

Discourses of Nationalism and Pakistaniyyat: Challenges of Othering for Religious Minorities in Pakistan

Tabita Victor

PhD Scholar at the Department of Political Science, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan.
Email: tabitavictor@live.com (Corresponding Author)

Sadia Mahmood Falki

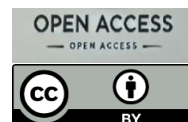
Assistant Professor, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: sadia.falki@lcwu.edu.pk

Misbah Mukhtar

PhD Candidate in Science, Technology, and Innovation Studies, University of Edinburgh, UK.
Email: misbah.mukhtar@ed.ac.uk

Abstract

Nationalism creates a sense of belonging among individuals and groups by emphasizing shared characteristics that, over time, form a broader collective identity. The constructed identity also forms a set of obligations for the people and groups to integrate a designed behavior to recurrently validate their sense of belonging with the respective group, tribe, or state, etc. The state discourses and policies often regularize certain acts, gestures, and beliefs as a part of the assertion of nationalism in an attempt to preserve the identity of the state. In authoritarian states, due to a lack of democratic traditions and practices, once the core beliefs of nationalism are established, these are hardly debated, challenged, or discussed. Religious nationalism generates an unyielding form of authority while requiring people to submit without any spaces for social, political, and religious dissent. Pakistan, nevertheless, is a federal democracy, conceived as an independent state on the basis of its religious identity. The nationalism in Pakistan is perceived as 'Pakistaniyyat'; however, over the years, this idea, at least through state discourses, has remained subjected to Islamization of state and society with varying intensity while creating categories of citizens. The study focuses on how the idea of nationalism has evolved in Pakistan before and after independence. This paper also explicates how, over the period of time, the notion of Pakistaniyyat has evolved. This research also explains what Pakistaniyyat means in its real essence and how it is interpreted. Additionally, how are the religious minorities and their relationship with the state and society affected by these ideas of Pakistani nationalism? Does Pakistaniyyat provoke strong religious othering and the politics of exclusion of religious minorities in Pakistan? This research is primarily exploratory in nature and concludes that religious nationalism alone cannot help in the process of integration and harmony, as it diminishes the spaces for other forms of identity. There is a need to encourage intellectual debate on civic nationalism in Pakistan to explore what may legitimately constitute Pakistaniyyat.



Received:
24 November 2025

Revised:
16 March 2026

Accepted:
27 April 2026

Published:
5 June 2026

Keywords: Citizenship, Discourses, Nationalism, Pakistaniyat, Othering, Religious Minorities.

Introduction

Nationalism creates a sense of belonging among individuals and groups through asserting some similarities that, over a period of time, establish a larger identity. The process of nationalism is generally reinforced through national rituals, employing national discourses in the education system, and often strengthened by highlighting the perceived threats such as states, ideologies, cultures, or social groups to the core values of the idea of nationhood. At times, nationalism is shaped through the construction of the idea of ‘others’ or ‘outsiders’, who are significantly considered different from the majority of people, in terms of culture and identity. The potential co-existence with ‘others’ is viewed as an inevitable threat to the core ideas of nationalism and identity by perceiving a probable contamination of values. Along with common heritage and language, the shared historical narratives and collective past not only create strong national bonding while determining the level of solidarity and social cohesion but also set the parameters of inclusion and exclusion. The exclusion process, though not necessarily constitutional, proceeds in a social and political sense in polarized societies. The frequent assertions of a collective past while identifying certain groups, tribes, and cultures as ‘others’ foster strong boundaries of ‘US versus Them’ where individuals start looking at national identity and internalizing national behavior and norms as a part of their personal identities and psychological makeup. The identities are largely constructed in order to form and mobilize groups towards the accomplishment of specific political goals. Keeping in view the contrasting and relational nature of identity construction, an identity often gets its meaning and existence from other identities (Martin, 1995). At times, an identity is exclusively defined by the ‘other’, then the distinctiveness and otherness are more emphasized, whereas common traits are disregarded (İnaç & Ünal, 2013). This repeated over-emphasis on othering within a society with unresolved disagreements based on contrasting political, ethnic, economic, and religious goals not only creates ‘us’ vs ‘them’ but constructs an idea and image of a collective enemy. This helps us understand that in Pakistan, self (Muslim) is exclusively defined against an extremely negative ‘other’ (non-Muslim), which leads towards increased focus on shared differences, fear and threats rather than shared goals such as socio-economic development, peace, harmony, human security, etc. Pakistan’s national identity centers on what it is not by frequent references to non-Muslims and their socio-cultural practices as inevitable

inferiors. This not only constructed a tradition of viewing non-Muslims as a collective enemy but also incorporated hierarchical positioning on the basis of religious faith in Pakistani society.

The images of the ‘other’ do not remain confined to the political elite; they are generally disseminated to the masses through education and media narratives (Dijk, 1998). A specific identity, for instance, Muslim identity in the Sub-continent, can be more influential at a certain period of time; however, the modernization process, spread, and access to technology, communication means, and resultant transformation of ideas can also transmute the nature of identity and sense of belonging. In a similar fashion, in pre-modern Europe, religious identity was dominant, but later modernization and development made national identity more critically relevant (İnaç & Ünal, 2013). Similarly, Pakistaniyat needs to be reoriented according to the emergent and contemporary challenges in Pakistan. The essence of being Pakistani must be defined by shared goals such as socio-economic development, human security, and social justice, a vital component of an Islamic polity. The focus of an inclusive Pakistaniyat must be on establishing civic nationalism leading to civic identity; a blend of religious morality of community, such as kindness, generosity, charity, ethics, and cultural pluralism, while endorsing values of transparency, accountability, and humility. The ideas of Islamic democracy and civic nationalism can go hand in hand as both focus on equality, liberty, and social justice. An inclusive identity is already in the making in Pakistan as it is shaped by frequently practicing and asserting certain values. For instance, the foreign tourists travelling to Pakistan often highlight the unmatched hospitality, friendly nature, and generosity of the Pakistani people, irrespective of their socio-economic status.

Demographic Profile of Religious Minorities in Pakistan

Religious minorities constituted approximately 23 percent of Pakistan’s population in 1947. Most of these religious minorities were residing in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), and after the separation of its eastern region in 1971, contemporary Pakistan was left with approximately 3 percent of religious minorities. These religious minorities consisted of Christians, Hindus (both religions are 92 percent of the total religious minorities), Ahmadis, and smaller groups of Parsis/Zoroastrians, Baha’is, Sikhs, Buddhists, etc. Almost 95 percent of these religious minorities live in two provinces: Sindh and Punjab (Religious Freedom Landscape Report: Pakistan 2020, 2020). According to the Pakistan population census of 1998, the total population of Pakistan was then approximately 132 million. Muslims made up 96.28 per cent of the total

population; Christians 1.59 percent; caste Hindus 1.60 per cent; scheduled castes 0.25 per cent; Ahmadis 0.22 per cent; and the rest, including Sikhs and Buddhists, a mere 0.07 per cent.

Figure 1

Religious Demographics Census 1998

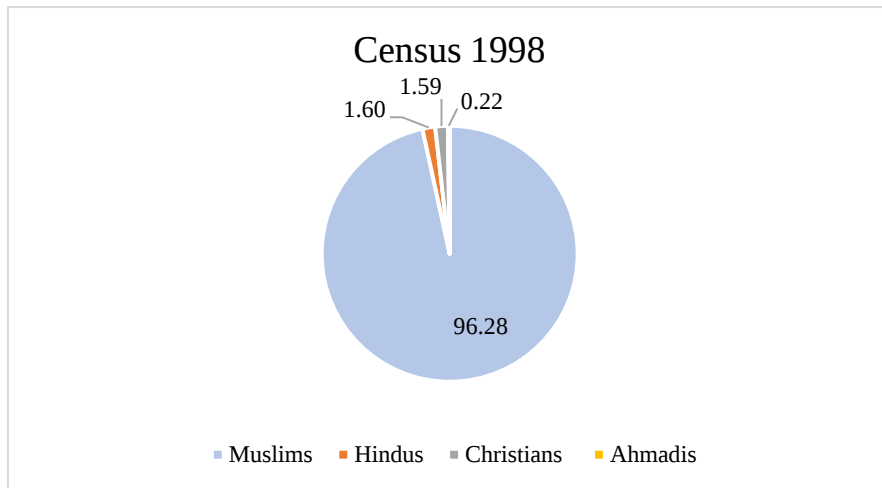
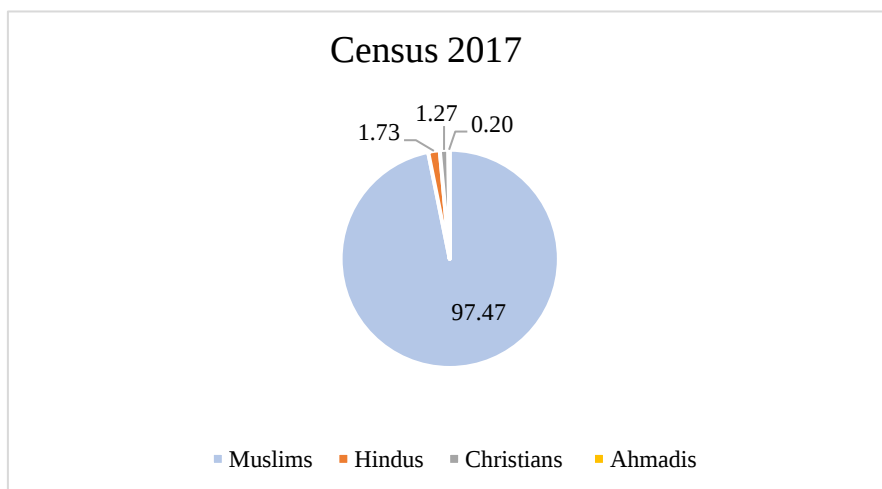


Figure 2

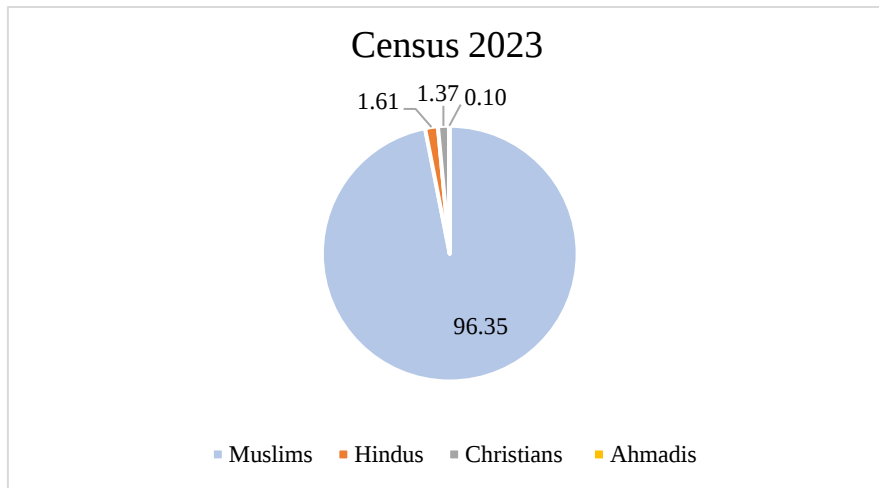
Religious Demographics Census 2017



According to the Census 2023, Bureau of Statistic Census 2023, Urban Spurt educational crisis and going off-grid, Abdul Maiz Malik, published in Dawn on July 29, 2025.

Figure 3

Religious Demographics Census 2023



Relationship of Religious Nationalism and Religious Othering in Pakistan

The idea of nationalism in Pakistan is grounded in religious nationalism, as Islam plays a significant role in unfolding the national identity in Pakistan. Religious nationalism significantly influences the relationship between religious minorities, Pakistan, and its society. It works at all levels of communication: state, societal, and institutional. Moreover, this relationship is largely driven by a religious worldview, which greatly impacts institutional and political settings of Pakistan through laws, policy, and patronage to religious organizations and their resultant say in determining the status of religious minorities. In the pre-independence period, key Muslim leadership, despite the fact that they were themselves not traditionally conservative Muslims, employed the religious identity of Muslims to accomplish a state on the grounds of the idea of a nation-state. This political positioning of religion by Muslim leadership certainly popularized the ‘Two-Nation theory’ as there were no other widespread ethnic or cultural similarities among Muslims of the Sub-Continent. This strategy strengthened the constitutional and political demands of Muslim leadership, and later this was reflected in the Lahore Resolution on 23rd March 1940.

In historical perspective, the ideology of Pakistan came into existence based on Islamic beliefs. This religious connotation became one of the leading forces for Muslims in United India. The declaration of Pakistan as an Islamic republic, though, did not challenge the federal identity of the state; however, at the operational level, it created paradoxes (Falki, 2019). The official name of the country conditioned the sense of belonging of citizens to Islamic values and beliefs in Pakistan. The preservation of the official Islamic identity of Pakistan in all constitutional schemes became a precedent and a convenient way for elected civilian as well as military rulers to prove their devotion to the greater interest of the state, which was primarily depicted as superior and above the welfare and interests of its people. In contemporary Pakistan, religion has become a sensitive issue and has proved to be a political and constitutional potent force to mobilize masses for vested interests of the powerful elite and electoral advantages of groups and parties. In many cases of political disputes, land grabbing, personal hatreds, and other economic motives, false allegations of blasphemy are employed to pursue vested interests. In such cases, religion is used as an instrument to gain personal or group payback. The collective discrimination and prejudices against religious minorities exist at different levels of the state, institutions, and society in Pakistan. These biases are unintended consequences of historical legacies, profoundly embedded in caste-based discernment and societal predisposition, rather than an official, overt government policy of religious exclusion in Pakistan.

Table 1

Dimensions of Religious Minority Discrimination and Exclusion

State level	Constitutional discrimination, policies leading to frequent strong assertion of religious identity in education, laws, and even in the political rhetoric of state discourses. Lack of consideration or policies for socio-economic uplift and significant inclusion or representation of religious minorities in the legislation process or laws specifically related to religion.
Societal level	Socio-economic disparities due to socially assumed religiously inferior status, religious discrimination leading to hatred, segregation, stereotyping, and social stigmatization.
Institutional level	Informal endorsement of societal practices towards religious minorities, both at the structural and operational levels of policy making and enforcement. Limited representation, quotas, and

	discriminatory laws. Formal declaration of some of the menial jobs, especially sweeper and sanitation, for non-Muslims only.
--	--

Research Methodology

This research is primarily qualitative in nature, and an exploratory research approach is employed to find out the relationship between religious nationalism and religious othering. The professed idea of Pakistaniyat and the politics of exclusion are used as mediating variables. The study has used discourse analysis and historical interpretation. Discourse analysis is used to examine language across various contexts while understanding the meaning behind them. Discourse analysis method is useful for analyzing writings and speeches related to nationalism especially speeches of the founding father, Mohammad Ali Jinnah. A limited number of semi-structured interviews were conducted in Lahore city to add a standpoint from religious minorities about Nationalism and Pakistan. The non-Muslim respondents belonged to different professions with lower, middle, and upper-class backgrounds in Pakistan. This research paper is not exclusively built on the worldviews of respondents from religious minorities, as a substantial part of the underlying study is based on historical and constitutional analysis. The themes extracted from the limited number of interviews of religious minorities are added for the perspective; however, it must not be treated as a generalization.

Table 2

Themes Identified in Interviews as Challenges for Religious Minorities.

Vigilante Violence	One of the leading challenges is vigilante violence or extrajudicial actions carried out through mob violence. Many incidents took place where people of the majority faith took the law into their own hands. Additionally, false allegations of blasphemy turned into violent mob attacks, causing the lynching of non-Muslim individuals, but also attacking residential areas of religious minorities and religious places. Jaranwala 2023, Joseph Colony 2013, and Gojra 2009 are such instances.
Legal and Institutional Discrimination	Socio-economic disparities, limited representation, inadequate quotas, and discriminatory laws (specifically

Structural Institutional Discrimination	the Blasphemy law) are a threat to the security and safety of religious minorities. Political Representation, Blasphemy Law
Social Categorization: US versus Them	Religious minorities are categorized into in-group and out-group identities.
Socio-Cultural Stigmatization	Cultural Inferiority and Moral Policing leading to affect in daily life and stereotypical experiences at the cultural level.
Socio-Economic Marginalization	Fewer economic opportunities for religious minorities
Forced Conversion	Forced conversion of religious minority girls and later on depraved behavior of the in-laws created stigmatization and discrimination due to previous religious identity.
Ghettoization	Furthermore, the ghettoization of religious minority colonies in slum areas is unsanitary and overcrowded.
Religious Intolerance	Spread of religious intolerance, hate speech, derogatory language, and disinformation through social media.
Caste-Based Discrimination	Pakistan has a culturally strong setup based on the belonging to caste system. Religious minorities are degraded due to their belonging to the lower caste Chuhra, to humiliate and socially exclude them.
Mis-Information	Misinformation, persona, and conflicts transform into religious conflicts, and hate speech provokes violence.

Discussion: Did Jinnah imagine an Islamic State?

Jinnah's political communication can be classified into four phases. Jinnah envisioned national freedom for Hindus and Muslims, which he endeavored to pursue through Hindu-Muslim Unity in United India. However, in

the given circumstances, his second phase started where he focused on Hindu-Muslim separatism and partition as his prime objective was to secure political power for Muslims (Mujahid, 1996). The third phase commenced with the arrival of a paradigm shift in the politics of United India in the post-1937 elections, and emergent realities made Islam and religious identity key discourses of Jinnah's political talk. From 1937 onwards, Jinnah frequently referred to Islam in his political communication; he often articulated his interpretation of religion. For instance, in January 1938 at the Gaya Muslim League conference, he asserted that the foundation of our Islamic code is that we stand for liberty, equality, and fraternity' (Speeches and statements by M.A. Jinnah from the period 1938-1940, 2009). Jinnah's political discourses in the pre-partition era, especially in the 1940s and onwards, extensively focused on the Muslim identity of the future state, as political mobilization among Muslims was largely encouraged on the basis of Muslim separatism. The Muslim mobilization in United India was driven by an urge for the recognition of the religious and cultural peculiarity of the Muslim community, as these identities were viewed as at risk under a likely Hindu majority.

In the post-independence phase, when religion was out, and language was in as a political base to power and representational claims by different ethnic groups, then Jinnah also altered his political discourse as per the changed political and demographic realities. Jinnah was a constitutionalist who was wise enough to understand the dynamics of the state-building phase. The fourth phase of political communication had begun when Jinnah became the founding father and started to envision Pakistan as a secular, modern, and Islamic-federal democracy with a strong central government. Jinnah elucidated Islam and Hinduism in the context of two ideologies, not exclusively as religions, as these carry unlike philosophies, driven by distinct civilizations, literature, and social customs, which ultimately led them to pursue different political systems. Jinnah's consistency of thought regarding Hinduism and Islam leading to two different political systems were also reflected in his infamous speech on August 11, 1947 when he explicated that "Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State" (Mr. Jinnah's presidential address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan). His understanding of Islamic democracy was the incorporation of principles of 'liberty, fraternity, and equality' through social justice. His continuous references to these essentials of Islamic society indicated a likelihood of civic covenant in Pakistan. He envisioned equality of rights of citizens irrespective of their caste, religion, and

sub-national identities. Jinnah also emphasized a parliamentary system to ensure civilian supremacy, an inclusive government, and the rule of law in Pakistan.

The 'Two-Nation Theory' gave a firm reasoning for a Muslim separate state in the context of communal politics and emergent violence in the Sub-Continent. However, the post-partition period clearly provoked exclusion based on religious othering, which was contrary to Jinnah's own vision of an inclusive state. A well-known historian (Jalal, 2011) elucidates the reason for this inconsistency when she views Pakistan as Jinnah's strategic failure. She argues that Jinnah used the idea of Pakistan as a bargaining chip to secure an advantageous power-sharing mechanism for Muslims in a loose federation of United India and did not want a separate state. This view is contended by (Ahmad, 2021) who sees the creation of Pakistan as a deliberate design of Jinnah. However, he criticized that Jinnah's intransigent approach led to the harrowing violence of partition, which built Pakistan's foundational notion on religious differences and suppression of local cultures. This shaped internal strains and hindered the formation of a cohesive national identity in Pakistan. These scholarly works focus on high politics and exclusively assess the decisions Jinnah made while highlighting the incongruities of what he believed and what he was able to achieve. Although these historical commentaries present intense scrutiny of Jinnah and overlook the human limitations and prevalent dynamics of the politics of the Sub-continent. Nevertheless, it is an irrefutable fact that Jinnah was a rational and legislative mindset who viewed Pakistan as 'the greatest good for the greatest numbers' (Khan, 2022).

In the post-partition period, Jinnah did not assert the religious identity of the state as the core of his political discourses, as political realities were completely transformed. Although the role of Islamic ideology was proclaimed as an outcome of the legacies of the independence movement. This was evident as just days before the establishment of Pakistan as a separate state, Jinnah referred to the features of secularism while stating that "You are free; you are to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other places of worship. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste and creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one State" (Malik, 2002). The idea of secularism is generally shaped through three core principles: freedom of belief, institutional separation, and no discrimination on the basis of religious identity (Jermey, 2019). Jinnah, in his speech of August 11,

1947, mentioned all three core principles while indicating that anyone's religious identity would not affect their relationship with the state. Though it's a matter of fact that Jinnah never mentioned the word 'secular' in his pronouncements from 1934-1948, and during his July 17, 1947, press conference, he claimed that Islam provided the system of democracy thirteen years ago (Mujahid, 1996).

It seems that Jinnah was keen to incorporate the values of an Islamic democracy based on equality, liberty, fraternity, and social justice while envisioning the values of tolerance, compassion, and equity. He unambiguously rejected the prospects of Pakistan being a theocratic state largely run by mullahs. In February 1948, during a broadcast to the people of the United States of America, Jinnah clearly expounded that 'in any case, Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic State to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non-Muslim Hindus, Christians, and Parsees, but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan' (Ahmed, 2005). Jinnah was supportive of equality of citizenship and an admirer of capable and hardworking people, irrespective of their religious identity. Jinnah's inclusive approach was not confined to rhetoric, as he assigned many non-Muslims important duties in newly independent Pakistan. Jogendra Nath Mandal, a Dalit Hindu, was appointed as the first temporary president of the Constituent Assembly (CA), who presided over the historic session of the CA on 11th August 1947. Later, he was appointed as the first Minister of Law and Labor. Jinnah also elevated Alvin Robert Cornelius (Christian) to Chief Justice of Lahore High Court, and later he served as Law Secretary in Liaquat Ali Khan's government. Although Jinnah's untimely demise in the backdrop of Pakistan's abrupt transition from nation-building to state-building created the crisis of consensus on the nature, form, and scope of political institutions made religion relevant for the state elite to accomplish a constitutional accord.

Politics of Exclusion and Religious Othering

The movement of Pakistan was rooted in Muslim nationalism; however, some of the non-Muslim groups and individuals supported the idea of a separate state due to their likely suffering under Hindu dominance, economic interests, and prospects of equality of rights. In the post-independence period, the first constituent assembly was mainly composed of Muslims, and an urge for an Islamic state by Muslim was frequently asserted, which led to overlooking the logical apprehensions of religious minorities. Religious othering was apparent when, at the time of the passing of the Objective Resolution, the concerns of religious minority members were overlooked. Although Mandal, as a Federal

Minister, supported the 'Objective Resolution' of 1949, he believed that it would provide equality for religious minorities. He anticipated on the reasoning of the Islamic idea of social justice to ensure the protection and dignity of religious minorities. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan also proclaimed that democracy, equality, freedom, tolerance, and social justice are key ingredients of the respective resolution, which would be observed in the future constitution. He also mentioned that not providing rights to religious minorities would be un-Islamic in an Islamic society. (Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, 1949). The resolution was adopted with a simple majority as 21 Muslim members voted in its favor except Mian Iftikharuddin, who asserted that such a document must be approved with the assent of the populace rather than merely by members of the league (Ahmad, Mustafa, & Asfa, 2022).

The non-Muslim members largely opposed the resolution, and a non-Muslim member, Prem Hari, suggested that the resolution must be circulated first to evoke public opinion. The fragmentation between the Muslims and non-Muslims was apparent as minority members feared that this would blur the line between religion and politics, which can lead to a theocratic state while compromising the equality of rights of religious minorities. Another member, Bhupendra Kumar Datta, was apprehensive about the possibility of misuse of delegated powers from the Almighty to the state by some politically ambitious individuals. Datta also pointed out that 'limits prescribed by the Almighty' would remain dependent on interpretations and variations of different authorities at different times. He, while referring to the provision 'wherein the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice, as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed', demanded that the words 'as enunciated by Islam' should be removed. Chandra Chattopadhyaya also had similar concerns about the state becoming a sole authority due to delegated powers rather than a spokesman for the people of Pakistan (Narejo, 2019). Some of the apprehensions expressed by non-Muslim members were valid; however, all the proposed amendments and objections expressed by minority members were straightaway rejected. Additionally, in a later period, no means and ways were initiated to ensure what was committed to religious minorities in this resolution.

Later, Mandal with reference to Lahore Resolution of 1940 and statement made by Jinnah on August 11, 1947 claimed in his resignation to Prime Minister that 'there was then no question of dividing the people on the basis of religion into full-fledged Muslim citizens and zimmies (translated as Dhimmis, refers to non-Muslim subjects living under an Islamic state) being under the perpetual custody of the Islamic State and its Muslims citizens'. During the early years of

Pakistan, Mandal diagnosed the root cause of the political problems as employing Islam to secure legitimacy by the state elite and also identified the resultant downside for religious minorities. He highlighted that 'Islam is being offered as the sovereign remedy for all earthly evils..... In that grand setting of the Shariat, Muslims alone are rulers while Hindus and other minorities are zimmies who are entitled to protection at a price. He foresaw that 'Pakistan is no place for Hindus to live in and that their future is darkened by the ominous shadow of conversion or liquidation. I am afraid that, by gradual stages and in a planned manner, we will either be converted to Islam or completely exterminated. (Mandal, 1950).

The Centrist state structure and authoritarian practices made Pakistani nationalism synonymous with alleged 'Punjabization which alienated smaller provinces while reinforcing centrifugal forces, ethnic, linguistic, and regional identities (Chaturvedi, 2002). The state elite, rather than establishing institutions and practices for democratic deliberations and consensus-building, started to politically instrumentalize Islam to suppress opposition and to divert attention from governance issues. The political use of Islam also helped the military establishment to Islamize the national security ideas to project India as a Hindu hegemonic and expansionist enemy. The widespread conceptualization of Pakistan as a Muslim state in the pre- and post-partition period significantly empowered religious groups and parties to assert their inevitable power claims. The constitutional direction of the state being an Islamic one through the Objective resolution of 1949 informally empowered the Islamist groups and clerics to become stakeholders in governance. The notion of Pakistaniyat projected on provincial autonomy, federal polity, and equality of rights soon became merely an agenda of national purification by incorporating the process of exclusion of religious minorities from every level of decision-making. The violent anti-Ahmadi riots in Lahore city in 1953 made the first overt demands of the removal of the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Sir Zafrullah Khan, and other Ahmadi working in higher posts on the basis of their religious faith. In response to the Lahore riots of 1953 against the Ahmadi sect, the government, though it did not accept the demands of religious groups, attempted to keep the masses content by dismissing the Chief Minister of Punjab, the Prime Minister, and his cabinet. The imagined exclusionary version of Pakistaniyat provoked by religious parties was explained in Munir Report of 1954 when it highlighted that 'if the state left the decision of who is or isn't a Muslim than according to the ulemas and fatwas, every citizen would be declared a non-Muslim' (Report of The Court of Inquiry Constituted Under Punjab Act II of 1954 to enquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953, 1954)

The idea of Pakistaniyat was completely transformed during the phases of Islamization, especially under the Zia regime (1977-88), as it redirected state policies and gradually brought a foreseeable change in social behaviors while significantly altering the plural nature of Pakistani society. Although it wasn't General Zia who devised the political instrumentalization of religion, as this precedent was established in pre and post-independence periods in Pakistan by some intentional and unintentional policies and discourses to boost the national integration process and to diffuse disagreements through short-term strategies. However, the Islamization under the Zia regime was comparatively more intense and expanded from merely pronouncing Islamic-led discourses to policing and monitoring the society. This phase of Islamization sped up the process of radicalization in Pakistan as the obsession with certain ideologies, personalities, rituals, and conflicts beyond the state borders grew. The introduction of discriminatory laws, such as the Hudood Ordinance and blasphemy law, further created severe punishments without employing any structural safeguards to restrict the misuse of these laws. The Zia regime was neither intended to transform Pakistani society nor particularly targeted religious minorities, as the core goal of the respective regime was to secure the legitimacy of its rule. Although religious minorities became immediate victims due to their weak socio-economic status, inadequate representation, lack of constitutional safeguards, and low numeric strength. The emergent trends of sectarian politics and competition among religious groups to win state patronage also empowered certain sections of the Muslim majority to become sensitive towards the manipulation of religious sentiments and provoking violence against their political opponents and socially marginalized groups.

Constitutional Idea of Equality in Pakistan: Dilemma of Constitutional and Legislative Paradoxes

It has been reported that almost eighty states of the world either favor a specific religion or provide preferential treatment to a religious faith (Many Countries Favor Specific Religions, Officially or Unofficially, 2017). The relationship between religious identity and constitution does exist in some of the Western democracies. For instance, in Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and Finland, the Evangelical-Lutheran church is recognized, whereas in the United Kingdom, the Church of England is constitutionally recognized as a national or state church. Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are examples of where there is a religious requirement for the ceremonial monarchs to be defenders of faith as head of state (In 30 countries, heads of state must belong to a certain religion, 2014). Though in these countries,

religious freedom is guaranteed and treated as a fundamental human right and enforced by the rule of law and constitutionalism. However, these ceremonial heads from a particular religious faith neither influence public policy nor intervene in the democratic process. Additionally, these religious affiliations operate at a symbolic level and are not employed for the religious policing of society or individuals. Moreover, liberal democracy in most of these cases operates through constitutionalism; largely putting the limitations on the ability of government to intervene in personal life and choices of individuals, as the objective is to regulate, facilitate, and protect rather than control. The conducive conditions to enforce constitutionalism are listed by (Stepen, 2000) as “Democratic institutions must be free, within the bounds of the constitution and human rights, to generate policies. He further added that religious institutions should not have constitutionally privileged prerogatives that allow them to mandate public policy to democratically elected governments. At the same time, individuals and religious communities ... must have complete freedom to worship privately”.

The relationship between the Pakistani state and Islamic faith was institutionalized by the declaration of Pakistan as an Islamic Republic under the Constitution of 1956. In later decades, though two Constitutions were introduced in Pakistan, the constitutional tradition of protecting the beliefs of the majority religion was established by asserting its superiority over other religious beliefs and laws. Article 25A (1) provides ‘equality before law and protection of law’ for all citizens irrespective of their differences in class, sex, religion, and creed. Article 26 (1) also prohibits any discrimination on the basis of a person’s ‘race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth’ in terms of access to public places of entertainment. Article 36 of the Constitution establishes the duty of the state to safeguard the interests and rights of minorities, especially their due representation in Federal and provincial services. However, Article 2 of the Constitution of 1973 establishes the primacy of Islam while declaring it as the state religion, which makes the above-mentioned provisions almost insignificant at the social level, as other religions are considered inferior. The paradoxical constitutional approach in Pakistan creates a hierarchy through contradiction: while certain provisions grant religious minorities the status of equal citizens, others effectively relegate them to second-class status. In a similar way, Article 27(1) bars any kind of discrimination against a citizen, qualified for the appointment of service in Pakistan, on the basis of the above-mentioned differences. However, Article 27 does not change anything for religious minorities, as they continue to suffer both economically and socially due to the existing caste and class system. The policies of the government incorporated a systematic deprivation of religious minorities

by specifically advertising menial jobs like sanitation and cleaning for them. These discriminatory policies not only indicate racial hatred but also reflect a collective mindset that sees only non-Muslims fit for these low-grade jobs due to their religiously inferior status.

The Constitution of 1973 does not overtly define religious, ethnic, or linguistic minorities; however, Article 260, while defining the terminologies used in the constitutional document, explains in section 3(b) that non-Muslims are those who are not Muslims and mentions only the followers of eight religions as non-Muslims. (The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan , 2012). The constitutional definition of religious minority as non-Muslims is related to the Muslim majority and provides a discriminatory and exclusionary discourse. Additionally, the second amendment to the Constitution in 1974 developed the constitutional distinction of the non-Muslim minority on the basis of a particular interpretation of Islamic belief. The constitutional idea of equality is constrained as religious discrimination is enriched in other articles of the Constitution of 1973. For instance, Article 41(2), while listing the requirements for the President of Pakistan as Head of State, makes it obligatory for a candidate to be a Muslim. In a similar way, Article 91 (3) specifies that the National Assembly (lower house of Parliament) is to elect the Prime Minister (Head of Government) from one of its Muslim members after elections. Article 20 (a) of the Constitution clearly gives rights to citizens to ‘profess, practice and propagate their religion’ while section (b) provides the right to every religious denomination to ‘establish, maintain and manage their religious institutions’ (The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan , 2012). Although the respective Article is contradicted by Ordinance XX of 1984, which amended the Pakistan Penal code while declaring the public professing of the faith by Ahmadis, public preaching of their religious faith, printing and distributing of religious beliefs and materials, a criminal offense (Pakistan: Ordinance No. XX of 1984, Anti-Islamic Activities of the Qadiani Group, Lahori Group and Ahmadis (Prohibition and Punishment) Ordinance, 1984). The constitutional and political instrumentalization of religion during the decades of 1970s and 1980s made it dreadful for democratically elected governments of the 1990s to even introduce procedural reforms in laws against religious minorities.

In 2019, a bill was proposed by a Christian member of the Parliament from PPP, Naveed Amir Jeeva, to address the constitutional discrimination against non-Muslims to amend Article 41(2) and 91(3). Ali Muhammad, a member of PTI and Pakistan’s Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, strongly opposed the proposed bill while clearly stating that ‘Pakistan is an Islamic Republic where

only a Muslim can be assigned to the key post of the President and Prime Minister'. Minister of States' respective argumentation based on an asserted notion that since Pakistan is an Islamic republic, certain things are off limits for non-Muslims (Kumer, 2019). The paradox of equality was also apparent when a member of right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami (JI); Maulana Abdul Akbar Chitrali expounded that any prospects of a religious minority becoming an executive of Pakistan is against Islam while saying that 'no law against Islamic values and teachings can be passed, introduced or even debated in the parliament' (National Assembly rejects bill that opens highest state offices to minorities, 2019). These recurrent parliamentary and political discourses by Muslim members normalize treating non-Muslims as second-class citizens at the societal level. Additionally, these statements by state elites are espoused by many Pakistanis, which leads to socio-economic discrimination against religious minorities, which are often neither documented nor monitored. The constitutional restriction on non-Muslims for the highest administrative and representative designations is institutional religious discrimination, which endorses a widespread public perception that non-Muslims are not completely loyal and devoted to the state of Pakistan.

Furthermore, there is a direct relation between the laws protecting the majority religion in Pakistan and incidents of religiously driven violence against religious minorities. The general and frequently used justification of Section 295-C is that it constrains people from blasphemy of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). However, data tells a different story as blasphemy cases substantially increased as this law paved the way for systematic persecute religious minorities whenever they have minor political, economic, social, property-related, and personal disputes and disagreements with the people of the majority religion. Herald highlighted that before the Blasphemy law, there were only ten cases of alleged blasphemy from 1947-1986, and once the respective law was passed, almost 1500 allegations were reported in the following 30 years (Ahmed A. , 2018). In one of the few attempts to change the procedural provisions of law in June 1994, the government under the Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, introduced a bill to amend the provisions to register blasphemy cases; however this bill was blocked by religious parties and the opposition, and resultantly Government had to defer the bill before presenting to the Parliament (Human Rights Watch World Report 1995 - Pakistan, 1995). In subsequent years, mob violence, lynching, and vigilante violence increased substantially and provoked a widespread belief that non-Muslims are inherently lesser humans and do not deserve any humane treatment, a chance to prove themselves innocent, and the right to live if people of the majority religion suspect any disrespect towards their religion. This prevailing religious superiority mentality stems from religious discrimination embedded in

the constitutional provisions of the 1973 Constitution, and for this reason, many of these blasphemous cases were promptly decided by people on the spot and did not reach the courts.

The misuse of blasphemy law was not confined to religious minorities and gradually employed against Muslims as well, mostly on the basis of personal grudges, property disputes, and general intolerance. It is estimated that from 1987-2017, against 715 Muslims, blasphemy cases were filed, whereas 785 were non-Muslims, including Ahmadi, Christians, and Hindus who faced allegations of blasphemy (Ahmed A. , 2018). Although no individuals have been judicially executed on Blasphemy offense until now by the Government of Pakistan. However, these death sentences are recurrently handed down by lower courts and generally overturned by higher courts in cases of appeal. Due to a lack of law and order and widespread sense of emotionality with religion among the uneducated and socio-economically lower classes, the majority of accusers of blasphemy are extra-judicially killed by individuals or mobs, often before the conclusion of the trial. See the table and source for data on blasphemy killings.

Table 3

Blasphemy Cases in Pakistan: 1947-2021

Gender	Accused	Killed
Female	107 (Including three minors)	18
Male	1308 (Including eight minors)	71
Total	1415	89

Source: (Blasphemy Cases in Pakistan: 1947 – 2021)

Construction of Othering and Exclusion of Religious Minorities through Education

Within Pakistan's historical context, education has been one of the most effective tools for creating a sense of national identity. However, it has also evolved into a means of erasing, misrepresenting, or symbolically marginalizing religious minorities. The way minorities appear (or do not appear) in textbooks, curricula, and classroom narratives is greatly influenced by the discursive construction of Pakistani identity, which is frequently associated with Islamic identity, Muslim ancestry, and the Two-Nation Theory. This dynamic justifies unequal

citizenship and perpetuates narrow interpretations of nationalism. Since the 1970s, school curricula have been reoriented to foster an "Islamic citizen," integrating Islam as the primary symbol of national identity, especially following General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization efforts (Nayyar & Salim, 2003). Religious minorities were either left out or shown as the cultural and political 'Other' in social studies and Pakistan Studies textbooks, which progressively framed the state as a "fortress of Islam," portraying the establishment of Pakistan as a divine endeavor and Muslims as intrinsically moral. In order to foster a homogenized Muslim national identity, these narratives create what (Talbot, 2012) refers to as a "selective historical memory," erasing the country's pluralistic, syncretic, and multi-religious past. The description of minorities makes this exclusion more overt. Instead of being portrayed as equal residents whose contributions influenced the history of the area, Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and Sikhs are sometimes portrayed as foreigners, holdovers of colonial rule, or adversaries in nationalist conflicts (Lall, 2008). In several instances, textbooks subtly depict Hindus as hostile or treacherous, connecting Hindu identity to current Indian geopolitical issues, which heightens mistrust among Indian-Pakistani people. Ahmadis are structurally marginalized and frequently discussed either in disparaging circumstances or while debating constitutional definitions of what constitutes a "true Muslim" (Rahman, 2008).

In addition to being discursive, the pattern of exclusion is institutional. Despite constitutional safeguards, religious minority students are sometimes forced to study Islamic Studies in institutions that do not provide alternative moral courses (ICG, 2014). This prevents minority children from learning about their own religious traditions and compels assimilation into the religious worldview of the majority. Even when an 'ethics course' is offered, it is underfunded, stigmatized, and given secondary attention, which makes minority students stand out in the classroom. These educational methods socialize kids into hierarchies of belonging by fostering 'othering' at an early age. While minority students feel alienated, Muslim students internalize the idea that minorities are marginal to the Pakistani nation, perpetuating what is referred to as the "pedagogies of exclusion." Long-term effects of this early indoctrination include views of national identification, political engagement, and minority integration. Such educational methods instill in children a hierarchical conception of who actually belongs to the country, fostering 'othering' at a young age. Muslim students adopt these myths as natural facts when textbooks portray Pakistan as a solely Islamic homeland and exalt Muslim identity as synonymous with Pakistaniyyat. They start to view non-Muslims as unique, marginal, or even suspicious members of the national community rather than as equal citizens. Their views of loyalty,

patriotism, and national purity are shaped by this early ideological conditioning, which makes it challenging to see minorities as co-owners of the state. The effects are particularly severe for minority students. Scholars refer to the experience of being forced to study Islamic Studies, having their past erased, and coming across stereotypes of their communities as ‘structural humiliation’ (Sayer, 2005). Minority pupils are discreetly and frequently taught that the prevailing national narrative does not align with their religious identities. They may experience psychological detachment as a result, feeling like visitors in a nation when they are residents by law. Feelings of vulnerability and exclusion are further reinforced in classroom interactions when teachers celebrate the religious holidays of the majority, stress Islamic standards, or inadvertently penalize diversity. These experiences are consistent with the idea of ‘pedagogies of exclusion,’ which are educational setups that systematically create marginality by emphasizing some identities over others. In the Pakistani context, these pedagogies function not only through curriculum material but also through everyday micro-interactions, school culture, and hidden curricula. For instance, when Christian heroes are excluded from national narratives, Ahmadis are completely erased, or Hindus are primarily portrayed in textbooks as being at odds with Pakistanis, students are exposed to a worldview that views minorities as politically dubious, historically irrelevant, or religiously incompatible with Pakistaniyat. This early socialization has significant long-term effects. Youngsters who absorb discriminatory beliefs may grow up to support discriminatory laws, oppose the rights of minorities, or see pluralism as a danger to the integrity of the country. In order to maintain safety and social acceptance, minority youth may, on the other hand, stop participating in politics, stay out of the public eye, or repress some facets of their identities. This undermines democratic culture, stifles civic creativity, and solidifies a nationalist model founded on religious uniformity rather than shared citizenship.

Conclusion

The exclusionary version of Pakistaniyat is crafted through state discourses over the years, largely based on Islamic identity through formal and informal mechanisms. The religious othering was apparent from the beginning when apprehensions of non-Muslim members on Objective Resolution were completely overlooked while pronouncing political statements to ensure them equality of rights, but no constitutional mechanisms were proposed or initiated by the majority Muslim members during the parliamentary debate. Ominously, all the fears of non-Muslims cited during this debate came true as the line between politics and religion was repeatedly blurred while making the Pakistani state a party to conflict, even when religious conflicts merely existed between

individuals. Delegated power was often misused by state elites, making it difficult to operationalize equality among citizens and ensure their protection before the law, despite constitutional guarantees.

Pakistani nationalism is still shaped by discourses that alternate between the allure of an exclusive religious nationalism and the aspirations of an inclusive civic identity. Although the rhetoric of Pakistaniyat purports to promote unity, its actual expression frequently favors a single Islamic identity while marginalizing individuals who do not fit into it. Religious minorities are marginalized socially and politically by state institutions, especially education, the media, and legislation that establishes the boundaries of national identity. This ‘othering’ process is not isolated; rather, it is ingrained in historical concerns about nation-building, regional disintegration, and the unresolved conflicts between Jinnah's equal citizenship vision and the Two-Nation Theory. These narratives of exclusion have serious repercussions. Minorities must manage their identities in a cultural setting that portrays them as the ‘other,’ confront systemic obstacles to full participation in public life, and experience erasure and misrepresentation in the educational curriculum. Such forces threaten the state's democratic and pluralistic goals as well as the rights and dignity of minority communities. A country cannot claim security or moral legitimacy while denying significant portions of its citizens a sense of purposeful belonging. Therefore, reimagining Pakistaniyat necessitates a deliberate effort to transcend simplistic religious nationalism in favor of an identity based on shared citizenship, constitutional safeguards, and cultural variety. This change necessitates changes in political narrative, societal attitudes, and educational discourse areas where the concept of the country is perpetuated. Pakistan can only develop a self-assured, inclusive, and just civic nationalism by challenging the ingrained processes of exclusion and embracing the variety that has always defined the region. Minorities must be genuinely integrated as co-authors of the country's past, present, and future rather than just acknowledged.

References

- Ahmad, I. (2021). *Jinnah: His Successes, Failures and Role in History*. PENGUIN Books.
- Ahmad, T., Mustafa, G., & Asfa, R. (2022, January). Political Rights of Christian Minority in Pakistan. *South Asian Studies*, 37(1), 61-76.

- Ahmaddiyas in Pakistan.* (2022, September). Retrieved from <https://minorityrights.org/>:
<https://minorityrights.org/communities/ahmaddiyas/>
- Ahmed, A. (2005). *Jinnah, Pakistan & Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin*. New York: Routledge.
- Ahmed, A. (2018, October 31). *A brief history of the anti-blasphemy laws*. Retrieved March 10, 2025, from <https://herald.dawn.com>:
<https://herald.dawn.com/news/1154036>
- Blasphemy Cases in Pakistan: 1947 – 2021.* (n.d.). Retrieved September 12, 2025, from <https://crss.pk>: <https://crss.pk/blasphemy-cases-in-pakistan-1947-2021/#:~:text=From%201947%20to%202021%2C%20107,the%20count,ry%20is%20under%205%25>.
- Chaturvedi, S. (2002, December 17). Process of Othering in the case of India and Pakistan. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 92(2), 149-59.
- Constituent Assembly of Pakistan.* (1949, March 10). Retrieved from <https://www.na.gov.pk>:
https://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1434604288_514.pdf
- Dijk, T. (1998). *Ideaology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. London : Sage.
- Falki, S. (2019). The Politics of Federalism in Pakistan: 1988-2008. *PhD dissertation*. Lahore: Department of Political Science , Lahore College for Women University Lahore.
- Human Rights Watch World Report 1995 - Pakistan.* (1995, January 1). Retrieved December 31, 2024, from <https://www.refworld.org/>:
<https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/hrw/1995/en/38720>
- ICG. (2014). *Education Reform in Pakistan*. Asia Report no 257: International Crisis Group.
- İnaç, H., & Ünal, F. (2013, June). The Construction of National Identity in Modern Times: Theoretical Perspective. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 3(11), 223-232.
- In 30 countries, heads of state must belong to a certain religion.* (2014, July 22). Retrieved October 3, 2025, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/short->

reads/2014/07/22/in-30-countries-heads-of-state-must-belong-to-a-certain-religion/

Jalal, A. (2011). *Jinnah: The Sole Spokesman*. Cambridge University Press.

Jermey, R. (2019, January 9). *What do secularists mean by 'secularism'?* Retrieved April 3, 2025, from <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2019/01/what-do-secularists-mean-by-secularism/>

Khan, A. (2022, August 14). *Belief, Not Bargains: Did Jinnah Really Want Pakistan?* Retrieved September 23, 2025, from <https://www.dawn.com/https://www.dawn.com/news/1704480/belief-not-bargains-did-jinnah-really-want-pakistan>

Kumer, R. (2019, October 7). *Why can't a non-Muslim dream of becoming the prime minister or president of Pakistan?* Retrieved May 11, 2025, from <https://tribune.com.pk/https://tribune.com.pk/article/88830/why-cant-a-non-muslim-dream-of-becoming-the-prime-minister-or-president-of-pakistan>

Lall, M. (2008). Educate to hate: The use of education in the creation of antagonistic national. *Compare Volume 38, Number 1*, 103-120.

Malik, I. (2002). *Religious Minorities in Pakistan*. Minority Rights Group International,.

Mandal, J. (1950, April 19). *JOGENDRA NATH MANDAL'S RESIGNATION LETTER TO LIAQUAT ALI KHAN*. Retrieved October 20, 2025, from <https://www.spmrf.org/https://www.spmrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/J-N-Mandal-Resignation-Letter.pdf?fbclid=IwAR02IGDtuWv17Iz1Ed9ptC3WHwb2MFezTZIGfykAojHcwtnxUKXFIA62vEc>

Many Countries Favor Specific Religions, Officially or Unofficially. (2017, October 3). Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/10/03/many-countries-favor-specific-religions-officially-or-unofficially/#:~:text=Among%20the%2043%20countries%20with,observe%20its%20days%20of%20rest.&text=There%20also%20are%20four%20states,apostasy%20%E2%80%93>

Martin, D. (1995). The choices of identity. *Social Identities* , 1(1).

- Mr. Jinnah's presidential address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. (n.d). Retrieved March 22, 2025, from https://www.pakistani.org/https://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent_address_11aug1947.html
- Mujahid, S. (1996, December 1). *Jinnah's Vision of Pakistan*. Retrieved May 22, 2025, from <https://www.tni.org/>: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/jinnahs-vision-of-pakistan>
- Mujahid, S. (1996, December 1). *Jinnah's Vision of Pakistan*. Retrieved from <https://www.tni.org/>: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/jinnahs-vision-of-pakistan>
- Narejo, Y. (2019, November 19). *The Objective Resolution 1949: Critically Analysed Causes and Consequences*. Retrieved May 23, 2025, from <https://medium.com/>: <https://medium.com/@yaseenazad98/the-objective-resolution-1949-critically-analysed-causes-and-consequences-58d783711ccd>
- National Assembly rejects bill that opens highest state offices to minorities*. (2019, October 4). Retrieved May 11, 2025, from <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/National-Assembly-rejects-bill-that-opens-highest-state-offices-to-minorities-48184.html>
- Nayyar, A. H., & Salim, A. (2003). *The Subtle Subversion: The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan*. Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute.
- Rahman, T. (2008). Language Policy and Education in Pakistan. *Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (pp.383-392), 383-392.
- Religious Freedom Landscape Report:Pakistan 2020*. Religious Freedom Institute.
- Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted Under PunjabAct II of 1954 to enquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953*. (1954). Retrieved May 19, 2025, from <https://ia803204.us.archive.org/>: <https://ia803204.us.archive.org/14/items/The1954JusticeMunirCommissionReportOnTheAntiAhmadiRiotsOfPunjabIn1953/The-1954-Justice-Munir-Commission-Report-on-the-anti-Ahmadi-Riots-of-Punjab-in-1953.pdf>
- Sayer, A. (2005). *The moral significance of Class*. Cambridge University Press.

- Speeches and statements by M.A. Jinnah from the period 1938-1940.* (2009, October). Retrieved from https://www.oocities.org/sadna_gupta/Extra1B_Jinnahspeeches193840.html#1
- Stepen, A. (2000). Religion, Democracy and the Twin Tolerations. *Journal of Democracy*, 11(4), 37-56.
- Talbot, I. (2012). *Pakistan: A New History*. England: Oxford University Press.
- Tidwell, A. (1998). *Conflict Resolved? A Critical Assessment of Conflict Resolution*. London: Printer.
- The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* . (2012, February 28). Retrieved February 10, 2025, from https://na.gov.pk:https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1333523681_951.pdf
-