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# QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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## Policy Brief

# Tackling Trends of Extremism among Law Enforcers

By Imran Mukhtar

Pakistan has a history of faith-based violence. The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal rights to all citizens including the right to protection of life, fair trial, freedom of expression, and the right to profess, practice and propagate the religion. However, these constitutional safeguards neither properly worked nor could ever be translated into actual liberties of thought and religious belief.

In practice, not only minorities including Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis face persecution based on their religious thoughts but also people of the Muslim majority community become a victim to faith-based extremism. And this is not a new phenomenon. It has been observed for the past many decades.

The purpose of this policy brief is to highlight growing trends of extremism among personnel of law enforcement agencies while dealing with cases of blasphemy and to provide some recommendations on it.

### An overview of anti-blasphemy laws

Pakistan has anti-blasphemy laws that make it illegal to insult the religion or religious beliefs of any class of citizens of the country, resulting in punishments ranging from fine to death penalty.

One of these laws includes Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which says, "Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine."

The data collected by various human rights organizations shows that Muslims constitute the majority of those booked under the anti-blasphemy laws followed by Ahmadis, Christians, and Hindus. Most of the cases are of

desecration of the Holy Quran and blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Two prominent Pakistani politicians including a provincial governor and a federal minister for minorities were killed in 2011, one after the other, for their opposition to the country's blasphemy laws. In 2014, human rights lawyer Rashid Rehman was killed for defending a university teacher accused of blasphemy.

### No right to fair trial

Pakistan's blasphemy laws have been criticized by rights organizations and the outer world in several ways. They say that these were being misused against vulnerable segments of society including women, religious minorities, and people with mental disabilities.

In many instances, people settled their personal scores by charging their opponents of blasphemy. Major reasons behind such false accusations are disputes of business, land, and of internal family.

It is rare that those accused of blasphemy get the right to fair trial. They languish in jails for years without being given the right to quick and easy access to justice. Even the judiciary avoids deciding such cases due to threats to its own security. The life of such people remains under threat even if they get a clean chit from the court.

In most incidents, police take no time to book the accused of blasphemy under the relevant laws without launching a proper investigation because of public pressure. Even after this, such accused get continuous bad treatment from landing in the police lockup to the jail and during their court trial.

The law enforcement fears that the enraged people would set the police facility on fire if

they took some time to probe the matter before registration of a blasphemy case.

This worry is genuine. It is usual that the mob attacks police stations, demanding that the accused should be handed over to them for lynching.

On November 19, several police officials suffered injuries when a crowd of nearly 2,000 people attacked a police station in Peshawar – the provincial capital of northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

They were demanding the custody of a man, who was detained for allegedly desecrating the Holy Quran during a domestic fight. The police resorted to tear gas shelling and aerial firing to disperse the angry protestors even though it had already registered a case against the accused.

The mob justice through public lynchings of blasphemy accused is normal. In many cases, such accused people are battling some mental illnesses. But people themselves become prosecutors, judges and executioners instead of handing over such accused to police.

### When law enforcers become executioners

Many incidents suggest that police personnel themselves maltreat those accused of blasphemy, while in custody, due to having extremist and radical thoughts among themselves. They see it as a sacred job to humiliate such an accused who has yet to be put on trial to prove a case against him or her.

As mentioned earlier, such accused face the same ordeal during their appearance in courts and during their stay in prison at the hands of

staff and their jail mates.

The tendency of abuse of blasphemy accused at the hands of the police is also old. As the law enforcers live in a deeply faith-based polarized society, they don't behave differently. But the matter is even beyond the mistreatment of the accused.

In January 2011, then Governor Punjab Salman Taseer was killed by his police bodyguard in an upscale market of Islamabad for his opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws and his defence of a Christian woman, Aasia Bibi, sentenced to death on blasphemy charges. Some years before this cold-blooded murder, a senior police officer in his official note had pointed out that police constable Mumtaz Qadri, the killer, should not be appointed for the security of VVIPs due to his radical views but the advice was ignored by his successors.

Now, the issue at hand is the recent extrajudicial killing of two blasphemy accused while in the custody of police. One incident happened in the southwestern Balochistan province and the other in Sindh, the southern province of the country.

On September 12, a police official shot and killed a blasphemy suspect inside the lockup of a police station in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan. The police had moved the accused to a more heavily fortified facility due to an angry mob demanding that he be handed over to them.

Earlier, the accused had been kept at the city's Kharotabad Police Station where protestors belonging to religious parties pelted stones

*In many instances, people settled their personal scores by charging their opponents of blasphemy. Major reasons behind such false accusations are disputes of business, land, and of internal family.*





at the facility to force the police to hand him over to them. The police then shifted him to the Cantt Police Station for his safety where he was killed by their own official. The illegal action was welcomed by some locals, announcing a cash reward for the alleged killer.

In an utter disappointment for many law-abiding citizens, the family members of the victim pardoned the police official, fearing that their lives would be in danger if they pursued the case in a court. The incident underlines that not only the blasphemy accused but also their families face persecution in Pakistani society.

In the second such incident on September 19, a medical doctor accused of blasphemy was killed in a staged encounter by police in Mirpurkhas district of Sindh. Later, a police inquiry committee confirmed the killing of Dr Shahnawaz Kunbhar, an accused of sharing blasphemous posts on social media, in the fake encounter.



“Serious violations of procedures and rules were undertaken by the command of...police, including celebrations and jubiliations and the way the encounter was portrayed on various platforms,” reads the probe report, indicating that the killing of blasphemy accused was even celebrated by police. The pressure of local clerics and the public also contributed to this murder incident.

The investigation into the killing incident revealed that Dr Kunbhar had gone into hiding after he was accused of blasphemy. The accused then surrendered himself to the police only to become a victim of an extrajudicial killing. The more worrying fact of the case is that names of some senior officers of the Police Service of Pakistan have surfaced, during the inquiry, for

their alleged connivance in this illegal act.

The incident drew widespread criticism from civil society, especially of Sindh, following the dead body of Dr Kunbhar was desecrated by a violent mob. The police at that point also failed in fulfilling their duty.

In a similar incident in November, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police arrested their own constable for his alleged key role in January 2023 suicide attack in Peshawar’s Police Lines area, which claimed the lives of at least 86 police officials.

All these points to prevalent tendencies of extremism among the personnel of police, which need to be addressed by the police top brass, policymakers, and the legislators. The above two separate incidents of extrajudicial killings of blasphemy accused also raise questions on the capability of the police to sustain public pressure and ensure protection of blasphemy accused while dealing with such cases.

### Recommendations

1. There should be psychological tests and complete scrutiny of police officials at the time of their induction into the department to ensure people with radical ideologies don’t get their entry into the department.
2. Courses on countering extremism should be included in the syllabus being taught at police training schools across the country. The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and the National Police Bureau should play their role by coordinating with the centre and provinces.
3. Special training should be given to serving police officials to deal with the blasphemy accused to ensure their protection and to sensitize them that police cannot become executioners on their own in such cases.
4. Separate training courses should be introduced for those investigation officers who investigate those accused of blasphemy to ensure that such people are not maltreated and could get the right to fair trial.

5. Training should also be provided to police on how to sustain public pressure while handling a case of blasphemy to ensure that a first information report (FIR) is registered against an accused only if there is some concrete evidence against him or her.
6. The standing committees on interior or home affairs of the Senate, and national, and provincial assemblies should take up the matter with respective governments, ministries, and police high-ups to bring reforms in the training system of police to confront the trends to extremism among the force.

# Youth: Beacon of Hope

*By Muhammad Murtaza*

The social fabric of Pakistan is woven with diverse religious threads, creating a vibrant society. However, the rise of extremism is shrinking the space for minority communities. For any society to coexist and thrive, interfaith harmony is essential. Unfortunately, numerous events have demonstrated that our social fabric is being eroded by the enzymes of violent extremism, creating an environment of despair within the country.

One of the most pressing challenges facing Pakistani society is the issue of blasphemy. We have witnessed dwellings turned to ashes as blasphemy accusations have become a weapon to threaten and subjugate dissenting voices, and at times, even eliminate them. According to the Center for Social Justice, in 2023, there were 329 individuals accused of blasphemy, of whom 75 percent were Muslims, 20 percent belonged to the Ahmadi community, and 3.3 percent were Christians. In Pakistan, institutions appear to have failed in promoting a tolerant environment and protecting the rights of religious minorities.

As of the 2023 census, Pakistan's population exceeds 240 million, projected to surpass 245 million by July 2024 according to United Nations estimates, with two-thirds comprising youth. In any country, youth set the course for the future, and Pakistan is no exception. However, when faced with variables such as unemployment and radicalism, youth may seek alternative outlets for their energies. Growing horizontal inequalities are consistent drivers of violent extremism. A holistic perspective shows that unemployment or poverty alone is not the sole push factor inciting violence and extremism; perceptions of injustice, human rights violations, social and political exclusion, widespread corruption, and the sustained mistreatment of certain groups are also significant contributors. Extremist ideologies often fill the void, leading to the exploitation of young minds for the selfish interests of orchestrators of extremism.

In Pakistan, we must ask: Is the youth equipped with the tools for critical thinking, or are they merely influenced by the tides of information and communication technologies that incite

their socio-political activism? On one hand, the information age, revolutionized by social media and online platforms, calls for digital literacy. However, the excessive influx of information can overwhelm even the most discerning minds, let alone the uninformed youth. On the other hand, distinguishing authentic and meaningful information requires a clear understanding of political and philosophical concepts.

The digital era has not only facilitated greater connectivity but also introduced challenges for youth. Numerous media platforms, often occupied by extremist ideologies cloaked in religious rhetoric, contribute to confusion. As a result, many young people accept propositions without logical backing, inadvertently giving rise to extremism in society. The recent trend of minority persecution by public mobs reveals that the demographics of these gatherings often comprise youth.

Addressing societal issues requires time; however, they can be contained through the implementation of both short-term and long-term strategies. In Pakistan, while legal frameworks and institutions to counter extremism exist, their effectiveness is questionable. These are critical times for the government to heed the "ticking bomb" of extremism that can lead to irreversible challenges. In the short term, the government should proscribe political and social entities that propagate extremist ideologies. Secondly, the curriculum of all education systems, including religious seminaries regardless of their sectarian affiliation, should include Pegham-e-Pakistan as, with further explanation to promote understanding and tolerance. Religious leaders must use their platforms during Friday prayers and festivals to discourage sentiments of religious intolerance.

In the long term, the government should develop institutional mechanisms for capacity building, equipping youth with skills relevant to local and international market requirements. Effective consultations with socio-political scientists, civil society members, and national and international partners are essential for setting both short- and long-term targets. Furthermore, training



programs and seminars at various levels (local, district, and division) should be implemented, along with technology-driven policies for students and young professionals. By integrating short and long-term strategies and ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation, we can foster an environment conducive to religious harmony, paving the way for the prosperity of Pakistani society with youth at its core.

Muhammad Murtaza is Project Manager at Pak Institute for Peace Studies



# Building Bridges: Fostering Tolerance & Inclusivity among Youth

## Swat Chapter

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organized a two-day workshop titled “Building Bridges: Fostering Tolerance and Inclusivity Among Youth” on November 25–26, 2024 in Shangla, Swat. The event focused on engaging youth to foster tolerance and inclusivity within their communities.

Guest speakers highlighted the importance of empowering youth to embrace change by interacting with individuals from diverse ethnic, social, and cultural backgrounds. They emphasized that adopting inclusive practices would ultimately contribute to societal peace. Speakers also stressed the critical need for interfaith harmony, which they described as essential for enabling young people to realize their full potential.

In his opening remarks, President PIPS Muhammad Amir Rana provided an in-depth overview of Pakistan’s historical journey, state structure, and contemporary policymaking challenges. He urged the youth to embody patience, open-mindedness, and a willingness to respect differing opinions—qualities he deemed vital for building a more tolerant and cohesive society.

Advocate Islamabad High Court Dileep Kumar Doshi addressed the audience on the concept of human rights, highlighting how conflicts of interest arise when these civil liberties are selectively interpreted and implemented. Mr. Doshi’s discussion also emphasized the rights related to natural resources—land, forests, and water—and how these are frequently neglected in favor of safeguarding personal or group interests.

He provided a historical perspective on human rights, tracing humanity’s progress from the era of Cyrus the Great. He referenced how, during Cyrus’s reign, cruelty and unlawful executions were prohibited, drawing parallels to modern-day discussions on slavery and human dignity. Mr. Doshi further elaborated on the legislative process in Pakistan, outlining the detailed, step-by-step procedures necessary for passing laws that

genuinely protect civil liberties. He underscored the importance of implementing these processes both in letter and in spirit to ensure justice and equity. In his conclusion, he stressed the critical role of participatory governance in upholding civil liberties and fostering fairness within society.

The participants posed several questions, including one about the differences between the abolition of slavery by Cyrus the Great and that by former United States President Abraham Lincoln in the 19th century. It was noted that during Cyrus’s reign, efforts were made to prevent illegal deaths, whereas Lincoln’s actions led to the complete abolition of slavery.

Renowned scholar and social activist Mr. Zubair Torwali talked about Pakistan’s linguistic, ethnic, and social diversity, with a particular focus on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He discussed the caste system, highlighting how social mobility is influenced by the company one keeps, which also shapes individual personalities. Mr. Torwali drew attention to the Kalash people, stressing the importance of preserving their cultural rights for future generations. He further emphasized the role of education and awareness in fostering inclusivity and protecting the rights of marginalized communities. His remarks underscored the need for collective efforts to celebrate and safeguard Pakistan’s rich multicultural heritage.

PIPS researchers Ms. Esham Farooq and Ms. Hina Khaliq Taj facilitated an engaging activity where participants expressed their perspectives on life through pastel-colored drawings. Various themes of an ideal world emerged, including climate change, peace, human rights, and equality. Participants then presented their artwork to the audience, sharing insights into the core values they believed were significant in today’s world. This interactive exercise underscored the importance of creativity in fostering empathy, making it a memorable and impactful part of the workshop.

Senior journalist Mr. Imran Mukhtar addressed



the audience on the workings of Pakistan’s National Assembly and Senate. The discussion focused on the interplay between the constitution, parliament, and citizenship, emphasizing how they collectively guide the country’s governance. The session also explored the allocation of seats in the National Assembly and Senate, the operational mechanisms of both houses, and their budgetary processes.

PIPS President Muhammad Amir Rana highlighted dialogue as the key to resolving religious, economic, and social challenges. He stressed the importance of access to accurate information in addressing current issues and urged today’s youth to prioritize skill development. This, he noted, would contribute to the growth and betterment of society as a whole.



# Building Bridges: Fostering Tolerance & Inclusivity among Youth

## Peshawar Chapter

Pak Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS) organized a two-day workshop namely, “Building Bridges: Fostering Tolerance and Inclusivity among Youth” on November 28-29, 2024, in Peshawar. The event brought together university students, rights activists and young members of civil society to engage on issues ranging from tolerance and peace to social harmony and pluralistic coexistence. The event started formally with the welcoming remarks by the President of PIPS, Muhammad Amir Rana. He explained the key objectives, aims and goals of the workshop to the participants.

The speakers encouraged the youth to cultivate and demonstrate a ‘behavior of acceptance’ towards others to foster peace in society. They emphasized that the evolving global standards of citizenship require promoting this particular identity among citizens. Experts from diverse fields shared their insights on various topics, engaging in debates that spanned over a wide range of shared interests of the students and distinct perspectives.

They also urged the youth to embrace the path of ‘personal growth’ and ‘inner peace’ emphasizing that both can serve as powerful agents of change to promote tolerance and inclusiveness in society.

Senior journalist Imran Mukhtar conducted the first session in collaboration with PIPS researcher Murtaza Ali. Mr. Mukhtar discussed the debate on “the relationship of citizenship and constitution”, emphasizing the importance of the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment in promoting democratic values and preserving diversity of Pakistan. Meanwhile, Mr. Murtaza highlighted the importance of social media and responsibilities citizens bear when posting some information online.

The third session was facilitated by political activist and lawyer Mr. Dileep Doshi, who conducted an interactive discussion to explore the history and development of human rights, highlighting their evolution and significance in today’s world. He delved into the concept of human rights and

their progression over time, emphasizing the importance of protecting fundamental rights.

Mr. Doshi also discussed the responsibility of the state to safeguard human rights, as enshrined in the constitution. He asserted, “Human rights are universal and inalienable, and it is essential for individuals to understand and demand their rights”. He also addressed the subjectivity of the societies in the interpretation and application of human rights and noted that work towards creating a more just and equitable society is needed to promote awareness and understanding of human rights.

The fourth session was conducted by the journalist and academic Dr. Syed Irfan Ashraf, who, in his talk on “Blessing in Diversity,” emphasized that language is the foundation of diversity, with culture and society as its essential elements. “Diversity is also the name of tolerance,” he said, explaining that diverse cultures, languages, and faiths can be preserved by raising voice against violence. He stressed the importance of critical thinking among the youth, urging them to recognize and celebrate a diverse environment and its colors.

The subsequent session was a panel discussion moderated by senior journalist Rifat Ullah Orakzai, who elaborated the interconnectedness of the constitution, parliament, and citizenship.

Renowned scholar and member of the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court, Dr. Qibla Ayaz, addressed the concept of ‘constitution, parliament, and citizenship’. He observed that while this concept may not be ideal in Pakistan, it is sufficiently robust to meet the requirements of citizenship. He underscored the importance of the written constitution for safeguarding democracy in the country. “The Constitution of Pakistan provides for equal citizenship to all including minorities. The [societal] problems prevailing in the society stem from its social structure, not the constitution,” he said.



Professor Dr Rashid Ahmad of the University of Peshawar pointed out various flaws in the present education system of the country. “Our education policy is neither market-oriented nor aligned with the demands of the market,” he added. He underlined the need to engage youth, guiding them to harness their potential according to their abilities.

The debate took a different turn when a participant raised a question regarding the ongoing security situation in Kurram, where a tribal conflict has claimed numerous lives.

Author and motivational speaker Husnain Jamal, in his session titled “Crafting an Easy Life,” discussed ways for individuals to create a simple and meaningful life for themselves and others. Drawing on global examples, he advised the youth to adopt non-violence as a means to bring peace to their lives and ultimately in society. He advocated a pacifist approach, urging students to indulge only in healthy debates. He suggested focusing on personal growth and self-improvement.

In his concluding remarks, PIPS President Muhammad Amir Rana emphasized the role of critical thinking in decreasing the incidence of faith-based violence and conflict. He explained how successful individuals think and act beyond conventional boundaries. “Critical thinking doesn’t mean rejecting everything; it is about viewing things from a different perspective,” he noted. Mr Rana urged the youth to engage with people from different faiths, ethnicities and nationalities to foster personal growth and cultivate a ‘behavior of acceptance’.





# Stories of impact: This quarter's story is about our participant of Building Bridges: Fostering Tolerance & Inclusivity among Youth-Usman Torwali

## 1. How can we celebrate diversity in our communities while fostering mutual respect among different faiths?

It could be understood by simply pondering over things around us. Nature has abundance of living and non-things and yet quite different in their very composition so much so that the fingerprint of humanity differs and that's what puts beauty in the existence of beings. In such a diverse universe different faiths, beliefs and values will inevitably be there and rationally demand to respect them.

## 2. What challenges do you think arise in diverse societies, and how they can be addressed effectively?

Prejudice and discrimination against religious, cultural, and racial minorities often backed by majority legislated laws and social institutions such as madrassahs and schools are often rooted in diverse societies. This situation is further exacerbated by illiteracy and lack of one's religious teachings which never preaches disrespect of other faiths. Religious leaders, educational institutions and legislation which promotes mutual respect can have a long-term efficacy in attaining peaceful coexistence, only if teaching and fostering interfaith harmony is prioritized.

## 3. Which session resonated with you the most and why?

Mr. Muhammad Rana's session was the most thought-provoking session for me as it inculcated a seed of curiosity into my mind that why there are no

international names in the field of science, literature, philosophy, technology etc. from Pakistan? Why our society is so stagnant and despite one of the biggest countries why Pakistan cannot contribute to the development of humanity? Perhaps there are multiple reasons but the most prominent is the lack of a social and philosophical conducive environment for producing great minds. Yet it instigated me to think more.

## 4. What was the most valuable insight and idea you gained during the workshop?

It was the use of social media and how fake news is produced and propagated for the attainment of a pre-planned outcome.

Stay alert on social media was an insightful session for me as it introduced some concepts of mass communication to me as well.

## 5. How did the workshop challenge your existing perceptions about interfaith harmony?

Earlier I assumed that the lack of interfaith harmony and mutual respect among different faiths in our country was due to social phenomenon such as false understanding of religion and other exclusive attitudes. However, I learned in this workshop that such attitudes and behaviors are often made by state apparatus as well. For instance, the PM and president positions are exclusively retained for Muslims in the constitution. That's where discrimination begins and ends in setting fire to churches. A particular identity

Prejudice and discrimination against religious, cultural, and racial minorities often backed by majority legislated laws and social institutions such as madrassahs and schools are often rooted in diverse societies.

*-Usman Torwali*



of the state undermines celebration of the very diversity a state naturally owns.

6. Were there any moments during the sessions that inspired you and changed the way you think about your role in fostering harmony?

Yes. Currently political and religious leaders including other power holders are all set on polarizing the society and dividing the masses for their wielded interests. Now, it is high time for youth to take the lead and design a future, one that is inclusive and celebrates diversity. Therefore, I think it is us to work on fostering harmony and making an environment where equality and respect is norm of the day.

7. How can you collaborate with others who attended the workshop to create a larger impact in your community?

We can do several seminars in the university and colleges on fostering interfaith harmony. We can instill a sense of cultural and lingual inclusivity as well in the participants by conducting a session on unity in diversity. Our seminars will mainly focus on extracting the commonalities of all faiths. Such as no religion preaches disrespect of other faiths.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Building Bridges: Fostering Tolerance & Inclusivity among Youth

Rawalpindi	13-14 January, 2025
Faisalabad	20-21 January, 2025
Lahore	23-24 January, 2025
Multan	03-04 February, 2025
Bahawalpur	06-07 February, 2025
Sukkur	11-12 February, 2025