



## Constitutional Guarantees and Social Realities: Christian Minority Rights and the Prospects of Muslim–Christian Interfaith Harmony in Pakistan

Muneer Mashi<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Muhammad Munib Khalid<sup>2</sup>

1. PhD Scholar, School of Political Science, Minhaj University
2. Assistant Professor, School of Political Science, Minhaj University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71145/rjsp.v4i1.530>

### Abstract

This study examines the gap between constitutional guarantees and the lived realities of the Christian minority in Pakistan. It aims to assess whether existing legal protections translate into meaningful social, political, and economic rights, and to evaluate the prospects for sustainable Muslim–Christian interfaith harmony within the current institutional and societal framework. The Constitution of Pakistan formally guarantees fundamental rights, including freedom of religion, equality before law, and safeguards against discrimination. Articles 20, 22, 25, and 36 provide explicit protections for religious minorities. Despite these guarantees, Christian communities frequently report challenges related to social exclusion, economic marginalization, misuse of blasphemy laws, limited political representation, and vulnerabilities in employment and education sectors. This disconnect between constitutional text and social practice raises critical questions about state capacity, institutional enforcement, and the broader socio-political culture that shapes interfaith relations. This study adopts a qualitative research design based on document analysis, policy review, and semi-structured interviews with minority rights activists, legal experts, clergy members, and community representatives. Primary sources include constitutional provisions, judicial decisions, and policy documents, while secondary sources include scholarly literature, human rights reports, and media accounts. Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns of institutional gaps, social attitudes, and interfaith engagement mechanisms. The findings reveal a structural implementation gap between constitutional commitments and on-ground realities. While the legal framework provides formal protection, enforcement mechanisms remain weak and inconsistent. Social discrimination, limited access to justice, and politicization of religious identity continue to undermine minority security and inclusion. However, the study also identifies emerging interfaith initiatives led by civil society organizations, religious scholars, and grassroots networks that demonstrate potential for improving Muslim–Christian dialogue. These initiatives, though promising, remain fragmented and lack sustained institutional support. The study recommends strengthening institutional enforcement of minority rights through judicial oversight and administrative accountability. Legal reforms should focus on procedural safeguards to prevent misuse of sensitive laws. Education curricula must incorporate structured interfaith literacy to reduce prejudice at an early stage. Furthermore, structured state-supported interfaith councils with measurable mandates should replace symbolic dialogue platforms. Without systematic reform and political will, constitutional guarantees will remain declaratory rather than transformative.

**Keywords:** Minority Rights Enforcement, Interfaith Dialogue, Religious Freedom, Social Inclusion, Legal-Institutional Gap

### Introduction

Pakistan presents a paradox of constitutional promise and social reality. As an Islamic constitutional state, Pakistan's 1973 Constitution enshrines robust protections for religious minorities, including Christians who constitute approximately 2-3% of the population (Aadil Ali, 2025). Articles 20, 22, and 36 collectively guarantee freedom of profession and practice of religion, safeguards in educational institutions against forced religious instruction, and state protection of minorities' legitimate rights including due representation in federal and provincial services (Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973). The Supreme Court of Pakistan has consistently reaffirmed these obligations, holding in *Church Missionary Trust Association v. Federation of Pakistan* (2022) that the state must safeguard minority rights to foster harmonious societal environments (PLD 36 Quetta High Court). Similarly, in *Mubarik Ali Babar v. Punjab Public Service Commission* (2023), the Court emphasized the inclusive nature of fundamental rights extending to minority communities (SCMR 518). These judicial pronouncements complement constitutional provisions that theoretically position Pakistan as a guardian of religious pluralism. Regardless of such formal assurances, Pakistani Christians are still living in a system of structural marginalization that is socio-economically marginalized with a lack of political disenfranchisement and susceptibility to communal violence. The society is experiencing what researchers refer to as a cycle of abuse in which constitutional equality in Article 25, ensuring that all citizens have equal protection under the law, is hitting against the wall of widespread discrimination during hiring, education, and in politics (Religious Freedom Institute, 2020). The recent events such as the attacks on Christian settlements in Jaranwala in August 2023, and the ongoing violation of the blasphemy laws prove that even legislative safeguards are not enforced but are mere empty promises (Oxford House Research, 2024). In accordance with Aadil Ali (2025), minorities are victimized by government bodies and the social systems although they are productive citizens. This gap between the text and lived reality of the constitution leads to the primary research issue: Why have constitutional guarantees of Christian minorities not yielded into long-term Muslim-Christian interfaith peace in Pakistan?

This article contends that legal guarantees alone prove insufficient for cultivating interfaith harmony; rather, meaningful integration remains constrained by tripartite barriers: weak institutional implementation of constitutional mandates, entrenched socio-religious hierarchies that relegate Christians to marginalized statuses, and the persistent politicization of religious identity. The implementation gap manifests in failures to enforce quota systems for minority representation in civil services, as highlighted in the *Sindh Public Service Commission* case (2015 CLC 1605), where courts acknowledged systemic failures in operationalizing Article 36's promise. Socio-religious hierarchies perpetuate what activist literature describes as "chura" discrimination derogatory treatment rooted in caste associations that limit Christians to sanitation and dangerous manual labor (Barnabas Aid, 2024). Concurrently, the constitutional elevation of Islam as state religion under Article 2 creates interpretive frameworks wherein minority rights become subordinate to majoritarian religious imperatives, facilitating the instrumentalization of religion for political mobilization against Christian communities. Consequently, interfaith harmony requires moving beyond constitutional formalism to address structural impediments that render legal protections functionally hollow.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Interfaith harmony is a complex state which goes beyond coexistence. Its theoretical framework consists of three different dimensions: legal equality, which is the constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination; social acceptance, which is the lack of prejudice in everyday interactions; and mutual trust, which is the reciprocal confidence across religious lines that would allow taking collective action (IDare, 2020). Legal equality is the first level, the one needed but not enough to preserve real harmony, and mutual trust is the aspirational level,

which needs intergroup cooperation at all times. This three-part model can be used to carefully examine the success or failure of the constitutional safeguards to produce substantive interreligious relationships. The difference between negative peace and positive peace gives the necessary analytical clarity. Johan Galtung (1964, 1969) theorized the concept of negative peace, as it is the lack of direct violence and an open conflict, similar to a ceasefire where a background of tension is present. On the other hand, positive peace is a form of integration of the human society (Galtung, 1964, p. 2) by swiftly removing structural violence in the social institutions. In applied to Muslim-Christian relations in Pakistan, negative peace is reflected in the fact that there are no communal riots or pogroms, only positive harmony where there is institutionalized respect and inclusion where religious identity does not dictate civic opportunity or limit social mobility. According to the Institute of Economics and Peace (2014), there are eight pillars to positive peace such as the rights of others are accepted and the distribution of resources is equitable, which are expressed to show the gap between Pakistani constitutional commitments and the real situation in society. Theoretical challenges of constitutionalism in religious states have different interpretations. This is in contrast to secular constitutionalism which supposedly privatizes religion, as Islamic constitutionalism institutionalizes religious identity as a citizenship category, forming what scholars call hierarchical pluralism (Fox, 2008). This structure brings intrinsic contradiction, in that, although Article 2 of the Constitution of Pakistan states that Islam is the state religion, Articles 20-36, on the same breath, secure minority rights. The social contract theory developed by Rawls (1971) provides normative information on how to avoid this tension. The thought experiment of the veil of ignorance proposed by Rawls indicates that rational individuals who would be ignorant about their religious affiliation would pick principles that guaranteed equal basic liberties and the difference principles that would safeguard the least fortunate (Oyeshile, 2008). Nevertheless, the critique of the racial contract by Charles Mills (1997) helps us to realize that even so-called neutral constitutional structures can be used to conceal systemic exclusions that deprive minorities of the securities of the social contract. This study centers its analysis around the law-society gap. Similar to the comparative research that Boyle (2018) emphasizes, constitutional rights are quite ineffective when they do not have institutional mechanisms that hold the government accountable. In Pakistan, this disparity is perceived in the form of structural violence (Galtung, 1969) which is systematic denial of opportunity inherent in bureaucratic procedures, education and labor market discrimination that is neither removed by the constitution in place. The distance is caused by three failures, which are interdependent, namely, the interpretive difference between judicial intent and executive action; the sociological resistance, where the majoritarian norms override the constitutional mandates; and the political economy, which renders the rights of the minority as expendable in the course of electoral calculation. This analysis therefore transcends constitutional formalism to the interaction of law guarantees with social structures, knowing that peace and violence beget each other (Galtung, 1996) - peaceful coexistence must not just proclaim rights but also destroy structural barriers.

### **Constitutional Guarantees for Christian Minorities under the 1973 Constitution**

The 1973 Pakistan Constitution has introduced a detailed set of rights that has placed the Christians minorities as full citizens and not conditional residents. Though incorporated into an Islamic constitutional framework, this legal framework establishes binding responsibilities to religious minority groups via certain substantive and procedural assurances.

#### **Basic Rights System.**

Articles 20, 22, and 25 are the three-part basis of protecting minors. Article 20 ensures that all citizens are free to profess, practice and spread religion and form, retain and run religious bodies. The provision establishes a negative liberty, which is protecting Christian worship and

ecclesiastical administration against state intervention, and a positive right, under which communal religious infrastructure is made possible. Article 22 lays down particular protection on the subjects of educational setting: no citizen of state education must be taught religious doctrine, nor in any way made a participant in religious worship, then that of his own religion, nor an object of religious teaching by the religious communities. This provision deals with the historical patterns of forced assimilation of the country in that it is provided that state education is not used to convert the people into religion. Article 25 defines equality before law and equal protection of law and expressly states that there should be no discrimination by grounds of religion alone. These articles work together in order to establish a formal equality regime.

**Table 1: Constitutional Provisions for Christian Minorities**

Article	Protection Scope	Limitation
20	Freedom of profession, practice, propagation; management of religious institutions	Subject to public order, morality, health
22	No compulsory religious instruction in state institutions; protection of minority educational rights	Applies to state institutions; private institutions exempted
25	Equality before law; non-discrimination	Permits "reasonable classification" under judicial interpretation
36	Protection of legitimate rights; due representation in federal/provincial services	Implementation contingent on executive action
51/106	Reserved seats for non-Muslims in federal/provincial assemblies	Substantive representation limited to advisory capacity

### **Minority Representation and Islamic Provisions**

The Article 36 specifically includes the provision that the state should protect the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, such as providing proper representatives in Federal and provincial services. This is a protection that extends beyond the negative liberties to affirmative obligations. In addition, Articles 51 and 106 provide a reserved seat of non-Muslims in both the federal and provincial assemblies, which gives the non-Muslims a say in the parliament. Yet, these representatives are acting in limits, they are not allowed to amend the provisions of Islamic law or to vote on something considered as Islamic. The constitutional conflict arises between Article 2 (Islam as state religion) and the provisions of minority rights. Although Article 2 declares Islam as the state religion, the guarantees in Article 20-25 will not be nullified. *Churchion Missionary Trust Association v. the Supreme Court*. The Federation of Pakistan (2022) confirmed that Islamic clauses should not atrophy the minority protection, as the clauses in Article 20 are considered as the fundamental rights and not inferior to Article 2. The Court insisted that the constitutional framework of Pakistan has to be constructed harmoniously between the pluralist demands and the Islamic identity. Christians, then, have rights, not privileges as subjects in terms of toleration, but as citizens, which are constitutionally enforceable. The law set of fundamentals is clear: the law of the Constitution incorporates the religious plurality into the polity and not a temporary order that will be settled. The question of whether this formal equality is being converted into substantive citizenship is an analytical question whose answer is provided later in the paper.

### **Social Reality in Pakistan of the Christian Community.**

The guarantees in the constitution that have been outlined above fail miserably when they come in touch with the realities of structure that are systematically marginalizing Pakistani Christians. Instead of a few cases of discrimination, the community is subjected to systematic

marginalization in education, employment, and political representation which is supported by institutionalized discrimination and weaponization of laws against blasphemy.

### **Educational Exclusion**

The data on the educational attainment shows that there are structural barriers to human capital formation. According to the National Council for Justice and Peace, the Christian literacy is at 34, which is dramatically lower than the national average of 46.56% (The Reporters, 2022). This gap is based on poverty being more prevalent nowadays because of the generations, where the vast majority of Christian students drop out of school; only 2 percent of students reach the higher education stage, and also stop their studies already at the matriculation stage due to financial reasons (National Commission for Human Rights [NCHR], 2022). The data published by Non-Formal Education Management Information System presents the number of Christian pupils in the country as 2,469, which is also concentrated in Sindh (85%), and females make only 36 percent of non-Muslim students, which is significantly lower than the overall enrolment rate of females (Pakistan Institute of Education, 2024). This student discrimination generates vicious cycles: low educational attainment causes inability to get a job, trapping generations in poverty.

### **Employment Segmentation and Occupational Traps.**

There is an extreme occupational segregation in the labor market. Although a potential definition is that Christians comprise nearly 1.6% of the Pakistani populace, they form more than 80 percent of the sanitation workers (NCHR, 2022). The imbalance is structural discrimination and not the choice. Government ads directly limit sanitation jobs to Non-Muslim only, with NCHR documenting a large number, more than 300, of these discriminatory notices in 20212022 alone. Even the 5 percent minority employment quota as set in 2009 is habitually underemployed on the high grades; the federal workforce is just 2.8 percent minority with 80 percent of federal workers being in the Basic Pay Scale (BPS) 1-4 jobs (NCHR, 2022).

**Table 2: Structural Employment Discrimination Patterns**

Indicator	Christian Data	National Average	Structural Mechanism
<b>Sanitation workforce representation</b>	80%	1.6% (population proportion)	"Non-Muslims only" job advertisements
<b>Higher education attainment</b>	2%	12-15% (estimated)	Economic constraints, early dropout
<b>Unemployment (youth)</b>	61%	~15%	Limited vocational training (71% never access)
<b>Minority quota fulfillment (federal)</b>	2.8%	5% (mandated)	Bureaucratic resistance, qualification barriers
<b>BPS 1-4 representation</b>	80% of minority employees	N/A	Segregation to low-status positions

It is the same with the Punjab Provincial Assembly: out of 207 BPS-01 posts (sanitary worker, bathroom attendant, gardener), 39 out of 42 vacancies of the sanitary workers are held by Christians, as well as both the vacancies of bathroom attendant workers; only 3 of 163 other

vacancies of the sanitary workers (farash, mali) are occupied by the minorities (NCHR, 2022). Muslims employed as sweepers often decline to clean the gutters, arguing that it is the work of Choorhas (an offensive caste-related word used to describe Christians), and leave the Christian co-workers to do the manual sewer cleaning, unprotected (NCHR, 2022). This is structural brutality structural exposure to fatal working environments (toxic gases, asphyxiation) institutionalized in the employment relations.

### **Political Marginalization**

There is a high level of political participation that is limited. The Punjab Local Government Act 2025 abolishes direct election of minority seats, and instead of direct election, the party-based process of four of four categories of reserved seats (minorities, women, laborers, youth) is introduced in 4,000 union councils and above (Christian Daily, 2025). This makes marginalization institutional by eliminating voter accountability and also contravening the provision of Article 140-A on political authority within the location. The mechanism of picking people will make sure that minority representatives represent the interests of the party, not the needs of the constituency, further developing the concept of political marginalization of the population of pre-existing vulnerable categories, as put forward by Samson Salamat of Rwdari Tehreek (Christian Post, 2025).

### **Blasphemy and Structural Exposure.**

The laws concerning blasphemy are structural tools of control within the community and not individual legal tools. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), there has been an increasing blasphemy business, where networks or groups, often with government officials as members, make up accusations to get money more than they could get through legitimate means, but usually target minorities (Center for the Study of Organized Hate, 2025). The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) enables entrapment by spying on social media, which researchers refer to as structural precariousness of religious minorities. In 2024 alone, Dignity First reported more than 70 violent offenses against Christians, such as premeditated assaults on Christian businesses and homes by Jaranwala (UK Parliament Hansard, 2024). These trends reveal that the accusations of blasphemy are the enforcement mechanism to the hierarchies within the society that makes the whole community constantly exposed to dispossession and violence despite the personal conduct of the individual.

### **The Gap between Law and Practice: an Explanation of the Disconnect.**

The constant mismatch between the constitutional promise and experience of Pakistani Christians is not due to the inefficiency of legislation but to the structural processes that entail the systematic exchange of law with social ranking, political calculation, and institutional incompetence. The key to comprehending this gap is to examine how failure to enforce, localized power distributions, and the instrumentalization of religious identity all play a role of neutralizing the protections of the constitution.

### **Institutional Ability and Selective Implementation.**

The human rights architecture in Pakistan is a victim of the so-called strong laws, weak implementation crisis (Javed, 2026). Although the Constitution is a source of enforceable rights and the judiciary creates constitutional checks through the public interest litigation, structural weaknesses such as poverty, illiteracy, judicial delays, and poor policing enable violations to continue especially in the marginalized communities. The police machine is often a regulator of majoritarian standards, not constitutional ones, and when the accusation of blasphemy appears, the police regularly do not intervene to prevent the mob against accused minorities, therefore losing sovereignty to the vigilantes (The Diplomat, 2023). The discriminatory application of this produces a dual legal regime in which constitutional protection is applied

procedurally but the communal application in fact adheres to power relations. According to the Institute of Strategic Studies, the Constitution provides equality before the law, but, in most cases, access to justice is in fact the economic power and not legal entitlement (Javed, 2026).

### **Local Power Structures and Parallel Governance.**

Informal institutions are still rampant against the penetration of constitutional law in the daily relations between Muslims and Christians. The biraderi (kinship/caste) system is a model of parallelism in governance, specifically in rural Punjab and Sindh, whereby people everywhere in the nation are more confident of their caste affiliations than their government (Semantic Scholar, 2018). These systems adjudicate disputes, regulate local economies and impose social frontiers such as religious segregation, by mechanisms that are impervious to constitutional challenge. Even though, in legal terms, panchayat system has been replaced by the state courts, it still remains the most important place of dispute resolution and the main idea and thoughts promoting the source of holding and justifying socio-economic and political power is called key Biradaris (Semantic Scholar, 2018). As a result, the constitutional equality guarantees (Article 25) are challenged by what anthropologists describe by the term, hierarchical pluralism (Fox, 2008) of social order, in which status is determined in religious identity regardless of legal formalism.

### **Religious Identity is being politicized.**

Religious identity is a political asset that views minorities systematically disadvantaged. Religious parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam have shifted their position as marginal players to the center of legislative processes and they use conservative religious norms as a strategic tool in mobilizing constituencies (Zeeshan, Khan & Iqbal, 2025). It is not limited to the expressly religious parties; secular political leaders, such as Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and modern politicians have always played the religious card to win over religious political parties (Religious Freedom Institute, 2017). The outcome is what researchers describe as competitive intolerance - a political market in which parties lure one another to prove dedication to the majoritarian interests of religion, which leaves minority protection as electorally dispensable. The laws on blasphemy are another example of such an instrumentalization: the laws were initially colonial-era, but in the post-1980s, their growth turned them into the means of the so-called deployment of a persecution weapon, with religious minorities being around 40 out of the 100 accused of blasphemy despite their representing less than 5 percent of the population (Muslim Vibe, 2024).

**Table 1: Mechanisms of Law-Society Disconnect**

<b>Legal Guarantee</b>	<b>Social Reality</b>	<b>Mediating Mechanism</b>
<b>Article 20: Religious freedom</b>	Church burnings, restricted worship	Failure to protect against mob violence; police complicity
<b>Article 22: No forced religious instruction</b>	Mandatory Islamic studies in schools	Bureaucratic inertia; absence of alternative curricula
<b>Article 25: Equality before law</b>	Employment discrimination; "Choorha" designation	<i>Biraderi</i> enforcement of occupational hierarchy
<b>Article 36: Due representation</b>	Tokenistic reserved seats; selection vs. election	Political party gatekeeping; patronage politics
<b>Anti-blasphemy protections</b>	171 blasphemy cases in 2023; 40% targeting minorities	Judicial delays; extremist networks; PECA misuse

### **Judicial Limitations and Structural Violence**

Procedural inefficacy and institutional capture continues to limit the ability of the judiciary to close the law-practice gap. Courts have made landmark rulings to recognize the rights of minorities, like Church Missionary Trust Association (2022), to be protected by the state, but it remains a matter of implementation by executive branches that often seem to disregard the orders of the court. The doctrine of harmonious construction by the Supreme Court tries to balance the provisions of Islam with those of the minority, but this judicial balancing makes the constitution provisions unstable in interpretation as the process of the tension between freedom and enforcement is unresolved (Javed, 2026). Also, judicial solutions can only offer retrospective relief, they cannot stop the structural violence inherent in educational syllabuses that teach masses to become extremists (The Diplomat, 2023) or the social marginalization that exposes Christian sanitation workers to fatal workplace hazards.

### **The Breach of Law to Restructure Daily Interaction.**

The constitutional law is unable to change Muslim-Christian relations due to its functioning on the state-citizen level at the time when marginalization takes place mostly in the civil society, in the workplace, education and residential localities. Employment discrimination is forbidden by law (Article 25) but the biraderi system creates occupational segregation; the law ensures religious freedom (Article 20) but local power structures create spatial segregation and restrictions on worship; the law mandates equality, but no practical action to curb violence is taken at the societal level by its political institutions and criminal justice system (The Diplomat, 2023). This institutional divide is why constitutional assurances did not translate into long-term interreligious peace: law can order the lack of discrimination but it cannot enforce the existence of mutual trust without breaking the informal norms and practices (Semantic Scholar, 2018), which make up social reality in Pakistan.

### **Implications on Muslim Christian interfaith Harmony.**

The above discussion indicates that the constitutional security has not been able to bring about interfaith harmony since the structural inequality cannot be addressed by legal formalism. The substantive equality is needed in interfaith harmony, which is active contact with mutual trust and joint action but Pakistani Christians are only symbolically included in the conditions of structural inferiority. It is analytically important: tolerance allows people to coexist although hierarchy still exists; harmony demands eliminating hierarchies which keep people unrecognised.

### **Insecurity of the Law and the Dying of the Fidelity.**

Intergroup relation is essentially undermined by institutional distrust. Other studies have shown that distrust of institutions decreases trust among strangers, enhances prejudice, and decreases prosocial behavior among community boundaries (Van Prooijen and Douglas, 2022). Where Christian societies can note that constitutional rights are being applied selectively, where the laws against blasphemy are used as the tools of extortion and the laws against equality are not being enforced, the consequent legal insecurity causes defensive withdrawal instead of defensive engagement. The Sargodha 2023 case is a demonstration of this process: after the mosque proclaimed the protest due to the alleged blasphemy, about 4,000 Christians fled their residences, which shows that even the legal protection does not ensure any psychological protection against the communal violence (Release International, 2023). It is this phenomenon of security gap where constitutional rights are on paper but the actual safety is conditional upon the majority not acting that gives rise to what sociologists refer to as parallel lives, where communities live in the same geographical space and are, however, socially disconnected.

### **Symbolic Inclusion/Substantive Integration.**

The example of Pakistan undertaking the reserved seat system to the non-Muslim nation is an example of symbolic inclusion replacing substantive representation. Whereas Articles 51 and 106 ensure parliamentary representation, elimination of direct election of minority seats in Punjab in 2025 and their replacement by party nomination turns political representation into what scholars refer to as "symbolic inclusion" where minority candidates act as liberal symbols as opposed to constituent representatives (Dancygier, 2017; Christian Daily, 2025). This process is meant to guarantee that the Christian voices are procedurally present but substantially absent in the policy-making process.

**Table 1: Symbolic Inclusion Versus Substantive Integration**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Symbolic Inclusion (Current Reality)</b>	<b>Substantive Integration (Harmony Requirement)</b>
<b>Political Participation</b>	Party-selected reserved seats; no constituency accountability	Direct election; autonomous agenda-setting
<b>Educational Access</b>	Constitutional right to education; 2% higher education attainment	Equal completion rates; integrated curricula
<b>Economic Participation</b>	5% employment quota; 80% concentrated in sanitation	Occupational diversity; proportional representation across sectors
<b>Social Interaction</b>	Tolerance of Christian presence; spatial segregation	Collaborative engagement; shared residential and institutional spaces
<b>Legal Protection</b>	Constitutional guarantees; selective enforcement	Consistent enforcement; institutionalized accountability

### **Community-Level Consequences: Parallel Lives and Social Withdrawal**

The idea of parallel lives, which was first created to describe ethnically segregated societies in Britain, is the most appropriate description of Muslim-Christian relations in Pakistan (Cantle, 2005). Although Christians and Muslims are equal as stated in the constitution, they live in different social, cultural, educational and employment patterns that do not intersect anywhere (Cantle, 2005, p. 14). This division is structural: education enrolment figures indicate that there are only 2,469 Christian students in non-formal education nationwide; on occupation, 80 percent of sanitation workers are Christian even though they constitute 1.6 percent of the population; and residential: the Christians are concentrated in informal settlements where they are easily targeted by mobs. The resultant effect is ignorance and fear of one another whereby the myth and misinformation will be left to flourish with no leadership to advance positive diversity (Cantle, 2005). This institutional segregation creates withdrawal tendencies that continue to harm peace. It has also increased the scope of emigration where rising religious intolerance is making Christians flee to other countries (Girrjournal, 2023). Remaining ones take invisibility strategies such as not declaring themselves as religious, not sending their children to mixed schools, or not resisting occupational ghettoization to reduce exposure to majority aggression. These kinds of behaviors are logical responses to the institutionalized insecurity, but at the same time they kill the possibility of the cross-cultural dialogue and social mixing, which is defined by the theory of intercultural as the conditions of harmony (Meer et al., 2016).

### **The reasons why Harmony Needs Equality.**

Literature on interfaith dialogue draws a distinction between passive tolerance which is merely allowing the existence of other faiths, and active engagement which aims to learn and understand their different faiths (Sustainability Directory, 2025). Pakistan is defined by the former model of the constitution: Christians are free to live, to worship and to vote, however,

they are not free to affect the social conditions of their lives as equals. It must be accompanied by what Rawls (1971) has described as fair equality of opportunity or, not the absence of legal obstacles, but the existence of institutional means so that religious identity is not the determinant of life opportunities. As long as the constitutional assurances of Pakistan are not translated into breaking the occupational segregation rooted in biraderi, the educational segregation and the political tokenism that is inherent in the Christian parallel lives, interfaith harmony becomes analytically impossible despite the fact that intercommunal tolerance may be high.

### **Developmental Measures to Constitutionalism-based Interfaith Peace.**

Interfaith harmony can only be realized after going beyond constitutional formalism, structural reforms that will combat deficiencies in enforcement, educational apartheid, and instrumentalization of religious identity. The following routes provide grounded and incremental processes of converting legal guarantees to social reality, being sensitive to political constraints and focusing on the vulnerabilities of the system.

#### **Enhancing the Institutional Enforcement.**

The National Commission for Minorities Rights Bill 2025 will be a preliminary institutional move, establishing a legislative institution to observe infractions and offer policy recommendations (Courting the Law, 2025). The watering down of the legislation in the parliamentary negotiation however, which removed a clause 35 in the legislation which would have permitted the overriding of conflicting legislation and the power of the *sui motu* investigation and enforced this may have been the political choking of reform. Much-needed realistic development demands enhanced independence of this body in the current restraint: representation of the minority communities in appointments, stable funding in form of streams not tied to executive will and reporting to parliamentary bodies annually. Simultaneous changes have to tackle the fact that law enforcement is unable to act because of the lack of specialized police training in dealing with intelligence gathering, crowd control, and riots early detection (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [HRCP], 2025). Most importantly, the procedural protection of blasphemy charges, such as the obligatory scrutiny of the charges by senior police officials prior to FIR registration pursuant to Sections 295-B and 295-C as well as the strict implementation of Sections 182 and 211 of the Pakistan Penal Code on false accusers can diminish weaponization without the need to repeal the legislation, which is currently not supported by politicians (Record of Law, 2026; Christian Daily, 2025).

#### **The Reform of Education and Citizenship.**

Education system is now being a phenomenal engine of intergenerational marginalization. Article 22 is abused by the Single National Curriculum (currently National Curriculum of Pakistan) that includes Islamic teachings in mandatory non-religious subjects, and it was found that 15% of the textbooks on Pakistan Studies include hate speech or derogatory language about minorities (Center for Social Justice [CSJ], 2025; Bitter Winter, 2025). Reform should focus on three practices: (1) abolition of religious education in compulsory subjects to adhere to Article 22(1); (2) the approval of religion textbooks by the National Curriculum Council (three years later) on seven minority religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Bahaism, Zoroastrianism, Kalasha, Buddhism) with qualified teachers and equal distribution; and (3) the establishment of constitutional citizenship education with the focus on shared citizenship rather than differentiated religious identity (CSJ, 2025; FOR These reforms need administrative measures by the ministries and not overhaul of the legislations making them possible to achieve within the current institutional structures.

### **Religion and Leadership in the Constitution.**

The clergy have special powers to close the divide between the constitutional rights and the attitudes of the communities. In 2014, Church Missionary Trust Association was ruled by the Supreme Court that expressly urged the religious leaders to foster tolerance and discourage extremist discourses. According to the 2025 Interfaith Harmony Policy, this role is acknowledged with reference to the August 11, 1947 speech of Quaid-e-Azam that laid the concept of equal citizenship as a fundamental constitutional outlook (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2025). Efficient engagement needs to include religious leadership into the rightful structures of the National Commission to Minorities Rights consultation and the supporting civil society movements that focus on the Islamic concepts of justice and moderation as directly opposite to the constitutional pluralism. This is a strategy which uses the already established religious power to demonstrate constitutional citizenship instead of focusing secularism on religious identity.

### **Minority Protection to Equal Citizenship.**

The normative change that has to be made is the conceptual one of changing the notion of minority protection into equal citizenship. The report Streets of Fear by HRCP underlines that it is crucial that religious minorities cannot be considered as a safer or more protected subject, but they should be treated as equals and that the structural aspects that form the life of parallel living must be dismantled (HRCP, 2025). This change requires: (1) the 5% employment quota should be strictly implemented at all levels of government with the sanction of not doing so; (2) the overt should be dropped in placing the advertised vacancies of the sanitation positions; (3) the minorities should be restored into direct-election at the local governments; and (4) the independent inquiry commission should be formed to probe the entrapment in the cases of blasphemy. These actions go beyond pragmatic tolerance to active inclusion because interfaith harmony is essential to social unity and that acceptance of non-violence does not entail institutional equality (President of Pakistan, 2026).

**Table 1: Realistic Reform Trajectory**

<b>Reform Area</b>	<b>Short-Term (1-2 years)</b>	<b>Medium-Term (3-5 years)</b>	<b>Political Constraints</b>
<b>Institutional</b>	Strengthen NCMR reporting; police training in crowd management	Independent statutory commission with inquiry powers	Religious party opposition to override authority
<b>Legal- Procedural</b>	Mandatory senior police review for blasphemy FIRs; enforce penalties for false accusations	Make blasphemy offenses bailable and non-cognizable per ICJ recommendations	Extremist mobilization; judicial intimidation
<b>Educational</b>	Remove religious content from compulsory subjects; deploy minority faith textbooks	Constitutional citizenship curriculum; teacher bias training	Curriculum conservatism; madrassa autonomy
<b>Political</b>	Restore direct elections for minority local government seats	Eliminate "separate electorates" entirely	Party gatekeeping; biraderi politics

These avenues also recognize that interfaith harmony cannot be enacted upon but must be built by breaking the structural violence within institutionalized practices. Development is pegged on aligning judicial supervision, executive action, and civil society observation without undermining minority interests to majority inclinations since constitutionalism in Pakistan should not disregard infrastructures of religion.

## Conclusion

The constitution in Pakistan defines Christians as the rights bearers rather than the tolerated subjects but the fact remains that the Muslim Christian discord has not ended despite the constitutional framework reasonably, showing that the legal formalism does not have enough powers to change the social structures. Religious freedom, equality, and minority representation guarantees of the Constitution are being systematically undermined by lame institutional enforcement, power structures of biraderi, which promote occupational and spatial segregation, and politicalization of religious identity which makes minority and other rights electorally expendable. Thus, the Pakistani Christians live in parallel lives characterized by educational segregation, ghettoization in the employment of sanitation workers and tokenism in politics, which creates a sense of legal insecurity and defense withdrawal, which ultimately makes interfaith trust impossible. The blasphemy bills are not just devices of law, but of social organization, and symbolic incorporation through special seats in place of real incorporation. The analysis shows that interfaith harmony is not something that can be created by the constitutional text alone, but that it needs to break down the structural violence that the institutional practices are based on and it should go beyond tolerance and equality of citizens. Such meaningful development requires the procedural protection against the weaponization of blasphemy law, educational changes that codify citizenship instead of religious distinction, and the restructuring of minority commissions into an enforcement agency. Legal guarantees will remain a hollow form until Pakistan manages to fill the gap between constitutional promise and social reality, i.e. that the identity of religion has no effect on the chances of life, and interfaith harmony can remain analytically unachievable no matter how intermittently there may be intercommunal tolerance.

## References

Ahmad Javed, A. (2026, January 24). *Strong laws, weak implementation: Pakistan's human rights crisis*. Pakistan Today.

Ali, A. (2025). The marginalized voices: A socio-political study of minorities in Pakistan. *ASA Journal*, 4(2), 1460–1468.

Boyle, A. (2018). *Human rights: Closing the gap*. Edinburgh, SL: Scottish Human Rights Commission.

Cantle, T. (2005). Parallel lives—The development of community cohesion. In *Citizenship, cohesion and solidarity*. London, England: Smith Institute.

Center for the Study of Organized Hate. (2025, August 17). *Systemic persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan*.

Christian Daily. (2025, November 14). *Christians in Pakistan demand equality in new election law*.

Christian Post. (2025, November 16). *Christians in Pakistan demand equality in new election law*.

Church Missionary Trust Association v. Federation of Pakistan, PLD 2022 Quetta 36 (Pakistan).

Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, arts. 20, 22, 25, 36, 51, 106.

Danygier, R. (2017). *Dilemmas of inclusion: Muslims in European politics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dr. Zeeshan, Khan, S. U., & Iqbal, S. (2025). The evolving identity of religious parties in Pakistan's political arena. *ASA Journal*, 3(1), 509–524.

Fox, J. (2008). Religious freedom and the social order: A comparative analysis. *Review of Religious Research*, 50(2), 128–145.

Galtung, J. (1964). An editorial. *Journal of Peace Research*, 1(1), 1–4.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191.

Girrjournal. (2023, June 30). *Analyzing post 9/11 religious freedom in Pakistan*.

IDare. (2020, September 19). *Peace for the people*. IDare Organization blog.

Institute for Economics and Peace. (2014). *Global peace index 2014*. Sydney, Australia: Institute for Economics and Peace.

Meer, N., Modood, T., & Zapata-Barrero, R. (2016). A plural century: Situating interculturalism and multiculturalism. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 4(1), 1–14.

Mills, C. W. (1997). *The racial contract*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Mubarik Ali Babar v. Punjab Public Service Commission, SCMR 518 (Pakistan 2023).

National Commission for Human Rights. (2022). *Unequal citizens: Systemic discrimination in employment of sanitary workers*. Islamabad, Pakistan: National Commission for Human Rights.

Oyeshile, O. (2023). The social contract: A critical analysis. *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 9(4), 48–56.

Pakistan Institute of Education. (2024). *NFEMIS report*. Islamabad, Pakistan: Ministry of Federal Education.

Perception of local community and biradari on panchayat. (2018). *Semantic Scholar*.

Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Religious Freedom Institute. (2017, March 15). *National identity versus religious identity in Pakistan*.

Religious Freedom Institute. (2020). *Pakistan religious freedom landscape report*. Washington, DC: Religious Freedom Institute.

Release International. (2023, July 24). *Christians flee as blasphemy tensions grow*.

Sindh Public Service Commission v. Government of Sindh, CLC 1605 (Karachi High Court 2015).

The Diplomat. (2023, August 25). *Religious intolerance is burning Pakistan*.

The Muslim Vibe. (2024, November 21). *Pakistan's constitutional promises for minorities: Enforcement and challenges*.

The Reporters. (2022, October 18). *Pakistani minorities struggling with low literacy rate*.

UK Parliament Hansard. (2024, November 28). *Pakistan: Freedom of religion*. London, England: UK Parliament.

Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Douglas, K. (2022). Suspicion of institutions: How distrust and conspiracy theories deteriorate social relationships. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 47.