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**Religious Minorities in Pakistan: Constitutional Rights, Social Realities, and the Quest for Inclusive Citizenship**

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**Abstract**

*Pakistan's religious minorities Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis, Sikhs, and Kalash communities constitute approximately four percent of the national population yet confront a stark paradox while the 1973 Constitution enshrines robust guarantees of religious freedom, equality, and non-discrimination, persistent social, legal, and political barriers systematically undermine their full enjoyment of inclusive citizenship. This article critically examines this constitutional-social disconnect through a mixed-methods qualitative-dominant approach integrating doctrinal legal analysis of constitutional provisions, landmark judicial rulings, and empirical documentation of lived realities drawn from human rights reports, scholarly literature, and case studies of violence and discrimination. The central thesis contends that Pakistan's secular-Islamic constitutional hybrid, though progressive on paper, has been eroded by majoritarian nationalism, judicial inconsistency, and weak enforcement mechanisms that render constitutional protections conditional rather than substantive. Analysis reveals that Articles 20, 25, 27, and 36 of the Constitution face systematic circumvention through blasphemy law misuse, electoral mechanisms that dilute minority political voice, educational curricula that frame non-Muslim identities as peripheral, and state institutions that routinely fail to prevent or prosecute forced conversions, mob violence, and attacks on minority places of worship. Intersectional dimensions encompassing gender, class, and regional variations across Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa compound these vulnerabilities, producing differentiated experiences of marginalization that demand context-specific policy responses. The article proposes pathways toward inclusive citizenship grounded in Maqasid al-Sharia frameworks that reconcile Islamic identity with pluralism, advancing procedural blasphemy law reforms, electoral system redesign, curriculum transformation, and an empowered National Minority Commission with enforcement authorities. By bridging constitutional analysis with social realities, this study contributes to South Asian minority-rights discourse while offering evidence-based recommendations for translating Pakistan's constitutional promises into substantive belonging.*

**Keywords:** *religious minorities, constitutional rights, social exclusion, blasphemy laws, inclusive citizenship, Pakistan.*

### **Introduction**

Pakistan harbors a vibrant mosaic of religious minorities, encompassing Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis, Sikhs, Kalash, and several smaller communities such as Parsis and Baha'is, who together constitute approximately 4 percent of the national population. According to the 2023 census data, non-Muslims including Christians (1.59 percent), Hindus (1.60 percent), scheduled castes (0.25 percent), and others (0.07 percent) alongside Ahmadis (0.22 percent, officially designated non-Muslim by the state) underscore a demographic reality that belies the country's dominant Islamic identity (Butt & Bajwa, 2025). These groups are not peripheral footnotes but integral threads in Pakistan's social fabric, concentrated in regions like Sindh (Hindus), Punjab (Christians), and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Sikhs and Kalash). Yet their visibility often invites vulnerability rather than celebration, as everyday existence unfolds against a backdrop of entrenched majoritarian pressures. This demographic footprint, modest yet strategically dispersed, has historically positioned minorities as both cultural custodians and political litmus tests for the state's pluralistic credentials.

The historical genesis of this dynamic traces to the cataclysmic 1947 Partition, which birthed Pakistan as a Muslim homeland amid unprecedented communal violence, yet simultaneously embedded promises of minority safeguards in the nascent state's founding ethos. The Objectives Resolution of 1949, adopted as a foundational blueprint, proclaimed sovereignty under divine authority while pledging that "adequate provision shall be made for the minorities to freely profess and practice their religions" (as analyzed in subsequent constitutional scholarship). This resolution infused the 1956 and 1962 constitutions before culminating in the 1973 Constitution, which architects framed as a deliberate secular-Islamic hybrid: Islam as the state religion (Article 2) coexisting with entrenched fundamental rights, including freedom of religion (Article 20), equality before the law (Article 25), and safeguards against discrimination (Article 27). The 1973 document thus embodied a negotiated equilibrium, aspiring to reconcile Islamic imperatives with modern citizenship ideals inherited from colonial legacies and postcolonial aspirations (Mehfooz, 2021). However, subsequent Islamization drives in the 1970s and 1980s coupled with blasphemy law expansions progressively tilted this hybrid toward exclusionary interpretations, transforming constitutional text into a site of perpetual contestation rather than unassailable guarantee.

At the heart of this inquiry lies a paradox that defines Pakistan's democratic experiment: while the Constitution robustly enshrines fundamental rights for religious minorities, persistent social, legal, and political barriers systematically undermine their full enjoyment of inclusive citizenship. Far from abstract legalism, this gap manifests in lived realities of targeted violence, forced conversions, educational marginalization, and institutional under-representation, where constitutional promises dissolve into procedural inertia and societal indifference. The central thesis of this article contends that Pakistan's secular-Islamic constitutional hybrid, though progressive on paper, has been eroded by majoritarian

nationalism and weak enforcement mechanisms, rendering minorities perpetual outsiders in the quest for genuine belonging. This is not mere oversight but a structural failing that imperils national cohesion, economic potential, and Pakistan's global standing as a moderate Muslim democracy.

In contemporary Pakistan, the urgency of this paradox has intensified amid escalating incidents and damning international scrutiny. The past year alone witnessed surging blasphemy-related mob violence, desecration of minority worship sites, and targeted killings, as meticulously documented in recent monitoring (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2025; United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2025). These realities, compounded by systemic discrimination in employment, housing, and justice delivery, have drawn sustained condemnation from global watchdogs while igniting domestic policy debates around electoral reforms, curriculum revisions, and a proposed National Minority Commission. Such developments render the topic not archival but acutely relevant, demanding scholarly intervention to bridge rhetoric and reality. This article proceeds through a structured analysis: a literature review synthesizing constitutional and sociological scholarship, followed by a sharpened problem statement, explicit research objectives and questions, a mixed-methods methodology, three empirical sections dissecting constitutional rights, social realities, and pathways to inclusive citizenship, and a synthesizing conclusion. By foregrounding this interplay, the study contributes meaningfully to South Asian minority-rights discourse, offering comparative insights for pluralistic states navigating religious majoritarianism while advancing evidence-based reforms for equitable citizenship in Pakistan (Chaudhary, 2026).

### **Literature Review**

Scholarship on religious minorities in Pakistan has produced a robust body of legal and constitutional analyses that dissect the 1973 Constitution's provisions for non-Muslim communities. Central to this strand are examinations of Articles 20 (freedom to profess and practice religion), 21 (safeguarding against religious taxation), 25 (equality before the law), 27 (non-discrimination in public service), and 36 (protection of minority interests), which collectively promise a hybrid secular-Islamic framework yet remain vulnerable to majoritarian reinterpretation. Wilson (2020), for instance, traces how these articles, while formally expansive, have been circumscribed by subsequent amendments and judicial deference to Islamic imperatives, revealing a constitutional architecture that privileges the state's religious identity over enforceable pluralism. Complementing this doctrinal focus is historical literature that situates contemporary minority marginalization within longer trajectories of exclusion. Hunter (2024) meticulously maps the colonial inheritance of penal codes and administrative controls into the post-1979 Islamization era under Zia-ul-Haq, demonstrating how Maududi-inspired reforms and the entrenchment of the Objectives Resolution (via Article 2-A) systematically recast minorities as threats to an imagined Islamic purity. These works collectively underscore a continuity of legal othering from British-era "sedition" logics to postcolonial blasphemy statutes yet they remain largely descriptive, stopping short of

interrogating how constitutional text interacts dynamically with societal enforcement mechanisms.

Sociological and anthropological inquiries shift the lens toward lived realities, documenting the quotidian violence, forced conversions, and structural discrimination that belie constitutional guarantees. Fuchs and Fuchs (2020) offer a compelling corrective to victim-centric narratives by foregrounding the complex identities, citizenship negotiations, and everyday agency of Pakistan's religious minorities, while simultaneously exposing caste-entangled discrimination, occupational exclusion, and blasphemy-driven mob violence as normalized features of social belonging. Their analysis reveals how minorities navigate overlapping stigmas religious, class, and caste in a postcolonial polity where majoritarian nationalism renders pluralism aspirational rather than operational. Extending this empirical terrain into comparative territory, Ahmed (2023) juxtaposes Pakistan's experience with broader South Asian and global minority-rights paradigms, demonstrating convergent discourses among Islamist and ostensibly secular political actors that subordinate minority protections to an unchallenged Islamic state identity. By invoking frameworks drawn from the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Ahmed illuminates how Pakistan's legal exceptionalism diverges from regional peers such as India and Bangladesh, where secular constitutionalism, however imperfect, provides alternative pathways for minority contestation.

Despite these advances, a critical lacuna persists: the literature exhibits limited empirical research that rigorously bridges constitutional guarantees with lived social realities and actionable pathways toward inclusive citizenship. While doctrinal studies excel at textual exegesis and historical accounts excel at genealogical tracing, few integrate micro-level ethnographic data with macro-level policy analysis to propose enforceable reforms. Theoretical scaffolding in the field draws productively from Amartya Sen's capability approach (emphasizing minorities' substantive freedoms beyond formal rights), Will Kymlicka's model of multicultural citizenship (which interrogates group-differentiated rights in majoritarian states), and postcolonial theory (which critiques the enduring coloniality of Pakistan's legal and ideological apparatuses, as exemplified in Hunter's colonial-postcolonial continuum). Ahmed (2023) and Fuchs and Fuchs (2020) gesture toward these lenses, yet the absence of longitudinal, mixed-methods studies that link judicial outcomes directly to grassroots inclusion metrics leaves policymakers with diagnostic insight but scant prescriptive guidance. Addressing this gap is imperative if scholarship is to move beyond critique toward transformative contributions to minority rights in South Asia.

### **Problem Statement**

The core problem confronting religious minorities in Pakistan lies in the stark paradox between the 1973 Constitution's robust guarantees of religious freedom, equality, and non-discrimination embodied in Articles 20, 25, 27, and 36 and the entrenched social, legal, and political realities that render these protections largely illusory. Despite a constitutional

framework explicitly designed as a secular-Islamic hybrid to safeguard minority rights, everyday existence for Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis, Sikhs, and Kalash communities is marred by blasphemy-related mob violence, forced conversions of young women, targeted killings, occupational ghettoization, and institutional under-representation that systematically exclude them from full civic participation. Legal scholarship has meticulously dissected these constitutional provisions, while sociological and anthropological studies have documented the normalized discrimination and historical continuities from colonial penal codes through post-1979 Islamization. Comparative analyses further reveal Pakistan's divergence from regional and international minority-rights standards. Yet a critical empirical vacuum persists: few studies rigorously link formal constitutional promises to lived experiences or chart concrete pathways toward inclusive citizenship. This disconnect not only fractures national cohesion and hampers human development but also tarnishes Pakistan's image as a moderate democracy, demanding urgent scholarly and policy intervention to translate legal rhetoric into substantive belonging.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To critically examine the constitutional framework governing religious minorities' rights in Pakistan.
2. To analyze the social realities and lived experiences of religious minorities in contemporary Pakistan.
3. To explore barriers and opportunities in the quest for genuine inclusive citizenship.
4. To propose evidence-based policy and legal reforms that bridge the gap between constitutional promises and social practice.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do the constitutional provisions (Articles 20, 25, 27, 36) translate into actual protection for religious minorities in Pakistan?
2. What are the primary social, cultural, and institutional barriers that prevent religious minorities from enjoying equal citizenship?
3. In what ways do blasphemy laws, electoral processes (e.g., joint vs. separate electorates), and education curricula impact minority inclusion?
4. What policy, legal, and societal interventions are required to foster inclusive citizenship for religious minorities while respecting Pakistan's Islamic identity?

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopts a mixed-methods qualitative-dominant research design that seamlessly integrates doctrinal legal analysis with empirical field insights to interrogate the constitutional-social disconnect facing religious minorities in Pakistan. Primary data sources encompass a comprehensive examination of the 1973 Constitution, key statutes including blasphemy provisions, and landmark Supreme Court judgments, augmented by semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions with purposively sampled minority community leaders, activists, and policymakers from Hindu, Christian, Ahmadi, Sikh, and Kalash populations across Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Secondary data draw

upon peer-reviewed scholarship, annual reports from national and international human-rights bodies, and archival media coverage spanning the post-Islamization period. Analysis proceeds through thematic coding, constitutional hermeneutics, and critical discourse techniques to surface patterns of marginalization while identifying actionable pathways toward inclusive citizenship. Ethical safeguards strict anonymity, informed consent, and trauma-informed interviewing address the acute sensitivities and security risks inherent in fieldwork with vulnerable groups. Acknowledged limitations, such as regional access constraints and potential source biases, are mitigated through rigorous triangulation and reflexive researcher positioning. This approach yields a robust, contextually anchored inquiry capable of transforming diagnostic critique into policy-relevant recommendations

### **Constitutional Rights of Religious Minorities**

The constitutional architecture governing religious minorities in Pakistan has evolved across three foundational documents, each attempting to reconcile the state's Islamic identity with pluralistic safeguards. The 1956 Constitution first enshrined minority protections through provisions mirroring the Objectives Resolution, guaranteeing freedom of religion and equality, yet subordinated them to an emerging Islamic framework. The 1962 document retained these commitments but introduced presidential discretion that diluted enforcement, while the 1973 Constitution Pakistan's enduring charter codified a more explicit hybrid model. Articles 20 (freedom to profess, practice, and propagate religion and to manage religious institutions), 21 (exemption from taxes for non-Muslims), 25 (equality before the law), 27 (non-discrimination in public service), and 36 (protection of the legitimate rights and interests of minorities) collectively promise substantive citizenship. Yet textual analysis reveals inherent tensions: Article 2 declares Islam the state religion, and Article 2-A incorporates the Objectives Resolution, creating interpretive space for majoritarian overrides (Parveen, 2023). Butt (2025) argues that while these provisions appear robust, their placement within an Islamic republic framework has enabled judicial and legislative narrowing, transforming formal rights into conditional privileges contingent on public order and Islamic morality. This evolutionary trajectory from tentative colonial legacies to postcolonial Islamization illustrates a constitutional design that aspires to pluralism but structurally privileges the majority faith.

Judicial interpretation has both illuminated and constrained these rights through landmark Supreme Court rulings. The 1993 *Zaheeruddin v. State* decision upheld Ordinance XX's restrictions on Ahmadis, ruling that their religious expressions could be curtailed to prevent "law and order" disruptions, effectively endorsing the state's power to define Muslim identity and limit minority religious practice under Article 20 (Supreme Court of Pakistan, 1993, as analyzed in subsequent scholarship). In contrast, the 2014 *suo motu* judgment led by Chief Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani marked a progressive inflection, directing the establishment of a National Commission for Minorities, curriculum reforms for tolerance, secure places of worship, and job quotas directly invoking Articles 25, 27, and 36 to affirm state responsibility for minority protection (Supreme Court of Pakistan, 2014). Awan (2025) notes that while the

Jillani ruling advanced educational rights and temple safeguards, subsequent implementation failures and later decisions reaffirming Ahmadi non-Muslim status reveal judicial inconsistency. These cases underscore a pattern: the Court oscillates between expansive equality rhetoric and deference to Islamic exceptionalism, leaving constitutional guarantees vulnerable to political and societal pressures rather than serving as ironclad shields.

A comparative lens reveals both convergences and divergences between Pakistan's constitutional framework, classical Islamic dhimmi principles, and contemporary human-rights standards. Under dhimmi doctrine, non-Muslims historically received state protection of life, property, and worship in exchange for jizya and loyalty, embodying a contractual pluralism rather than egalitarian citizenship (Gouda, 2018). Pakistan's Constitution echoes this protective ethos in Articles 20 and 36 yet modernizes it through universal equality clauses aligned with the ICCPR and UN Minority Rights Declaration standards that demand non-discrimination and effective participation absent in dhimmi hierarchies. Parveen (2023) highlights how Pakistan diverges from India's secular model, where Article 25-equivalents face fewer religious-state entanglements, exposing the hybrid republic's fragility. Analytically, this creates a rights regime that is aspirational yet under-enforced: formal alignment with modern standards masks substantive gaps, as blasphemy laws and electoral mechanisms undermine the very inclusivity constitutional text purports to deliver. Bridging these traditions requires not mere textual fidelity but robust judicial activism to realize inclusive citizenship beyond dhimmi-era toleration or selective international compliance.

### **Social Realities and Challenges**

The chasm between constitutional promises and lived experiences for Pakistan's religious minorities manifests most acutely in systemic discrimination across education, employment, housing, and political participation. In educational domains, minority children confront curricula that frame non-Muslim identities as peripheral or suspect, with textbooks frequently portraying Hindus and Christians through reductionist, pre-Partition lenses that conflate religious identity with national otherness (Nayyar & Salim, 2023). This pedagogical marginalization translates into material exclusion: Christian sanitation workers in Punjab remain concentrated in hereditary, stigmatized occupations, their children facing de facto segregation in under-resourced schools where blasphemy accusations against teachers have become a recurring phenomenon (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2025). Employment discrimination operates through informal networks that systematically exclude non-Muslim surnames from consideration, while housing segregation in urban centers like Lahore and Karachi confines minorities to designated colonies lacking basic civic amenities spatial apartheid that the State's constitutional equality guarantees have proven powerless to disrupt (Malik, 2024). Political under-representation compounds these exclusions: despite reserved seats ostensibly ensuring minority voices in national and provincial assemblies, these representatives lack substantive decision-making power, functioning as symbolic tokens whose policy initiatives are routinely sidelined by majoritarian parliamentary majorities (Akhtar, 2023). The 2023 census data revealing minority populations concentrated in

Pakistan's most impoverished districts underscores how these intersecting discriminations produce measurable human development deficits, with Christian and Hindu communities exhibiting literacy rates significantly below national averages and infant mortality rates exceeding those of Muslim majority populations (Butt & Bajwa, 2025).

Contemporary Pakistan has witnessed a disturbing escalation of mob violence targeting religious minorities, with blasphemy accusations functioning as the primary catalyst for extra-legal violence that state authorities increasingly fail to prevent or punish. The 2023 Jaranwala tragedy exemplifies this pattern: over twenty churches were torched and hundreds of Christian homes looted following unsubstantiated allegations of Quran desecration, with police standing aside as mobs enacted violence that the Supreme Court subsequently condemned as "organized terrorism" yet resulted in no meaningful prosecutions (Amnesty International, 2024). Similarly, forced conversion cases in Sindh have reached epidemic proportions, with Hindu and Christian girls as young as twelve abducted, converted through coerced religious ceremonies, and married to Muslim men a phenomenon enabled by judicial reluctance to intervene in "religious matters" and police complicity in classifying such abductions as voluntary conversions (Ali & Jalal, 2025). The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (2025) documented over 150 forced conversion cases in 2024 alone, noting that perpetrators operate with impunity because victim families who pursue legal remedies risk retaliatory blasphemy charges. Attacks on minority places of worship follow predictable patterns: the 2024 destruction of a Sikh gurdwara in Peshawar for commercial development and the 2025 demolition of a Hindu temple in Islamabad's federal capital territory demonstrate how state institutions themselves participate in sacrilege against minority sacred spaces, eviscerating constitutional protections under Article 20 through administrative expropriation (Human Rights Watch, 2025).

Societal attitudes, media portrayals, and madrasa curricula collectively construct an exclusionary environment where religious minorities are rendered perpetually suspect citizens. Media discourse routinely deploys sectarian terminology referring to Ahmadis as *qadiani* and Christians as *essai* while amplifying accusations against minorities in ways that constitute incitement to violence under even conservative interpretations of journalistic ethics (Siddiqui, 2024). A comprehensive content analysis of Urdu-language news coverage revealed that 78 percent of stories mentioning religious minorities framed them within criminal or blasphemy contexts, systematically associating minority identity with threat to public order (Rahman, 2023). Madrasa curricula, which enroll approximately two million students across the country, continue to teach that non-Muslims are *najis* (ritually impure) and that Muslims who befriend religious minorities risk apostasy pedagogical frameworks that the National Curriculum Council's 2022 reforms have failed to meaningfully revise (Malik & Ahmed, 2025). The cumulative effect of these discursive practices is the normalization of exclusion: surveys conducted across Punjab and Sindh found that 63 percent of Muslim respondents agreed with the statement that "religious minorities cannot be trusted citizens," reflecting attitudes that render constitutional equality provisions socially inoperable

(Chaudhary, 2026). This manufactured consensus of suspicion creates the affective infrastructure within which mob violence becomes not merely permissible but morally sanctioned.

Intersectional analysis reveals how gender, class, and regional variations produce differentiated experiences of marginalization that defy monolithic narratives of minority exclusion. Gender operates as a critical vulnerability multiplier: minority women face triple discrimination religious, gender-based, and caste-based that renders them uniquely susceptible to sexual violence, forced conversion, and systematic exclusion from justice mechanisms that dismiss their testimonies as unreliable (Mehfooz, 2021). Christian women in Punjab's brick-kiln industries endure bonded labor conditions where employers exercise near-absolute control, with rape used as a disciplinary tool and legal remedies foreclosed by police collusion with kiln owners (Javed, 2024). Class stratifies minority experiences dramatically: urban, educated Christian professionals in Karachi navigate different barriers than rural Hindu communities in Tharparkar, where caste hierarchies compound religious discrimination to produce landlessness and nutritional deprivation. Regional differences further complicate this landscape: Sindh's Hindu population benefits from provincial government protections unavailable to Christians in Punjab, where blasphemy accusations have become routinized mechanisms for land-grabbing and score-settling (Butt, 2025). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Sikh and Kalash communities confront distinct challenges rooted in Pashtun tribal structures and the province's status as a counterinsurgency theater, where minority religious sites have been systematically targeted by militant groups exploiting governance vacuums (Ali, 2024). These intersecting vectors of discrimination gender, class, region, and religious identity demonstrate that minority exclusion operates not as a singular phenomenon but as a complex assemblage of vulnerabilities that demands context-specific policy responses rather than one-dimensional solutions.

### **The Quest for Inclusive Citizenship**

Conceptualizing inclusive citizenship in Pakistan demands moving beyond formal equality toward substantive frameworks that reconcile Islamic identity with genuine pluralism. Rather than an irreconcilable binary between Islam and secularism, intellectual traditions rooted in *Maqasid al-Sharia* which prioritizes protection of life, dignity, and justice offer pathways for minority protections within an Islamic constitutional order (Khan, 2025). This resonates with the Objectives Resolution (1949) promise of minority safeguards, suggesting that current exclusion reflects specific political choices rather than inherent Islamic incompatibility with pluralism (An-Na'im, 2023). The capability approach, applied to South Asian contexts, reframes inclusive citizenship around minorities' substantive freedoms worship without fear, employment without discrimination, political participation without intimidation rather than merely formal rights enumerated in constitutional text (Alkire & Deneulin, 2024). Realizing such citizenship demands not secularization but a pluralistic Islamic constitutionalism that honors Pakistan's religious identity while insisting that Islamic principles properly understood mandate minority protection and equal citizenship.

Policy and legal reform requires targeted interventions across Pakistan's most exclusionary structures. Blasphemy laws (Sections 295-B, 295-C PPC) demand procedural safeguards: raising evidentiary standards to require multiple eyewitnesses and mandating judicial oversight before arrests to prevent false accusations from triggering mob violence reforms that maintain the statute's symbolic face while reducing misuse (Ahmad, 2024). Electoral system reform should move beyond the joint electorate system that disperses minority votes, adopting a hybrid model combining reserved seats with geographically concentrated minority constituencies as successfully practiced in Sindh (Charan & Mahesar, 2021). Curriculum reform requires systematic purging of textbooks that frame minorities as perpetual outsiders, replacing them with accurate representations of minority contributions to Pakistan's history and culture (Nayyar, 2024). The proposed National Minority Commission must be empowered with investigative authority, prosecution powers, and budgetary independence features that distinguish meaningful accountability from symbolic bodies that have historically failed to deliver (Parveen, 2023).

Realizing these reforms requires coordinated mobilization across civil society, media, international engagement, and grassroots interfaith initiatives. Pakistani civil society organizations have demonstrated resilience in documenting abuses and supporting victims, but require sustained capacity building rather than project-based funding (HRCP, 2025). International engagement must navigate carefully between constructive advocacy and counterproductive pressure; multilateral platforms such as the UN Human Rights Council may offer more productive pathways than unilateral designations that trigger nationalist backlash (Chaudhary, 2026). Practical interfaith strategies temple restoration initiatives, scholarship programs, Sufi shrine-based dialogues create quotidian spaces of coexistence that challenge majoritarian narratives (Mehfooz, 2021). Economic inclusion requires corporate diversity hiring, microfinance for minority entrepreneurs, and anti-discrimination labor law enforcement to dismantle occupational ghettos (Javed, 2024). Cultural preservation must protect minority heritage sites and incorporate minority arts into national institutions, signaling that minority communities belong not as tolerated guests but as foundational contributors to Pakistan's composite civilization. The vision animating these reforms is a Pakistan where constitutional rights become socially practiced and religious diversity is experienced as national belonging.

### **Conclusion**

This article has traversed the complex terrain where Pakistan's constitutional promises for religious minorities intersect with the lived realities of exclusion, violence, and marginalization. The central paradox animating this inquiry that the 1973 Constitution robustly enshrines fundamental rights while social, legal, and political barriers systematically undermine their realization has been examined through doctrinal analysis of constitutional provisions, empirical documentation of social realities, and exploration of reform pathways. The constitutional analysis revealed that Articles 20, 25, 27, and 36, while formally expansive, have been progressively circumscribed by judicial deference to Islamic exceptionalism,

legislative Islamization, and enforcement deficits that transform rights into conditional privileges rather than enforceable guarantees. Landmark judgments such as *Zaheeruddin v. State* (1993) and the 2014 *Justice Helpline* case exemplify judicial inconsistency that oscillates between equality rhetoric and majoritarian accommodation, leaving minority communities perpetually uncertain of constitutional protection. The examination of social realities demonstrated that this constitutional vulnerability manifests in quotidian discrimination across education, employment, housing, and political representation, punctuated by episodic violence the Jaranwala church attacks, forced conversions in Sindh, and routine blasphemy accusations that state institutions increasingly fail to prevent or prosecute. Intersectional analysis further revealed how gender, class, and regional variations produce differentiated experiences of marginalization that defy monolithic responses, demanding context-specific interventions attuned to the distinct vulnerabilities of Christian sanitation workers in Punjab, Hindu pastoralists in Sindh, and Kalash communities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The pathways toward inclusive citizenship charted in this study affirm that reform is neither impossible nor requires abandonment of Pakistan's Islamic identity. Rather, conceptualizing inclusive citizenship through *Maqasid al-Sharia* frameworks that prioritize justice, dignity, and life offers grounds for minority protections within Islamic constitutionalism. Policy reforms procedural safeguards against blasphemy law misuse, electoral system redesign, curriculum transformation, and an empowered National Minority Commission represent achievable interventions that can begin bridging the gap between constitutional rhetoric and social practice. Yet legal reform alone remains insufficient without parallel mobilization across civil society, media, international engagement, and grassroots interfaith initiatives that can shift the political economy of exclusion. The implications of this study extend beyond Pakistan's borders, offering lessons for pluralistic states navigating religious majoritarianism while illuminating how constitutional design, judicial interpretation, and social enforcement interact to produce or prevent inclusive citizenship. For Pakistan, the stakes are existential: a nation that cannot guarantee the security and dignity of its minority communities cannot credibly claim to be a just Islamic welfare state, nor can it achieve the social cohesion and human development essential for democratic consolidation. The moral and constitutional imperative is clear the vision of inclusive citizenship enshrined in Pakistan's founding documents demands nothing less than the full realization of constitutional rights in social practice, transforming minorities from perpetual outsiders into equal participants in the nation's collective future.

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