



Image: Amir Qureshi/AFP/Getty Images

## PAKISTAN

Christians are subject to violent persecution and discrimination, much of it directly linked to Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws, which are widely abused. There have been 224 Christian victims of the blasphemy laws since they were passed in 1986. The most notorious case was that of Asia Bibi who, after 10 years in custody including many years on death row, was finally acquitted by the Supreme Court in October 2018. She eventually left Pakistan in May 2019 to start a new life with her family in Canada. With guilty blasphemy verdicts carrying the death penalty and radical Islamists gaining more political power in the region, Christians are living in fear for their lives. Conversions to Christianity from Islam in particular carry tremendous risk. Attacks on churches have occurred in some places.

Christians also suffer from institutionalized discrimination. Jobs considered low, dirty and belittling are often held by Christians – for example, Christian workers make up a very high proportion of the sewerage and street cleaning workforce despite comprising only 1.5 percent of the population.<sup>1</sup> Many Christians are exceptionally poor and some are victims of bonded labor. However, middle class Christians also face marginalization and persecution. In the Punjab region Christian and Hindu girls continue to be abducted and forced into marriage.

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1. K. K. Shahid, "ISIS targeting Christians in Quetta," *The Nation*, April 17 2018, <https://nation.com.pk/17-Apr-2018/isis-targeting-christians-in-quetta> (accessed June 17, 2019).
2. Meher Ahmad and Salman Masood, "Pakistan Makes Concessions to Protesters in Blasphemy Case," *New York Times*, November 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/02/world/asia/pakistan-blasphemy-asia-bibi.html>; Sabrina Toppa, "A Pakistan Court Overturned a Christian Woman's Death Sentence for Blasphemy. Now, Protests Are Spreading Across the Country," *Time*, November 2, 2018, updated November 13, 2018, <https://time.com/5442851/pakistan-blasphemy-asia-bibi-protest/> (both sites accessed June 25, 2019).
3. Leah MarieAnn Klett, "15 year old Christian teen abducted, raped by five Muslim men in Pakistan," *The Christian Post*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/15-y-o-christian-teen-abducted-raped-by-five-muslim-men-in-pakistan.html> (accessed June 24, 2019).

### APRIL 2018

Two Christians were killed and five injured when gunmen shot at worshippers leaving a church in Esa Nagri, Quetta. This was the third attack on the community attributed to Daesh (ISIS) and the second within a fortnight, after a Christian family was shot dead on Easter Monday on Shahzaman Road. In the earlier Daesh attack, at least nine members of Bethel Memorial Methodist Church were killed in a suicide bombing a week before Christmas 2017.<sup>2</sup>

### OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2018

Violent protests paralyzed towns across Pakistan after the Supreme Court acquitted Asia Bibi. Protesters blocked major roadways, forcing the closure of businesses and schools. Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan, which organized the mass demonstration, said both Asia Bibi and the judges who heard the case should be killed. The government reached an agreement with protest leaders allowing an appeal in the Supreme Court and for legal proceedings to be initiated to stop Asia Bibi traveling abroad. The appeal was rejected in January 2019 and Asia Bibi left the country four months later.<sup>3</sup>

### JUNE 2019

On Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup>, 15-year-old Christian girl Maria was abducted from her home in Sheikhpura by five Muslim men and raped.<sup>4</sup> Authorities refused to investigate the crime. The child's father, Jalal Masih, filed a police report, accusing a local businessman and four others. Several witnesses saw the girl abducted at gunpoint. Mr. Masih said: "We made contact the next day and [the kidnapper] threatened to return her dead body if we informed the police."<sup>4</sup>