and policies that belie the negative online images, thereby correcting misunderstandings and advocating for a more informed perspective.

1.1. Significance of the Study

Addressing this issue is important for several reasons. First, social media misinformation can inflame communal tensions and undermine regional trust; correcting false narratives about Pakistan's minorities may ease diplomatic strains and reduce propaganda.[3] Second, accurate information is crucial for minority communities themselves. Erroneous perceptions about harassment may discourage tourism, interfaith cooperation, or conflict resolution efforts. Third,

[1] View. (2023, August 23). *Protection of Minority Rights in Pakistan's Constitution: Adequacy, Discrimination and Marginalization - Courting The Law*. Courting the Law.

[2] Dawn.com, & Hussain, J. (2018, November 7). *PM Imran Khan wishes Hindu community on Diwali*.

[3] Alaphilippe, A., Machado, G., Adamczyk, R., & Grégoire, A. (2019, November 26). *Uncovered: 265 coordinated fake local media outlets serving Indian interests*.

understanding the gap between digital discourse and reality can help civil society and policymakers in Pakistan build more effective outreach: for example, by publicizing successful minority-protection initiatives. Finally, in the era of global media, narratives formed in one country quickly influence opinions elsewhere. A balanced study grounded in credible evidence can inoculate audiences in the South Asia against xenophobic misinformation and highlight shared values of religious freedom.

1.2. Research Objectives

1. Identify the dominant social-media narratives about Pakistan's religious minorities in the South Asian region.
2. Analyse how these digital narratives differ or align across regional contexts.
3. Document Pakistan's constitutional and legal guarantees, institutional measures, and reforms concerning minority rights.
4. Compare social-media discourse with empirical data on minority treatment in Pakistan.
5. Highlight case studies where online misrepresentations can be directly contrasted with factual events.
6. Assess the role of Pakistani civil society and minority community voices in shaping or correcting online narratives.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What are the prevalent portrayals of Pakistan's religious minorities on social media platforms in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal?
2. How do these social-media narratives diverge across the four countries, and what common themes do they share?
3. What are the actual legal protections and institutional supports for religious minorities in Pakistan?
4. In which ways do the online narratives align or conflict with these on-ground realities?
5. What specific instances of misinformation or biased reporting can be identified, and what are their true contexts?
6. How are Pakistani minority groups and civil society using digital media to present their own perspectives online?

1.4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, case study-based approach using secondary data. We analysed existing literature, along with excerpts from interviews and webinars conducted by the South Asia Research Institute for Minorities (SARIM). Sources included media reports, legal documents, social media discourse, and NGO publications. Thematic content analysis was used to identify recurring narratives, framing patterns, and misinformation about Pakistan's religious minorities in regional media. Findings were compared against official data and credible reports to highlight discrepancies. While limited by the absence of primary fieldwork, this approach offers valuable insights into how these communities are portrayed across South Asia.

2. Literature Review

The study of cross-border media and minority rights provides a useful context. Reports by human rights organizations detail the legal framework for minorities in Pakistan: for example, Haroon (2023) explains that Pakistan's Constitution explicitly guarantees freedom of religion to all citizens (Article 20) and forbids discrimination based on religion, race, caste or sex (Article 25).[4] Other provisions (Articles 36–38) oblige the state to protect minority culture and provide special safeguard. [5] The UK Parliament's research briefing (2024) similarly notes that Pakistan's constitution and preamble ensure equal protection of law and adequate provisions for minorities to practice their religion. [6] These sources emphasize that, on paper, Pakistan has a broad normative commitment to pluralism and inclusion. However, existing literature and media reports also acknowledge gaps in implementation. The House of Commons Library cites the US State Department's observation that many minority leaders feel these rights have "never been fully implemented" and that forced conversion and

[4] View. (2023, August 23). *Protection of Minority Rights in Pakistan's Constitution: Adequacy, Discrimination and Marginalization - Courting The Law*. Courting the Law.
[5] *Uncovered: 265 coordinated fake local media outlets serving Indian interests*. (n.d.). EU
[6] Curtis, J., & Robinson, T. (2025, February 18). *Freedom of religion in Pakistan*. House of Commons Library.

blasphemy laws remain concerns.[7] Minority Rights Group (MRG) analyses trace how legal changes (such as the 1974 constitutional amendment declaring non-Muslim) have eroded pluralism.[8] These reviews show Pakistan's constitutional protections alongside persistent challenges a complexity often lost in overheated media narratives.

Studies on social media disinformation in South Asia highlight how nationalistic agendas shape online narratives. The EU DisinfoLab documented a network of dozens of fake "local news" outlets run by Indian linked actors, which repeatedly targeted Pakistan with anti-Pakistan stories, including about its minorities.[9] This suggests that some negative content about Pakistan's domestic affairs may be part of a coordinated media campaign.[10] Other analysts point out that media coverage of minorities in Pakistan tends to be one-sided and crisis-focused, which can itself create distorted perceptions.[11] Conversely, research on South Asian media emphasizes the role of echo chambers and communal bias: for example, Bangladesh's and India's media have been shown to amplify each other's sectarian or political narratives.[12] Thus, the literature underscores a gap: on one hand, Pakistan's laws formally protect minorities; on the other, both Pakistani and Indian/Bangladeshi media often spotlight worst-case incidents without context.[13] This study builds on that context by focusing specifically on how social-media platforms in neighbouring countries portray Pakistan's minorities, and by contrasting those portrayals with grounded facts. There is a research gap in comparative analysis of regional digital discourse on this topic; it aims to fill that gap, drawing

[7] Tschannen, R. A. (2019, May 4). *Pakistani minorities: A one-sided story*. The Muslim Times.
[8] *Pakistan - Minority Rights Group*. (2015). Minority Rights Group.
[9] *Uncovered: 265 coordinated fake local media outlets serving Indian interests*.
[10] Alaphilippe, A., Machado, G., Adamczyk, R., & Grégoire, A. (2019, November 26). *Uncovered: 265 coordinated fake local media outlets serving Indian interests*. EU DisinfoLab.
[11] Shehzadi, S. (2017). *Coverage of Minority Issues in the Pakistani Electronic Media*.
[12] Qayyum, A., Gilani, Z., Latif, S., & Qadir, J. (2018). *Exploring Media Bias and Toxicity in South Asian Political Discourse*.
[13] View. (2023, August 23). *Protection of Minority Rights in Pakistan's Constitution: Adequacy, Discrimination and Marginalization - Courting The Law*. Courting the Law.

on documented legal standards and recent policy developments in Pakistan.

2.1. Regional Social Media Narratives about Pakistan's Minorities

Across South Asian social media, certain themes recur when discussing Pakistan's religious minorities. In ***India***, online posts often claim that Pakistan is uniquely anti-Hindu or anti-Sikh. Common narratives include allegations of frequent temple desecrations, endemic forced conversions of Hindu girls, or harassment of Sikh citizens. For example, one widely shared story portrayed a Hindu Member of Parliament (MNA) from Pakistan Ramesh Kumar Vankwani as being publicly reprimanded by a government minister for introducing a child marriage bill, implying an official bias against Hindu initiatives. [14] On that case, many Indian users circulated the snippet without noting that Pakistani leaders later defended child-marriage reforms or that civil society groups were actively involved in protecting Hindu women. In general, Indian social media tends to highlight any incident that can be framed as "Pakistani authorities versus Hindus/Christians", often without context or follow-up.

In ***Bangladesh***, the narrative built by Sheikh Hasina's government is coloured by historical tensions. Some Bangladeshi users draw parallels between Pakistan's current policies and the 1971 independence war, insinuating that Pakistan continues anti-Hindu persecution as a legacy. Viral claims about Hindu minorities being oppressed or displaced in Pakistan circulate occasionally. However, concrete evidence of such claims is often lacking; investigators have repeatedly debunked sensational posts (e.g. fake viral videos of temple attacks) as unrelated to Pakistan. Bangladeshi discourse also sometimes conflates issues in Pakistan with domestic ones, so that any attack on Hindus in South Asia might be attributed to Pakistani policy by nationalists.

In ***Sri Lanka***, direct coverage of Pakistan's internal affairs on social media is limited. Occasionally, factions like Buddhist nationalists or political activists in Sri Lanka draw analogies between Muslim extremism in both countries, implying that Pakistan's treatment of its Shi'a minorities is part of a broader Islamist trend. However,

[14] Tschannen, R. A. (2019, May 4). *Pakistani minorities: A one-sided story*. The Muslim Times.

organized misinformation about Pakistan's Hindus/Sikhs specifically is rare in Sri Lankan networks. Some Sri Lankan media outlets do pick up Indian wire reports on Pakistan, but the reach remains low.

Similarly, ***Nepal*** has minimal home-grown narratives about Pakistani minorities. Nepalese social media tends to share content originating in India or international press. Thus, any discussions about Pakistan's minorities in Nepali networks largely mirror Indian viewpoints. Occasionally, social media users in Nepal engage in solidarity with Indian Hindu or Sikh communities and repost stories about Pakistan, reinforcing regional narratives of victimhood. Overall, Nepal's role is more as a passive channel relaying others' content, rather than generating its own claims. Each country's social-media environment shapes the narratives: India's dominant Hindu nationalist discourse emphasizes persecution of Hindus abroad; Bangladesh's secular nationalism evokes the 1971 legacy; Sri Lanka's Buddhist nationalist circles focus on Pan-South Asian Islamist issues; and Nepal typically echoes Indian trends. These narratives are often unidirectional and lacking nuance. In the next section, we will compare these social-media impressions with Pakistan's constitutional and institutional realities.

3. Comparative Digital Discourse and Ground Realities

To summarize the contrast, the table below highlights common online narratives in each country versus the factual situation in Pakistan. It shows how the same evidence is interpreted differently in digital discourse:

Country	Social Media Narrative about Pakistan's Minorities	Reality/On-Ground Context in Pakistan
India	*"Pakistan is an anti-Hindu state. Temples are often vandalized and Hindus face forced*	In fact, Pakistan's Constitution enshrines religious freedom for all (Articles 20, 36–38) and equality of citizens (Article 25). [15] The government even

[15] Haroon, H. (2023, August 23). *Protection of Minority Rights in Pakistan's*

	conversions."	granted parliamentary seats to non-Muslims when the 1973 Constitution was framed.[16] In 2025, Pakistan launched a master plan allocating PKR 1 billion (~USD 6 million) for renovation of Hindu temples and Sikh Gurdwaras.[17] Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and others hold reserved assembly seats and have served in government. Pakistani leaders routinely celebrate minority festivals for example, in 2018 the Prime Minister and cabinet ministers publicly greeted Hindu citizens on Diwali.[18] These facts counter the notion that Hindus are systematically disenfranchised.
Bangladesh	*"Pakistan glorifies Islamist extremism and has no tolerance for Hindus after 1971."*	Pakistan's current legal framework guarantees minority rights by law. Its Constitution and preamble explicitly require "adequate provision for the minorities to freely profess and practice their religions."[19] Unlike Bangladesh (which has suffered communal violence during the regime of previous

Constitution: Adequacy, Discrimination and Marginalization. Courting the Law.
[16] *Pakistan - Minority Rights Group*. (2015). Minority Rights Group.
[17] India. (2025, February 22). *Pakistan Prepares PKR 1 Billion "Master Plan" To Renovate Temples, Gurdwaras*. NDTV.
[18] Dawn.com, & Hussain, J. (2018, November 7). *PM Imran Khan wishes Hindu community on Diwali*.
[19] Curtis, J., & Robinson, T. (2025, February 18). *Freedom of religion in Pakistan*. House of Commons Library.

		government), Pakistan has formal equality and joint electoral rolls (no separate electorates) for non-Muslims (though remain on a separate list).[20] Moreover, Pakistan observes a National Minorities Day annually and has ministries and commissions (even if still developing) dedicated to minority affairs.[21] While extremist groups exist, the state officially condemns persecution. The portrayal of monolithic extremism ignores the evidence of legislative safeguards and outreach efforts in Pakistan.
Sri Lanka	*"Muslim-majority Pakistan is exporting radicalism; religious minorities there have no rights"*	In reality, Pakistan's official policy affirms respect for all faiths. For example, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (now Interfaith Harmony Ministry) oversees places of worship for Hindus, Sikhs, and Christians and manages endowments. Institutions like the Evacuee Trust Property Board refurbish Hindu and Sikh sites. The Media frequently covers minority celebrations e.g. Christmas and Diwali messages from the President and PM. Pakistan's blasphemy laws and cases (which are

[20] Curtis, J., & Robinson, T. (2025, February 18). *Freedom of religion in Pakistan*. House of Commons Library.
[21] *Beyond Commissions: Institutionalizing Minority Rights In Pakistan*. (2020). Blog.

		indeed controversial) which are conducted by masses, it does not reflect a government policy of targeting minorities. The Sri Lankan narrative conflates different issues, whereas on the ground Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and others each have legal rights to worship and own property.
Nepal	*"Rarely discussed; often shares Indian posts about Hindus in Pakistan."*	Pakistan's minorities (roughly 3–4% of the ~240M population) include Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and others. Although small, they are recognized in the polity. The Constitution prohibits religious discrimination and provides special safeguards (Articles 25, 36–38).[22] Provincial governments and NGOs have worked on minority welfare, and interfaith dialogues occur regularly. The absence of extensive Nepalese discourse reflects low awareness, but the legal reality is one of formal pluralism: minorities vote in general elections (subject to separate rules for) and may hold public office (though top posts require Muslim faith). In short, Pakistan's stated commitment to protecting all citizens' stands in contrast to the silence or misconceptions in neighbouring online conversations.

[22] Haroon, H. (2023, August 23). *Protection of Minority Rights in Pakistan's Constitution: Adequacy, Discrimination and Marginalization*. Courting the Law.

In summary, cross-country comparisons show that social-media narratives are often exaggerated or decontextualized. For instance, an Indian post might claim "Pakistan bans Hindu marriage bills," whereas in fact a Punjabi Hindu MP's anti-child-marriage bill became widely supported across party lines despite some criticism (reflecting complex politics rather than state persecution).[23] The Bangladeshi narrative of pervasive "revenge" against Hindus overlooks Pakistan's actual constitutional guarantees for minority religious practices. Our analysis reveals that every narrative identified in social media finds counter evidence in Pakistan's laws and policies. This comparative table underscores the importance of checking sensational claims against verifiable facts.

4. Case Studies: Misrepresentation vs. Reality

Several concrete examples illustrate how online misrepresentations contrast with the truth:

- **Attacks on Religious Sites and State Responses: A Complex Landscape:** Religious minorities in Pakistan including Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs sometimes face violence against their places of worship, often in the form of vandalism, arson, or demolition. These attacks are typically carried out by extremist groups or mobs. A stark example occurred in August 2023, when a mob in Jaranwala, Punjab, torched churches and Christian homes over blasphemy allegations.[24] While the Pakistani government has publicly condemned attacks on minority places of worship and also taken positive measures to address the issue. As in 2025, the Evacuee Trust Property Board approved a PKR 1 billion plan to renovate Hindu temples and Sikh Gurdwaras, its largest initiative of this kind.[25]

- **EU Parliament Letter (May 2019):** International headlines reported that 52 EU parliamentarians wrote to Pakistan's Prime

[23] Tschannen, R. A. (2019, May 4). *Pakistani minorities: A one-sided story*. The Muslim Times.
[24] *Jaranwala Church Attacks Another Example of the Misuse of Blasphemy Laws in Pakistan*. (n.d.). Thediplomat.com.
[25] Mukherjee, S. (2025, February 22). *Pakistan's PKR 1 Billion "Master Plan" To Renovate Temples, Gurdwaras*. NewsX World; Newsx.

Minister urging him to end "persecution of religious minorities."[26] Indian and Bangladeshi social media amplified this, claiming broad EU condemnation of Pakistan. In reality, Pakistan's government publicly responded by reaffirming its commitment to minority rights. The letter focused on technical issues like enforcement of existing laws; meanwhile, Pakistan highlighted positive reforms (e.g. judicial oversight of blasphemy cases). The narrative framing in regional media painted Pakistan as uniquely condemned, but fact-checks showed the letter sought constructive measures and Pakistan's stated agenda already included some of them (for example, rebuilding temples and drafting new policies for minorities).

- **Sindh Forced Conversion Bill (2016–2019):** A viral claim circulated that Pakistan would never end forced conversions of Hindu girls. In fact, the Sindh Assembly passed an anti-conversion bill in 2016 (sponsored by a Hindu legislator) to criminalize coerced religious change, though it was blocked by conservative pressure. Again in 2019, Sindh debated a revised bill; it ultimately rejected it under Islamist opposition.[27] What social media often omits is that these bills passed at all and prompted debate indicating political will to address the issue. The documentary ***"Chained in the Web,"*** directed by Aisha Ghazi, premiered in Karachi on January 26, 2024. It explores the complexities surrounding alleged forced conversions in Pakistan, suggesting that some cases labelled as forced may involve individuals, particularly adolescents, choosing to convert due to personal or social factors.[28] While this remains a deeply contentious and sensitive issue, the documentary reveals the complexities often omitted in binary social media portrayals. In other words, the heated hashtags ignored the fact that elected Muslims and Hindus in Pakistan were actively pursuing legal solutions. The online narrative was "Islamists won, Pakistan is terrible," but the ground reality was a public legislative struggle

[26] Tschannen, R. A. (2019, May 4). *Pakistani minorities: A one-sided story*. The Muslim Times.
[27] *Pakistan: Sindh Provincial Assembly Passes New Law Prohibiting Forced Religious Conversion*. (2015). The Library of Congress.
[28] Our Correspondent. (2024, January 27). *Chained in the Web contests forced conversions in Pakistan*. The Express Tribune.

and even a unanimous resolution (July 2019) to protect girls of all faiths from abduction and forced conversion.[29] This nuance is usually lost in sensational posts.

These cases show a pattern: social media often spotlights negative anecdotes (sometimes out of context or factually incomplete) while ignoring the fuller picture. In each example, the truth is more nuanced and frequently more positive than the portrayal. By examining such cases in detail, one sees that on-the-ground realities legislative efforts, executive actions, and public commitments do not fit the black-and-white stereotypes spread online.

5. Pakistan's Institutional Protections for Minorities

Pakistan's legal and institutional framework provides multiple layers of protection for minority communities, contrary to what some outsiders assume. The Constitution of Pakistan (1973) explicitly guarantees freedom of religion and equality. Article 20 "guarantees freedom to profess, practice and propagate one's religion," and Article 25 ensures all citizens are "equal before the law".[30] Articles 36–38 further oblige the state to protect minority culture and provide "special safeguards" to protect minority interests.[31] For instance, the state must ensure "adequate provision shall be made for the minorities to freely profess and practice their religion and develop their culture." These provisions establish a clear legal commitment to pluralism.

Politically, Pakistan reserved ten seats in the National Assembly (six under general seats, four for women) specifically for non-Muslims, and additional seats in each provincial assembly.[32] These reserved seats have been part of parliamentary representation since the 1973 Constitution, ensuring minority communities have a direct voice in legislation. Previously, Pakistan briefly experimented with separate

[29] ABPL. (2025). *Sindh adopts resolution to end forced conversions of girls*
[30] Haroon, H. (2023, August 23). *Protection of Minority Rights in Pakistan's Constitution: Adequacy, Discrimination and Marginalization*. Courting the Law.
[31] Haroon, H. (2023, August 23). *Protection of Minority Rights in Pakistan's Constitution: Adequacy, Discrimination and Marginalization*. Courting the Law.
[32] *Pakistan - Minority Rights Group*. (2015). Minority Rights Group.

electorates, but since 2002 all general seats use a common roll for all citizens, with only on a separate list a status under review. In practice, minorities have been elected to parliament and even appointed to ministerial positions.

The federal government also created dedicated institutions. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony (formerly just Religious Affairs) oversees protection of all worship sites. Under this ministry, the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) manages historical temples, Gurdwaras, churches and other properties left by migrants at Partition. The ETPB's new budget for temple and Gurdwara renovation illustrates institutional action at work. In addition, by a 2014 Supreme Court order Pakistan was directed to form a National Commission for Minorities to monitor constitutional safeguards (although implementation has been slow). Pakistan observes National Minorities Day (11 August) each year to honour contributions of non-Muslims.[33]

Legally, Pakistan has general laws against hate crimes (e.g. criminal penalties for incitement to violence and discrimination). Some specific laws have been introduced: for example, in 2022 Pakistan criminalized forced conversion of minors nationwide (converting children under 18 to another faith is illegal), replacing earlier piecemeal efforts. Although societal challenges remain, the fact that such legislation was passed indicates governmental recognition of the problem.

Finally, official discourse reiterates these commitments. Leaders from the President down to local officials frequently voice support for pluralism. In Parliament and public statements, parties across the spectrum acknowledge that minorities are equal citizens. In 2018, the federal government even proclaimed that it would allocate funds to "beautify" minority holy places and treat Pakistani minorities as "our own people" (news statements by ministers).

In sum, Pakistan's institutional framework from the Constitution to ministries and laws provides a clear basis for protecting minorities. While implementation can lag and incidents of intolerance occur (as in any country), it is factually incorrect to say Pakistan has no minority safeguards. The reality is that there are multiple legal guarantees, dedicated agencies, and affirmative programs in place. These stand in

[33] *Beyond Commissions: Institutionalizing Minority Rights In Pakistan*. (2020).

sharp contrast to one-sided social media claims and demonstrate that, at least on paper and increasingly in practice, Pakistan aspires to include its diverse communities.

6. The Role of Civil Society and Minority Voices Online

Domestic civil society in Pakistan has grown increasingly active in speaking up for minority rights, often using social media as a tool. Pakistani NGOs, religious councils, and rights groups regularly publish reports, hold seminars, and lobby for policy change. For instance, human rights organizations like the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) issue annual "Freedom of Religion" reports documenting incidents and progress (the 2021–22 report "A Breach of Faith" was released in 2023).[34] While critical of problems, these reports also note legal safeguards. Minority religious parties (such as the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance) and councils (Pakistan Hindu Council, Pakistan Christian Congress, Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, etc.) maintain an online presence and engage with government officials via social media and public forums.

Media outlets based in Pakistan (e.g. *Dawn*, *Express Tribune*, *UCA News*) and Pakistan-based journalists likewise report on minority issues, albeit selectively. These internal voices are part of a larger digital ecosystem. Importantly, in some cases Pakistani minorities themselves address global audiences: during the Asia Bibi blasphemy case, Pakistani Christians gave interviews on international platforms to explain their side; in legislative debates, Pakistani parliamentarians from minority backgrounds (like Shahi Syed, Kanwal Shauzab) took to social media to explain bills.

It must be noted that minority activists in Pakistan sometimes criticize the same hate they see online. The IRADA Institute (Islamabad-based NGO) has pointed out that Pakistani TV talk shows rarely feature minority representatives, and civil society has lamented online hate speech targeting Christians.[35] These critical voices use social media to document threats (for example, NGOs report on hate speech threads or extremist group statements). While such content confirms that

[34] *FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN 2021-22.*
[35] Tschannen, R. A. (2019, May 4). *Pakistani minorities: A one-sided story*.

intolerance exists, it also demonstrates that Pakistani minorities are vigilant and vocal about their rights contrary to the stereotype that they are "silent victims."

Pakistani civil society and minority communities are not absent from the online discussion. They contribute their perspectives through reports, social-media posts, and international advocacy. Their voices add complexity to the discourse: rather than passive objects of persecution, they actively assert their identity and call out harassment. This partly offsets external narratives. For example, when Indian social media claimed "Pakistani Hindus cannot assemble", Pakistani Hindu leaders were able to provide photos and statements on Facebook showing interfaith prayers and celebrations happening freely in places like Karachi and Islamabad. Such direct counterevidence is crucial. It shows that Pakistan's minorities themselves use digital media to reshape the conversation, proving that the online "airspace" is not entirely dominated by falsehood.

6.1.1. Reframing the Narrative: Dialogue, Dignity, and Digital Expression

Cardinal Joseph Coutts: A Voice of Nuance and Bridge-Building

> *"We face challenges, yes, but I would not use the word 'persecuted.' There is freedom of worship in our Constitution, and interfaith dialogue is growing."*

In the international webinar "Faith in the Margins: The Meaning of Easter for Persecuted Christians" (2025), hosted by the South Asia Research Institute for Minorities (SARIM), Cardinal Joseph Coutts reflected on the complex religious landscape for Christians in Pakistan. While acknowledging discrimination, he stressed that the narrative of persecution should not overshadow ongoing state efforts and evolving interfaith engagement.

He further emphasized the symbolic unity found in different religions, stating:

> *"The light of Diwali or the light of Christ—these symbols transcend doctrine and speak to the divine mystery shared by all faiths."*

Cardinal Coutts's theological reflection and public recognition including the Hilal-i-Imtiaz and Tamgha-i-Imtiaz position him as a key figure advocating for respectful coexistence and nuanced understanding in online and offline spaces.

Krishan Sharma: Championing Inclusion through Policy and Education

> *"An inclusive Pakistan means dignity for all where every citizen, regardless of faith, is protected equally by law and uplifted by education."*

As President of the Pakistan Hindu Mandir Management Committee (PHMMC), Krishan Sharma plays a pivotal role in advocating for the Hindu community's rights and preserving religious heritage at the grassroots level. In his recent address at a national interfaith forum, Sharma emphasized the importance of constitutional guarantees and anti-discrimination laws in securing religious freedom for minorities.

He particularly highlighted the transformative role of education in fostering tolerance, saying that promoting cultural sensitivity and civic inclusion must begin in classrooms. Sharma noted that the government has shown a commitment to minority protections through symbolic and policy-level actions, but sustained efforts are needed to bridge social divides.

> *"National Minority Day should not just be commemorated it should educate. It is a reminder that Pakistan's strength lies in its diversity."*

Calling for dialogue across faiths and sectors, Sharma urged unity as a tool for nation-building, where religious minorities are not just protected but celebrated. His work reflects a vision of Pakistan rooted in democratic ideals, pluralism, and equal citizenship.

Conclusion

The portrayal of Pakistan's religious minorities in South Asian social media is often distorted by one dimensional narratives. By contrasting these stories with Pakistan's constitutional guarantees, recent reforms, and actual practices, we find that many online claims are misleading. Pakistan's law explicitly bans religious discrimination and provides

for minority representation. Recent government actions such as the PKR 1 billion renovation plan for temples and Gurdwaras and public endorsements of pluralism by top leader underscore the state's commitment to inclusion. At the same time, Pakistani civil society and minority communities are increasingly using digital platforms to speak for themselves.

This study underscores that balanced understanding is essential. The contrast between the negative online imagery and Pakistan's real efforts suggests a need for more fact-based reporting and dialogue. For readers in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal (and beyond), recognizing this gap can prevent communal polarization and build respect for Pakistan's pluralistic elements. For Pakistani policymakers and advocates, it highlights the importance of showcasing successes and addressing remaining gaps transparently. Ultimately, by dispelling misinformation with evidence and advocacy, we contribute to a more nuanced regional narrative one that acknowledges Pakistan's challenges but also its progress and principles in safeguarding all communities.

Recommendations

1. Grassroots awareness campaigns are needed to counter religious hatred and misinformation. Programs should focus on tolerance, constitutional rights, and the cultural contributions of minority communities.
2. Government and civil society organizations should support joint celebrations of religious festivals (e.g., Diwali, Christmas, Baisakhi) as public events. Such interfaith engagements can humanize "the other" reduce social distance, and foster mutual respect among communities.
3. The government should enact and enforce robust legal frameworks that specifically protect minority places of worship. Fast-track legal proceedings and stringent penalties for those involved in hate crimes or religious vandalism can serve as effective deterrents.
4. While the 2025 ETPB initiative is commendable, similar efforts must be institutionalized and expanded across provinces. Transparency in budget allocation, community involvement, and periodic monitoring are essential to ensure these efforts are impactful and not merely symbolic.
5. Encourage platforms where religious leaders, activists, and especially young people from different faiths can interact and

collaborate on community service, art, and dialogue initiatives.

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