Not Our Daughters

Section 1. Introduction and Context

The moral and legal status of women in Pakistan has been contested since the country's founding. From its inception, Pakistan was envisioned in different and competing ways: Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in his August 11, 1947 address to the Constituent Assembly, articulated a civic compact in which religion would remain a private matter and citizenship would be equal for all regardless of faith.[1] Yet, within only two years, the Objectives Resolution of 1949 reframed sovereignty as belonging to Allah alone, anchoring state legitimacy in a confessional identity.[2] This constitutional ambiguity — equal citizenship on paper but confessional privileging in practice — has had lasting consequences for religious minorities, especially women.

Minority women and girls, particularly Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and Ahmadis, face distinctive and intersectional risks: abduction, forced religious conversion, child and forced marriage, and sexual violence. These harms are not isolated episodes but recurring and predictable patterns embedded in the legal, social, and institutional design of the state.[3] The problem is not merely that individuals commit abuses, but that state structures — police, judiciary, registrars, and sometimes even politicians — normalize and ratify these abuses by privileging conversion documents and marriage certificates over evidence of minority status, childhood, or coercion.

Reliable national prevalence data remain elusive. Families often avoid police out of fear of retaliation or accusations of blasphemy. Yet convergent reports from Pakistani civil society organizations such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), and international monitors like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch suggest that hundreds of minority girls, often between the ages of twelve and seventeen, are abducted and converted annually.[4] Hotspots include northern Sindh and southern Punjab, where Dalit Hindu communities and Christian agricultural laborers live under structural precarity. The common pattern is that a girl disappears on her way to school or work, and within days a local madrasa or cleric produces a certificate claiming that she has embraced Islam and married a Muslim man, usually much older.[5]

The role of documentation is central. These certificates almost always list the girl as eighteen years old, regardless of school or birth records. Police are often reluctant to file First Information Reports (FIRs), or they record complaints in ways that minimize the possibility of abduction. Courts, too, often accept conversion certificates as dispositive evidence of capacity, even when the girl's minority status is otherwise well documented.[6] Thus, what should be prima facie evidence of coercion — the sudden conversion and marriage of a minor girl — is legally reimagined as evidence of free will.

Two premises guide this analysis. First, the privileging of the majority religion within law and institutions is not symbolic; it has direct material effects on how evidence is evaluated, how police prioritize cases, and how courts interpret consent. Second, women's bodies have historically been treated as vessels of communal identity in South Asia. During Partition, abduction and rape of women served as markers of conquest and revenge.[7] Today, the abduction and forced conversion of minority girls perform a similar function: symbolizing religious triumph while erasing minority presence.

This study employs a multidisciplinary method. Historically, it traces the arc from Jinnah's civic promise to the Islamization policies of General Zia ul Haq, which institutionalized discrimination through the Hudood Ordinances and expanded blasphemy laws.[8] Legally, it analyzes constitutional provisions, child marriage laws, and penal code sections, identifying gaps and contradictions. Sociologically, it foregrounds the vulnerabilities of Dalit Hindus and Christian laborers, who often lack political protection. Comparatively, it situates Pakistan within global patterns of gendered religious violence — for example, the experiences of Yazidi women under ISIS and Rohingya women in Myanmar — while acknowledging contextual differences.[9]

The role of advocacy is equally important. Initiatives such as **Project CHINGARI**, launched in 2021 by HinduPACT, specifically document and amplify cases of abducted and forcibly converted minority girls in Pakistan.[10] By curating survivor testimonies, engaging policymakers, and mobilizing diaspora networks, CHINGARI seeks to connect grassroots realities to global policy forums, including the U.S. Congress, European Parliament, and UN human rights mechanisms. The presence of such initiatives underscores that this is not merely a local issue but a transnational human rights crisis.

Ultimately, the plight of minority girls in Pakistan cannot be understood in isolation. It must be situated within broader trajectories: the constitutional privileging of Islam, the legacy of Partition, the Islamization drive of the 1970s and 1980s, the persistence of patriarchal honor codes, and the weaponization of blasphemy laws. Together, these elements create an environment where the abduction and conversion of minors are not aberrations but systemic outcomes. As this paper argues throughout, reform is both possible and urgent — but it requires a fundamental reordering of institutional priorities, coupled with international accountability and survivor-centered protections.

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Section 2. Historical Foundations and Islamization

The trajectory of minority women's vulnerability in Pakistan cannot be understood without situating it within the historical arc from Partition to the Islamization of law and politics. At independence in 1947, Pakistan inherited both the trauma of communal violence and the demographic reality of pluralism. Hindu and Sikh communities were significant in Sindh and Punjab, while Christians and smaller groups such as Parsis and Bahá'ís were integrated into professional, commercial, and civic life.[1] Jinnah's August 11 speech promised that religion would be a private matter, emphasizing equal citizenship across faiths.[2] However, within two years, the **Objectives Resolution of 1949** shifted the constitutional foundation. It declared that sovereignty belongs to Allah, that Muslims would be enabled to live according to Islam, and that minorities would be "freely" allowed to practice their religions.[3] This dualism — privileging the majority faith while granting minorities limited tolerance — introduced structural ambiguity into Pakistan's legal order.

The **1956 Constitution** formally designated the country as the "Islamic Republic of Pakistan." Subsequent constitutional frameworks reinforced this confessional identity. The **1973 Constitution**, still in force today, established multiple Islamic review bodies, including the Council of Islamic Ideology, and required laws to conform to Islam. In 1974, Parliament declared Ahmadis to be non-Muslims, cementing the state's authority to determine confessional boundaries.[4] This precedent eroded minority protections, demonstrating that citizenship status could be reclassified by statute under clerical and political pressure.

The most consequential turning point, however, came under **General Zia ul Haq** (1977–1988). Zia's Islamization project transformed both criminal law and cultural identity. The **Hudood Ordinances of 1979** collapsed the legal distinction between rape and zina (fornication/adultery) by requiring testimony from four adult Muslim male witnesses for conviction.[5] Women who reported rape risked being charged with zina themselves, while men accused of sexual assault frequently went unpunished. This evidentiary framework institutionalized suspicion toward women's testimony and entrenched gender subordination within law.

Parallel to Hudood, Zia expanded **blasphemy laws** (Penal Code sections 295–298), culminating in Section 295-C, which mandated the death penalty for defiling the name of the Prophet.[6] These laws became tools not only for religious policing but also for suppressing minorities. Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis were disproportionately targeted, often in cases where personal disputes were reframed as blasphemy accusations. For minority women, the dual effect of Hudood and blasphemy laws was devastating: reporting sexual violence became nearly impossible, while challenging coerced conversions risked accusations of insulting Islam.

These statutory changes were accompanied by a cultural project. Zia's regime revised school textbooks, expanded madrasa networks, and promoted narratives in which non-Muslims were portrayed as historical antagonists.[7] In this climate, the trope of the "rescued" non-Muslim girl who converted to Islam gained prominence, celebrated in local media and sermons as a spiritual

triumph. This narrative erased coercion, recast abduction as religious duty, and reinforced patriarchal honor codes that made return to one's family nearly impossible without stigma.

Post-Zia governments oscillated between modest liberalization and retrenchment. Civilian leaders attempted to reform Hudood provisions and limit the excesses of blasphemy laws, but religious parties mobilized street protests to block change.[8] The judiciary, influenced by decades of Islamization, often deferred to conversion and marriage certificates even in cases involving minors. Meanwhile, rural bonded labor systems and economic dependency continued to expose Dalit Hindu girls in Sindh and Christian domestic workers in Punjab to heightened risks.[9]

The cumulative effect is what scholars describe as a **historical palimpsest**: each legal regime layered over the last, producing a dense system of confessional privileging and gendered subordination. On top of Jinnah's promise of equal citizenship lies the Objectives Resolution; atop that, the 1974 anti-Ahmadi amendment; then the Hudood Ordinances and blasphemy expansions; and finally, cultural narratives of religious rescue. Together, these have trained state institutions to treat the conversion of minority girls not as prima facie evidence of coercion but as spiritual evidence of consent.

This historical foundation explains why present-day courts so often validate the conversion and marriage of minors, why police hesitate to intervene, and why blasphemy accusations so effectively silence advocates. The vulnerability of minority women is not accidental — it is the systemic product of constitutional ambiguity, political Islamization, and entrenched patriarchy.

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Section 3. Legal and Institutional Framework

The vulnerability of minority girls in Pakistan is not merely the result of social prejudice; it is structured and reinforced by the country's legal and institutional framework. This framework contains a series of contradictions that, while ostensibly guaranteeing equality, embeds confessional hierarchies and procedural loopholes that enable coercion. To understand why abduction, forced conversion, and child marriage persist with systemic impunity, it is essential to analyze the relevant constitutional provisions, statutory law, judicial practice, and administrative failures that define Pakistan's legal order.

3.1 Constitutional Ambiguities and Confessional Hierarchy

At its core, Pakistan's Constitution embodies a tension between **articles that guarantee equality** and **provisions that enshrine confessional privileging**. Article 25 proclaims that all citizens are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection.[1] Similarly, Article 20 grants every citizen the right to profess, practice, and propagate religion, and Article 36 commits the state to safeguarding minorities.[2] Yet these provisions are counterbalanced by structural exclusions: Article 41 restricts the presidency to Muslims, while Article 91 limits the office of Prime Minister in the same way.[3] Furthermore, the preamble—derived from the Objectives Resolution of 1949—grounds sovereignty in Allah and requires legislation to conform to Islam as interpreted by state-sanctioned bodies.[4]

This dualism shapes state behavior. Judges and bureaucrats often privilege Islamic identity when interpreting statutes, thereby creating a **hierarchy of citizenship**. For minorities, this means that rights are framed as tolerated exceptions rather than as equal entitlements. In practice, when a Hindu or Christian girl is abducted and presented with a conversion certificate, courts often treat the affidavit of conversion as a decisive spiritual act that trumps documentary evidence of age or parental guardianship.[5]

3.2 The Blasphemy Regime as a Tool of Control

Among the most feared instruments of coercion are Pakistan's blasphemy provisions, found in **Penal Code Sections 295–298**. Section 295-B prescribes life imprisonment for desecrating the Qur'an, while Section 295-C mandates the death penalty for defiling the name of the Prophet.[6] These provisions are notoriously vague, allowing almost any perceived insult to be weaponized as a criminal charge. Importantly, they are frequently deployed not only against minority communities but also against their defenders.

For minority women, the impact is uniquely gendered. Families who challenge forced conversions risk retaliation in the form of blasphemy allegations.[7] For example, pastors or lawyers attempting to advocate for abducted Christian girls have been accused of "insulting

Islam" merely for questioning the validity of a conversion certificate. In some cases, police officers themselves advise families not to press charges, citing fear of blasphemy-related unrest.[8] The **Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)** has documented multiple instances where courts expedited hearings to appease mobs surrounding the courthouse, resulting in perfunctory proceedings that ratify coercion.[9]

The broader effect of the blasphemy regime is to **create a climate of fear**. Lawyers withdraw from representation, witnesses recant testimony, and police avoid registering First Information Reports (FIRs). This chilling effect ensures that even where laws theoretically protect minors, enforcement collapses under the shadow of blasphemy threats.[10]

3.3 Fragmentation of Child Marriage Laws

Child marriage represents another area where legal frameworks exist on paper but collapse in practice. Pakistan lacks a harmonized national standard. The **Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2013** is the strongest, setting eighteen as the minimum marriage age for both boys and girls and criminalizing facilitation.[11] In contrast, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan retain older colonial-era statutes that allow marriage for girls as young as sixteen, with religious exceptions invoked to justify even earlier unions.[12] This **fragmentation enables forum shopping**: perpetrators abduct minors from Sindh and transport them to jurisdictions with weaker protections, where conversion and marriage certificates are more easily validated.[13]

Enforcement is further undermined by institutional failures. Police frequently refuse to register FIRs under child marriage laws, claiming that a conversion certificate demonstrates "consent." Judges, too, have been inconsistent, with some treating medical age assessments as inferior to forged national ID cards that list a girl as eighteen.[14] This judicial posture inverts the logic of child protection: instead of presuming incapacity below eighteen, courts often presume maturity if conversion is involved.

3.4 Police Practices and Procedural Failures

Procedural failures compound legal ambiguities. Multiple reports from the **National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR)** and **international observers** have documented recurring patterns in police handling of abduction and forced conversion cases:

- **Delay or refusal to register FIRs:** Families are frequently turned away or told the matter is a "marital dispute" rather than abduction.[15]
- **Failure to conduct age verification:** Medical examinations such as bone ossification tests are not promptly ordered, allowing abductors to present forged documents unchallenged.[16]

- **Compromised protective custody:** Even when minors are recovered, they are sometimes placed in shelters influenced by the abductors' networks, where intimidation persists.[17]
- **Absence of independent representation:** Minors rarely receive a guardian ad litem or trained child advocate to represent their interests in court.

The combination of these failures ensures that abductors can present coerced affidavits as legitimate and that victims are unable to retract false consent until, if at all, they reach neutral custody—often months later.[18]

3.5 Judicial Practices: Consent and Age Disputes

Judicial practice on consent and age disputes is one of the most critical determinants of outcomes. International child rights norms presume incapacity below eighteen, but Pakistani courts frequently deviate. In several cases, courts have treated the mere act of conversion as evidence of maturity and agency, disregarding contradictory school records or medical tests.[19]

The **Supreme Court of Pakistan** has occasionally intervened to uphold minority protections, particularly in landmark judgments on religious freedom.[20] However, at the trial court level—where most abduction and conversion cases are decided—the jurisprudence is inconsistent. Community pressure, mob threats, and clerical influence often shape judicial reasoning.[21] The absence of binding federal legislation prohibiting conversion of minors or conversions under duress leaves trial judges with few explicit legal grounds to invalidate such unions.

3.6 Civil Society Advocacy and Proposals

Despite these systemic barriers, Pakistani civil society has advanced a series of reform proposals:

- **Mandatory age verification protocols** requiring NADRA birth records or medical assessments before marriage registrations.
- **Protective custody standards** mandating that minors be placed in neutral shelters rather than with alleged abductors.
- **Specialized prosecutorial units** trained in child rights and gender-based violence.
- **Accountability measures** for police who refuse FIRs, including disciplinary sanctions.[22]

Yet implementation remains weak. Political leaders fear backlash from religious parties, while clerical actors frame reforms as Western impositions.[23] Without international pressure and domestic coalition building, these proposals risk remaining on paper.

Conclusion of Section 3

The legal and institutional framework of Pakistan thus entrenches the vulnerability of minority girls at multiple levels: constitutional ambiguities that normalize confessional hierarchy; blasphemy provisions that silence advocates; fragmented child marriage laws that enable forum shopping; police practices that obstruct justice; and judicial habits that invert child protection norms. Together, these structures create an ecosystem in which abduction, forced conversion, and underage marriage are not aberrations but predictable outcomes. Any meaningful reform will require harmonizing marriage laws, insulating child protection procedures from blasphemy pressures, and embedding accountability mechanisms that shift incentives for police and judges.

Endnotes (for Section 3)

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Section 4. Patterns of Atrocities

The plight of minority women in Pakistan is not captured adequately by isolated anecdotes. Rather, what emerges from testimonies, NGO case documentation, and investigative journalism is a consistent pattern — an identifiable cycle of abduction, coercion, forced conversion, and marriage, followed by the systematic denial of justice. This pattern is not a series of aberrations but a routinized structure of violence, undergirded by social, legal, and political complicity. By examining recurring stages of this cycle, we can identify how institutions function not as protectors but as enablers of abuse.

4.1 The Abduction Stage

Most cases begin with the abduction of a girl, often between the ages of twelve and seventeen, from vulnerable minority communities. Hindu girls in Sindh are disproportionately targeted, particularly in districts such as Ghotki, Jacobabad, and Tharparkar, where Dalit families work as agricultural laborers under bonded or semi-bonded conditions.[1] Christian girls in Punjab, frequently employed as domestic workers, face similar risks.[2]

Patterns of abduction share recurring features. Many girls disappear while en route to school, workplaces, or markets. Others are targeted within their homes, especially in rural areas with limited law enforcement presence.[3] The perpetrators are often known to the families or belong to local feudal or religious networks that wield social dominance. In some instances, madrasa-linked clerics are involved, with abductors delivering girls to religious authorities who certify their "conversion."[4]

What makes abductions systemic rather than opportunistic is the absence of deterrence. Local police often refuse to intervene promptly, citing lack of evidence or jurisdictional ambiguity. Families who attempt to file First Information Reports (FIRs) are frequently discouraged or threatened with counter-accusations of blasphemy.[5] The first hours and days after abduction are critical, yet delays in police response often allow perpetrators to relocate the girls to other districts or provinces where legal protections are weaker.

4.2 Coerced Conversion and Fabricated Documentation

The second stage in the cycle is the rapid production of conversion and marriage certificates. Typically within days of abduction, abductors present a certificate signed by a cleric, attesting that the girl has embraced Islam voluntarily. These documents almost uniformly list the girl's age as eighteen, regardless of her actual birth records.[6]

NGO monitoring has revealed systemic fabrication. The **CHINGARI Project (HinduPACT)** has documented case files where school records, NADRA birth certificates, and family testimony

all establish a girl's minority status, yet clerical certificates declare her to be an adult convert.[7] For instance, in one case from Ghotki, a fourteen-year-old girl's school ID card was dismissed by the court in favor of a conversion affidavit signed by a local cleric.[8] Similarly, Christian advocacy groups in Punjab report that forged Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs) are routinely used to inflate ages.[9]

This stage is crucial, because once a certificate exists, courts often treat it as conclusive proof of free will. The mere act of signing or appearing in front of a cleric is deemed evidence of consent, ignoring the coercive context of abduction and isolation from family. In practice, this **legal fetishization of documentation** allows perpetrators to transform abduction into marriage and coercion into conversion, legitimizing the violence.

4.3 Marriage and Entrenchment of Coercion

Following conversion, the abducted girl is almost always married to a Muslim man, often much older. Marriage certificates issued by local registrars, frequently under pressure or inducement, are used to entrench the coercion.[10] These marriages are rarely annulled by courts, even when the girl's minority status is demonstrable. Judges often argue that under Islamic law, puberty constitutes capacity for marriage, even if civil statutes set the minimum age higher.[11]

The consequences of this coerced marriage are devastating. Victims are cut off from their natal families, placed within households where they face continued surveillance, and exposed to sexual violence disguised as marital relations.[12] Escape is nearly impossible; those who attempt to return are often declared apostates, risking further violence. Some survivors who have managed to escape describe being beaten, drugged, or confined until they signed conversion papers.[13]

The marriage stage effectively completes the erasure of the girl's minority identity: her new identity as a Muslim wife is socially and legally validated, while her previous identity is delegitimized. This mechanism transforms gendered violence into an act celebrated by segments of society as religious duty.

4.4 Court Proceedings and Judicial Responses

When families manage to bring cases before the courts, proceedings often replicate the coercive pattern rather than disrupt it. Trial courts frequently treat conversion and marriage documents as overriding evidence.[14] Judges sometimes allow girls to make statements in the presence of abductors or clerics, creating coercive environments where retraction is impossible. In some cases, mobs surround court buildings, chanting slogans and threatening violence, pressuring judges into issuing rulings favorable to abductors.[15]

Landmark interventions do exist. The **Supreme Court's 2014 suo motu judgment** on minority protections underscored the state's duty to safeguard minorities and urged the creation of mechanisms to monitor forced conversions.[16] Yet implementation has been minimal. Lower courts continue to disregard age evidence, while appeals drag on for years, during which victims remain confined in marital households.[17]

Thus, even when judicial remedies are technically available, procedural realities deny justice. The structure of hearings — rushed, mob-influenced, or procedurally defective — ensures that victims rarely regain autonomy through the courts.

4.5 Patterns of Impunity and Retaliation

A defining feature of this cycle is impunity. Abductors rarely face prosecution, and even when cases proceed, charges are often dropped due to "lack of evidence" or because the victim is presented as having converted willingly.[18] Police officers who refuse to register FIRs or facilitate fraudulent documentation face no disciplinary consequences. Clerics who certify coerced conversions are rarely challenged. The absence of accountability signals to perpetrators that such actions are tolerated.

Families who resist often face retaliation. Abductors and their allies may file **blasphemy cases** against family members, accusing them of insulting Islam by contesting the conversion.[19] Economic reprisals also occur, particularly in rural areas where landlords hold sway over Hindu laborers. Entire families may be displaced or ostracized from their communities, exacerbating their vulnerability.[20]

The cumulative effect is a culture of normalized violence, where abduction and forced conversion are not only predictable but effectively sanctioned. Each unpunished case reinforces the expectation that perpetrators can act without fear.

4.6 Survivors' Voices

While data are crucial, the voices of survivors reveal the human cost of these patterns. Testimonies collected by HRCP, Amnesty International, and CHINGARI describe the trauma of forced isolation, the pressure to sign documents in languages victims cannot read, and the impossibility of returning to their natal communities without stigma.[21] Survivors recount being told that returning to Hinduism or Christianity would mark them as apostates, punishable by death.[22] Others describe the loneliness of being permanently severed from their families, with no legal path to reclaim their identity.

These testimonies illustrate that the atrocities are not only physical but also existential: they erase cultural continuity, communal belonging, and intergenerational security. Minority families often

describe daughters as the custodians of lineage and identity; their loss is thus experienced as both personal tragedy and communal dismemberment.[23]

Conclusion of Section 4

The recurring patterns of abduction, coerced conversion, forced marriage, judicial complicity, and impunity constitute a **systemic cycle of atrocities**. They are not isolated excesses but structural features of Pakistan's governance and social order. Recognizing these patterns is essential to dismantling them. Without addressing the systemic nature of abduction-to-conversion pipelines, efforts at piecemeal reform will fall short. Survivors' voices make clear that what is at stake is not only personal autonomy but the survival of minority communities as equal citizens of Pakistan.

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Section 5. International Responses and Advocacy

The crisis of forced conversions and abductions of minority girls in Pakistan has not remained invisible to the world. Over the past two decades, a growing number of international organizations, state actors, and advocacy networks have documented these abuses, condemned them in diplomatic forums, and urged Pakistan to institute reforms. Yet international responses have been uneven, reflecting broader geopolitical concerns, the limits of human rights enforcement, and Pakistan's strategic significance. Examining these responses provides crucial insight into both the possibilities and constraints of global advocacy.

5.1 The United Nations System

The United Nations has been a central platform for highlighting Pakistan's minority rights crisis. Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council, including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, have issued multiple communications to Pakistan. In April 2024, UN experts explicitly warned that Pakistan was failing to protect Hindu and Christian minority girls from abduction and forced marriage, urging legislative safeguards and accountability mechanisms.[1]

Pakistan is also a State party to the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** and the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**. Periodic reviews under these treaties have consistently flagged forced conversion and child marriage as grave violations. During the CRC's 2016 and 2021 reviews, Pakistan was urged to harmonize child marriage laws, raise the minimum marriage age to eighteen nationwide, and ensure protective custody for abducted girls.[2] Similarly, the CEDAW Committee's 2020 review highlighted the intersection of gender and religion in producing systemic discrimination.[3]

The **Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** mechanism has also been a venue where states raise concerns. In Pakistan's 2017 and 2022 UPR cycles, several member states — including Canada, Germany, and the Netherlands — called for legislation against forced conversion and child marriage. Pakistan's delegation often responded by asserting that existing protections suffice or that such issues are "social rather than legal."[4] These responses reflect the state's reluctance to acknowledge the systemic nature of the problem.

5.2 U.S. Responses: USCIRF and State Department

The **U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** has consistently flagged Pakistan as a "Country of Particular Concern" (CPC), citing forced conversions of minority women and girls as a central justification. In its 2025 Annual Report, USCIRF criticized Pakistan for failing to criminalize coerced conversions, for tolerating clerical

facilitation of child marriages, and for failing to protect families who contest conversions from blasphemy retaliation.[5]

The **U.S. State Department's annual International Religious Freedom (IRF) reports** also document these abuses in detail. The 2023 report, for example, highlighted the disproportionate targeting of Hindu and Christian girls, noting that police often decline to pursue abduction cases once conversion certificates are produced.[6] Beyond documentation, U.S. responses have included congressional hearings where victims' families and diaspora advocates testified. For instance, Hindu and Christian representatives from Pakistan's diaspora have briefed the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, linking the plight of minority girls to broader discussions on Pakistan's GSP+ status with the EU and U.S. aid conditionality.[7]

Despite this attention, U.S. policy has often been tempered by Pakistan's strategic role in South Asia. Counterterrorism cooperation and Afghanistan-related logistics have historically overshadowed human rights concerns. As a result, while USCIRF repeatedly recommends CPC sanctions, the State Department has often issued waivers, citing national security interests.[8] This tension illustrates how advocacy gains visibility but struggles to translate into binding pressure.

5.3 European Union and European Parliament

The **European Union (EU)** has emerged as another critical actor due to Pakistan's reliance on the **Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+)** trade status, which grants tariff-free access to EU markets in exchange for adherence to international human rights conventions. In 2021, the **European Parliament adopted a resolution** expressing alarm at blasphemy law abuses and calling on the European Commission to consider suspending Pakistan's GSP+ benefits unless tangible reforms occurred.[9]

Although that resolution was framed primarily around blasphemy cases, subsequent debates linked forced conversions to the same structural deficiencies. European lawmakers argued that the lack of safeguards for minority girls violates the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and CEDAW, both of which are GSP+ obligations.[10]

Pakistan, however, lobbied vigorously to retain GSP+ status, and the Commission has so far refrained from suspension, instead continuing "enhanced monitoring." This outcome underscores both the leverage and the limits of EU advocacy: while resolutions raise visibility, economic interests often mitigate enforcement. Still, EU scrutiny has created space for Pakistani civil society actors to press their government domestically, citing the risk of trade sanctions.

5.4 UK Parliamentary and Civil Society Advocacy

In the United Kingdom, advocacy has been particularly prominent through the **All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Pakistani Minorities**. Its 2021 report, *Abductions, Forced Conversions and Forced Marriages of Religious Minority Women and Girls in Pakistan*, provided one of the most comprehensive parliamentary accounts of the phenomenon.[11] Drawing on testimonies from survivors, NGOs, and diaspora networks, the report urged the UK government to condition aid and diplomatic engagement on Pakistan enacting legal reforms.

The UK also hosts a vibrant South Asian diaspora, including Pakistani Christian and Hindu groups, who have organized campaigns, vigils, and parliamentary briefings. Their advocacy has amplified survivors' voices and ensured continued debate within Westminster.[12] These efforts illustrate how diaspora communities serve as transnational bridges, linking grassroots cases to policy forums in ways that might otherwise be inaccessible.

5.5 Global NGOs and Media Attention

International NGOs have played a major role in framing forced conversions as a **human rights violation rather than a cultural issue**. **Amnesty International**, **Human Rights Watch**, and **Minority Rights Group International** have each published reports documenting systemic failures in police and judicial handling of abduction cases.[13] Their interventions are crucial in challenging narratives that frame conversions as consensual. By gathering survivor testimonies, these organizations establish coercion as the norm, not the exception.

Media coverage has also been vital. International outlets such as the BBC, Al Jazeera, and The Guardian have covered high-profile cases, often when families staged protests or when survivors managed to speak publicly. While such coverage raises awareness, it often fades quickly after news cycles end, underscoring the need for sustained advocacy.[14]

5.6 Diaspora Initiatives and CHINGARI

Among diaspora-driven initiatives, **Project CHINGARI (HinduPACT)** stands out as a focused platform documenting and advocating against the abduction and conversion of Hindu and other minority girls in Pakistan. Established in 2021, CHINGARI collects testimonies, prepares case files, and engages policymakers in the U.S. and beyond.[15] By linking survivor stories to congressional briefings, CHINGARI has elevated local cases to global forums.

Its work complements broader coalitions, such as the Coalition of Hindus of North America (CoHNA) and Pakistani Christian advocacy groups in the UK and Canada, which together mobilize diaspora voices across continents. These organizations often coordinate with NGOs like Amnesty and HRCP, ensuring that data circulates between local, national, and global levels.[16]

5.7 Limits and Challenges of International Advocacy

Despite these multiple avenues of engagement, international advocacy faces serious limitations. Pakistan's strategic role — as a nuclear power, a frontline state in the "war on terror," and a critical partner for China's Belt and Road Initiative — insulates it from the kind of sanctions smaller states might face. Moreover, Pakistani leaders often frame external criticism as "Islamophobic" or as Western interference, mobilizing nationalist sentiment against reform.[17]

Additionally, advocacy is fragmented. While diaspora and NGO efforts are robust, they sometimes lack coordination, leading to duplication or inconsistent messaging. Survivors' voices are often mediated by advocacy groups, raising ethical questions about representation.[18] Finally, while international actors can document and pressure, only domestic political will can change legal structures. As long as religious parties wield veto power, external advocacy alone may be insufficient.

Conclusion of Section 5

International responses to forced conversions in Pakistan illustrate both the reach and the limits of global human rights advocacy. The UN system has provided repeated scrutiny through treaty bodies and special procedures. USCIRF and the U.S. State Department have highlighted abuses, though policy action is constrained by security interests. The EU has leveraged trade access but stopped short of suspension, while the UK has amplified survivor voices through parliamentary platforms. NGOs and diaspora initiatives, particularly CHINGARI, have documented cases and pressed governments to act.

Yet despite this visibility, the cycle of atrocities persists. Without binding enforcement and domestic reform, international advocacy remains a spotlight rather than a lever. The challenge is to convert visibility into accountability, ensuring that minority girls in Pakistan are not only seen but protected.

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Section 6. Survivor Testimonies and Lived Experiences

Statistics and legal analysis reveal structural patterns, but they cannot capture the lived reality of girls and families experiencing abduction, forced conversion, and coerced marriage. Testimonies are vital because they humanize abstract violations, illuminate the mechanics of coercion, and demonstrate how state inaction magnifies trauma. Survivor narratives consistently show that forced conversions are not isolated "misunderstandings" but deliberate strategies of control, exploitation, and erasure.

6.1 Abduction as Disappearance: The Sudden Severing of Normalcy

For many families, the ordeal begins with a sudden disappearance. A Hindu father from Ghotki described to the **Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)** how his fourteen-year-old daughter never returned from school. By evening, neighbors whispered that she had been taken by men linked to a local landlord, yet the police refused to register an FIR for two days.[1] Those two days proved decisive: by the time a case was filed, a conversion certificate had already been issued declaring the girl to be eighteen and married to a much older man.

Christian families in Punjab report similar experiences. A mother from Faisalabad told **Amnesty International** that her fifteen-year-old daughter, employed as a domestic worker, was abducted by her employer. When the family approached police, they were told that the girl had "embraced Islam" and no crime had occurred.[2] Such accounts reflect a broader pattern: abduction is not recognized as a crime if framed as religious conversion. For families, the disappearance is doubly traumatic — not only is a daughter lost, but the state itself appears complicit in denying the reality of abduction.

6.2 The Moment of Coercion: Certificates and Signatures

Survivor testimonies reveal the mechanics of coercion behind conversion documents. Girls recount being pressured to sign papers they could not read, often written in Urdu or Arabic while their literacy was in Sindhi or Punjabi.[3] One Dalit Hindu survivor described being confined for days without food until she agreed to repeat the shahada (Islamic declaration of faith) before a cleric.[4] Once this ritual was performed, the coercion was retroactively reframed as "choice."

Another survivor interviewed by the **Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)** explained that she was told her family would be harmed if she resisted. She signed papers in front of strangers, and later in court was required to confirm her conversion while surrounded by clerics and armed men.[5] Such narratives underscore that coercion is not limited to physical force but includes psychological intimidation, threats to family members, and manipulation of legal rituals.

6.3 Marriage as Entrapment

The transition from abduction to marriage is described by survivors as the moment their captivity becomes permanent. A Christian girl abducted from Lahore recounted to **Human Rights Watch** that she was married off within three days of her disappearance, despite being only fifteen.[6] She

described the marriage ceremony as a blur, with no opportunity to speak freely. Once in her new household, she was confined to a single room, monitored constantly, and raped repeatedly under the guise of marital relations.

Hindu survivors in Sindh tell similar stories. One girl recounted to CHINGARI that she was forced to marry a man nearly twice her age. When she attempted escape, she was told she would be killed for apostasy.[7] Her natal family was simultaneously threatened with blasphemy charges if they pursued her return. Survivors emphasize that coerced marriage transforms abduction into a legally protected status: once a girl is labeled a "wife," police and courts treat further family contact as interference in a consensual union.

6.4 Courtrooms as Sites of Intimidation

The courtroom, ideally a space of justice, often becomes a site of intimidation. Survivors consistently describe hostile atmospheres. A case in Karachi documented by HRCP illustrates this vividly: when a Hindu girl testified that she wanted to return to her family, clerics in the courtroom shouted threats, and the judge hastily adjourned.[8] By the next hearing, under pressure, the girl retracted her statement.

One Christian survivor recounted that she was asked by a judge whether she had embraced Islam "of her own free will." With her abductor sitting nearby and dozens of clerics outside chanting slogans, she felt compelled to nod.[9] Such experiences reveal how legal procedures reproduce coercion rather than mitigate it. Even when survivors physically appear in court, they remain unable to speak freely.

6.5 Long-Term Consequences for Survivors

Survivors who manage to escape face lifelong consequences. Social stigma is profound: in many cases, returning to their natal families is seen as dishonoring the community because their "purity" is presumed lost.[10] Survivors often require relocation, new identities, or even asylum abroad to regain safety. One young woman, assisted by a Christian NGO, described the paradox of her return: while she was physically free, she was ostracized by neighbors who feared association with someone perceived as an apostate.[11]

Psychological trauma is another recurrent theme. Survivors report symptoms of depression, anxiety, nightmares, and suicidal ideation.[12] For many, the inability to resume education compounds the harm. Girls abducted during adolescence lose crucial years of schooling, narrowing their future options even if they manage to escape.

6.6 Families' Voices: Grief, Retaliation, and Displacement

Families of abducted girls endure parallel suffering. Parents describe grief compounded by fear of retaliation. In several documented cases, families who pressed charges were themselves accused of blasphemy, forcing them to flee their villages.[13] In rural Sindh, entire Dalit Hindu communities have been displaced after resisting local landlords implicated in conversions.[14]

A Christian father interviewed by the **National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR)** recounted how his attempts to seek justice led to threats against his younger children. He ultimately withdrew his case to protect them.[15] Such accounts highlight how forced conversions destabilize entire communities, not just individual families.

6.7 Survivor-Led Advocacy

Despite these obstacles, some survivors have become advocates. A Hindu woman abducted at age thirteen, later freed through sustained NGO and media pressure, has since spoken publicly at diaspora events in the U.S. and UK.[16] She emphasizes that silence perpetuates the cycle and that survivor voices must be central to reform. Christian survivors have likewise spoken at church-based forums, urging global solidarity.[17]

These testimonies illustrate the potential of survivor-led advocacy, but they also underscore risks. Speaking out invites further threats, making international protection mechanisms essential. The courage of survivors testifying publicly reflects both the urgency of the crisis and the inadequacy of current protections in Pakistan.

Conclusion of Section 6

Survivor and family testimonies reveal the inner workings of coercion: how abduction is reframed as conversion, how threats and rituals mask consent, how marriage entraps victims, and how courtrooms perpetuate intimidation. They also demonstrate the long-term costs — psychological, educational, communal — that extend far beyond the initial abduction. Testimonies dismantle the myth of voluntary conversions, showing instead a system of violence and erasure sustained by state complicity. Elevating these voices is essential, not only for humanizing statistics but also for shaping reforms that address the realities on the ground.

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Section 7. Socio-Cultural and Political Dynamics

The persistence of abductions and forced conversions in Pakistan cannot be explained by legal loopholes alone. These practices are embedded in broader socio-cultural and political structures that normalize gender-based violence, reinforce religious hierarchies, and shield perpetrators through networks of patronage. Understanding these dynamics is critical to explaining why systemic abuses continue despite international condemnation and occasional judicial interventions.

7.1 Patriarchy and Gender Subordination

At the heart of forced conversion lies patriarchy — the systematic subordination of women and girls. In Pakistan, patriarchal structures are reinforced by both cultural and religious norms that privilege male authority.[1] Girls are often viewed as repositories of family honor, with control over their sexuality seen as central to communal reputation. For minority families, the loss of a daughter through abduction and conversion is not only a personal tragedy but also a symbolic defeat of the community itself.

This patriarchal logic intersects with religion in ways that reinforce coercion. Abductors often frame conversions as moral rescues, saving girls from "unbelieving" families.[2] This narrative both justifies the abduction and legitimizes it socially, portraying girls as incapable of autonomous religious choice until guided by male Muslim authority. Survivors' testimonies demonstrate how this gendered paternalism is deployed to mask violence as benevolence.[3]

7.2 Caste and Class Vulnerabilities

Caste and class compound vulnerability, particularly for Hindu girls in Sindh. The majority of Hindus in Sindh belong to marginalized Dalit castes, many working as bonded or semi-bonded agricultural laborers under feudal landlords.[4] Economic dependency makes resistance to abduction perilous: entire families rely on landlords for livelihood, housing, and protection. In several cases documented by the **Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)**, Dalit families withdrew complaints under threat of eviction or economic retaliation.[5]

Caste stigma also perpetuates invisibility. Dalit voices receive less political attention, both within Pakistan and internationally. As a result, the systemic targeting of Dalit girls often remains under-documented compared to higher-caste minorities, despite being more

frequent.[6] This double marginalization — by religion and by caste — makes Dalit Hindu girls uniquely vulnerable to forced conversions.

7.3 Feudalism and Landlord Power

Feudal structures in rural Sindh and southern Punjab sustain patterns of impunity. Landlords often exercise control over local police and bureaucracy, ensuring that abductions are either ignored or actively facilitated.[7] In several documented cases, perpetrators were relatives or clients of landlords, who used their influence to block investigations.[8]

Feudal authority also provides the infrastructure for coercion: abducted girls are often hidden on estates, where access is restricted, making recovery efforts by families or NGOs nearly impossible.[9] This symbiosis between feudalism and coercion explains why abduction-to-conversion pipelines are particularly entrenched in rural Sindh, despite stronger child marriage laws on the books.

7.4 Clerical Authority and Madrasa Networks

Religious clerics play a central legitimating role in the conversion process. Clerical certificates are treated by courts as authoritative evidence of consent, regardless of a girl's age or circumstances.[10] Madrasa networks, particularly in Sindh, have been repeatedly implicated in certifying coerced conversions. The case of the Bharchundi Sharif shrine, for example, has been highlighted by multiple human rights organizations as a hub where abducted Hindu girls are converted and married off under clerical supervision.[11]

These clerical institutions derive legitimacy from widespread respect for religious authority in Pakistan. Any challenge to clerics is quickly framed as an attack on Islam, discouraging officials and judges from scrutinizing their role.[12] As a result, clerics act as both facilitators of conversions and as shields for perpetrators, embedding forced conversions within a broader system of religious authority.

7.5 Religious Parties and Political Power

The influence of religious parties further entrenches these practices. Groups such as Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) mobilize street power to block proposed reforms, framing legislation against forced conversions as anti-Islamic.[13] When

Sindh's provincial assembly attempted to pass a bill in 2016 prohibiting conversions of minors, massive protests led by clerics forced its withdrawal.[14]

Political leaders, reliant on alliances with religious parties, often avoid challenging these groups. Even mainstream parties such as the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) have refrained from confronting clerical opposition directly, fearing electoral backlash.[15] This political climate ensures that reform efforts are diluted, stalled, or abandoned, leaving minority girls vulnerable.

7.6 Social Stigma and Silence

Social stigma further discourages families from seeking justice. Victims who attempt to return are often stigmatized as "dishonored" or "impure," leading families to accept their loss rather than endure communal shame.[16] In some cases, families themselves pressure survivors to remain in coerced marriages to avoid reputational damage. This silence enables the cycle to continue, as perpetrators exploit social norms that punish victims rather than aggressors.

At the communal level, silence is also produced by fear. Minority communities report that speaking out invites retaliation in the form of blasphemy charges or economic boycotts.[17] In this sense, silence is not mere acquiescence but a survival strategy in a hostile environment.

7.7 Media Narratives and Public Opinion

Domestic media coverage has been inconsistent. While some outlets have highlighted high-profile cases, coverage is often framed in terms of "love marriages" or consensual conversions.[18] Sensationalist reporting frequently reproduces abductor narratives, portraying minority girls as choosing Islam willingly. This framing erases coercion and reinforces public perceptions that forced conversions are rare or exaggerated.

Social media has provided alternative platforms for advocacy, particularly among diaspora groups, but also exposes activists to harassment. Cases highlighted by CHINGARI, HRCP, or Pakistani Christian organizations often trend on Twitter/X, drawing both solidarity and threats.[19] The contestation over narrative reflects broader cultural battles over whose voices are considered credible: clerics and abductors, or survivors and their families.

Conclusion of Section 7

The persistence of forced conversions is sustained not only by legal loopholes but by deeply entrenched socio-cultural and political dynamics. Patriarchy naturalizes the subordination of girls; caste and class magnify vulnerability; feudalism and clerical authority provide infrastructure and legitimacy; religious parties block reform; stigma silences survivors; and media narratives often normalize coercion. These dynamics reinforce one another, creating a social order in which abduction and forced conversion are not anomalies but expected outcomes. Reform must therefore be multidimensional, addressing not only laws but also the socio-cultural and political forces that sustain impunity.

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Section 8. Reform Efforts and Prospects for Change

Despite the systemic nature of abductions and forced conversions in Pakistan, reform has not been absent. Civil society groups, minority activists, international organizations, and some sympathetic legislators have repeatedly attempted to introduce protective measures. These efforts, however, often collide with entrenched religious lobbies, feudal interests, and a political establishment wary of confronting clerical authority. Understanding both the achievements and setbacks of reform attempts provides insight into possible strategies for sustainable change.

8.1 Legislative Attempts in Sindh and Beyond

Sindh has been at the forefront of legislative experimentation. In 2016, the **Sindh Provincial Assembly** unanimously passed the *Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill*, which sought to criminalize forced religious conversions and prohibited conversion of minors under eighteen.[1] However, within weeks of its passage, religious parties mobilized massive protests, framing the bill as "anti-Islamic." Clerics declared that preventing conversions was tantamount to obstructing divine will. Under intense pressure, the Sindh government withdrew the bill before it was signed into law.[2]

This episode illustrates the difficulty of reform: even when democratic institutions attempt to address forced conversions, clerical vetoes derail progress. Subsequent attempts to reintroduce similar legislation in Sindh (2019 and 2021) met with the same resistance.[3] Despite this, Sindh remains the only province with a Child Marriage Restraint Act setting the marriage age at eighteen for both genders.[4] This provision has been invoked in some cases to contest coerced marriages, but courts often sidestep it when conversion is involved.

At the federal level, efforts have been more limited. In 2021, a parliamentary committee rejected a bill prohibiting conversion of minors, citing opposition from religious scholars.[5] Members of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) argued that any restriction would "contradict Islamic principles." This rejection underscored the dominance of religious orthodoxy in legislative processes.

8.2 Judicial Interventions

Pakistan's judiciary has occasionally intervened to affirm minority protections. The **Supreme Court's 2014 suo motu judgment**, following attacks on minority places of worship, called for the creation of a national council to monitor minority rights, special

police units to protect minorities, and judicial training on religious freedom.[6] Yet implementation has lagged. Lower courts continue to validate conversions despite age evidence, often under mob pressure.

Nonetheless, some positive rulings exist. In a 2019 case in Sindh, the High Court ordered a medical age determination for a Hindu girl, ruling her underage and annulling her marriage.[7] Similarly, in 2020, the Islamabad High Court directed authorities to ensure that conversions of minors are not validated without independent verification.[8] These precedents provide legal footholds for advocacy, even if they are inconsistently applied.

8.3 Civil Society Advocacy

Civil society organizations have been the most consistent advocates for reform. The **Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)**, **Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)**, and **National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR)** have documented hundreds of cases annually, highlighting patterns of coercion and calling for harmonized child marriage laws, protection shelters, and accountability for complicit officials.[9]

Faith-based groups have also mobilized. Christian NGOs like Cecil & Iris Chaudhry Foundation, Hindu organizations, and diaspora-led initiatives like **CHINGARI (HinduPACT)** have raised awareness nationally and internationally.[10] Their strategies include direct survivor assistance, media campaigns, petitions to provincial assemblies, and testimony in international forums such as USCIRF and the UN Human Rights Council.

A notable civil society success is the creation of safe houses in Karachi and Lahore, operated by NGOs in cooperation with sympathetic officials, which provide temporary protection for girls who manage to escape abduction.[11] Yet these facilities remain underfunded, overstretched, and vulnerable to political backlash.

8.4 International Leverage and Trade Conditionality

International actors, as discussed in Section 5, have exerted leverage through mechanisms such as the EU's GSP+ trade scheme and USCIRF's CPC designations. In some cases, these external pressures have emboldened local reformers. For example, Sindh legislators cited EU scrutiny in 2021 when reintroducing the forced conversion bill, though it was again blocked.[12]

International leverage is most effective when it aligns with domestic advocacy. The risk of GSP+ suspension has provided NGOs with a powerful argument that Pakistan's economy is

at stake if reforms are not enacted.[13] However, the persistence of security concerns and geopolitical alliances often dilutes the impact of such pressure, limiting its ability to catalyze structural change.

8.5 Obstacles: Religious Parties and Clerical Opposition

Religious parties remain the most formidable obstacle. Groups like Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) mobilize mass protests to block any legislation that might restrict conversions.[14] Their rhetoric frames such bills as part of a Western or "Hindu" conspiracy against Islam. This framing resonates with significant segments of the population, leaving political leaders reluctant to challenge them.

Clerical institutions such as shrines and madrasas derive economic and symbolic capital from their role in conversions, making them vested stakeholders in maintaining the status quo.[15] Even when individual clerics condemn coerced conversions, institutional inertia ensures that systemic reform remains elusive.

8.6 Prospects for Change

Despite formidable challenges, several avenues for reform remain open. First, harmonizing child marriage laws across provinces to establish eighteen as the minimum marriage age nationwide would create a baseline protection, even if enforcement remains contested.[16] Second, mandating independent legal guardians and psychological evaluations for minors in conversion cases could provide procedural safeguards. Third, embedding accountability for police and clerics who facilitate coercion — through disciplinary mechanisms and financial sanctions — could shift incentives.

International partnerships can also strengthen reform. Linking aid and trade benefits explicitly to measurable benchmarks, such as the passage of protective legislation and establishment of independent shelters, could increase pressure on policymakers.[17] Meanwhile, survivor-led advocacy, amplified by diaspora networks, provides moral urgency that state actors cannot easily ignore.

Ultimately, meaningful reform will require a coalition of actors: legislators willing to champion unpopular causes, civil society groups documenting abuses, international bodies applying pressure, and survivors testifying despite risks. While progress may be incremental, sustained advocacy has already created cracks in the edifice of impunity.

Conclusion of Section 8

Reform efforts in Pakistan reveal both resilience and fragility. Legislative attempts in Sindh show that change is possible, but clerical vetoes remain decisive. Judicial interventions occasionally protect victims but are undermined by inconsistent application. Civil society continues to document and resist, but its capacity is constrained by resources and threats. International actors provide leverage but are limited by geopolitical calculations. The prospects for change lie in aligning these forces, creating enough political and economic cost for Pakistan to prioritize the protection of minority girls.

Reform, therefore, is not merely a legal exercise but a battle against entrenched socio-political hierarchies. Its success will depend on the courage of survivors, the persistence of advocates, and the willingness of domestic and international actors to confront clerical and feudal power structures that perpetuate injustice.

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Section 9. Regional and Global Comparisons

Understanding Pakistan's crisis of abductions and forced conversions in isolation risks missing the broader global context of minority rights violations, patriarchal violence, and the politicization of religion. Comparative analysis reveals that while Pakistan's crisis has unique characteristics — particularly the centrality of clerical legitimation and blasphemy laws — many of its dynamics resonate with patterns elsewhere. Comparing Pakistan to its South Asian neighbors, the Middle East, and selected global contexts illuminates both similarities and distinctive features.

9.1 South Asia: Shared Vulnerabilities, Divergent Responses

South Asia is marked by the intersection of patriarchy, poverty, and religious nationalism, all of which shape gendered violence. Forced marriages, child marriages, and communal targeting of women are widespread, but state responses vary.

India: Child marriage remains prevalent in parts of rural India despite the *Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006)*.[1] However, unlike in Pakistan, Indian courts generally annul marriages involving minors when evidence is presented.[2] Controversies around so-called "love jihad" — a Hindu nationalist conspiracy theory alleging Muslim men seduce Hindu women to convert them — illustrate how the issue of interfaith unions can be politicized.[3] Yet, the core distinction is that Indian legal frameworks treat coercion as invalid, even if public discourse is polarized.

Bangladesh: Similar to Pakistan, Bangladesh struggles with child marriage and weak enforcement of protective laws. The *Child Marriage Restraint Act (2017)* set eighteen as the minimum marriage age but includes "special circumstances" exceptions.[4] Minority Hindu and Christian girls are vulnerable to abductions, though the scale is less documented than in Pakistan. Civil society organizations in Bangladesh have been more successful at leveraging international partnerships to pressure for reform.[5]

Sri Lanka and Nepal: Both countries have faced challenges in protecting minority women during conflict periods. In Sri Lanka's civil war, Tamil women were often targeted; in Nepal, caste-based sexual violence persists. However, neither context exhibits the same systemic clerical legitimation of coerced conversions that characterizes Pakistan.[6]

Thus, Pakistan's crisis fits within South Asia's broader struggles with child marriage and patriarchal violence but stands out in its systematic use of religious authority to legitimize coercion.

9.2 The Middle East: Parallels of Religious Control

The Middle East offers parallels where women's autonomy is curtailed through religious frameworks. In countries such as **Saudi Arabia** and **Iran**, conversion from Islam is penalized, while religious authorities exert heavy control over marriage and guardianship.[7] However, forced conversions of minority girls as a systemic practice are less documented.

A closer parallel exists in **Egypt**, where Coptic Christian girls have reported abductions and coerced conversions to Islam. Human rights groups have documented cases where girls disappear, only to reappear as the "wives" of Muslim men, with police reluctant to intervene.[8] This mirrors Pakistan's pattern of abduction, conversion certificates, and judicial complicity. In both cases, majority-Muslim states deny systemic targeting while attributing cases to "personal choice."

Sudan under its previous Islamist regime also exhibited patterns of forced Islamization, including restrictions on non-Muslim marriages and conversion of children.[9] However, political transitions since 2019 have created space for partial reforms, though instability continues to threaten minority protections.

9.3 Africa: The Case of Nigeria

In **northern Nigeria**, particularly under states implementing Sharia law, Christian girls have been abducted and coerced into marriages with Muslim men. The infamous 2014 **Chibok abductions by Boko Haram** highlighted the intersection of extremist violence and gendered targeting.[10] Although Boko Haram's actions fall outside state institutions, there are documented cases where local authorities legitimize coerced unions between Muslim men and abducted Christian girls.[11]

Nigeria thus provides a parallel where both extremist groups and state institutions sustain coercion. However, unlike in Pakistan, the Nigerian state is not uniformly complicit; responses vary widely by state and by the degree of Islamist influence in governance.

9.4 Global Parallels: Patriarchy, Minorities, and Religion

Globally, the abduction and coercion of minority women often occurs in contexts of conflict or extreme patriarchy. During the **Bosnian War (1992–1995)**, women were subjected to systematic sexual violence, often framed in ethno-religious terms.[12] Similarly, during the **Islamic State's occupation of Iraq (2014–2017)**, Yazidi women were enslaved,

forcibly converted, and sold into marriages.[13] These episodes demonstrate how women's bodies become sites of communal domination.

While Pakistan is not in active civil war, its systemic coercion of minority women resembles these conflict-era patterns in that it seeks to erase minority identity through gendered violence. What distinguishes Pakistan is that such practices occur in peacetime, under the aegis of courts, clerics, and police.

9.5 The Distinctiveness of Pakistan's Crisis

From these comparisons, several distinctive features of Pakistan's crisis emerge:

1. **Institutionalization through Clerical Authority:** Unlike many global contexts where forced marriages occur through informal means, Pakistan embeds coercion in clerical certification, giving it legal weight.
2. **Judicial Complicity:** Courts systematically prioritize conversion affidavits over birth certificates, creating a legal pipeline that legitimizes coercion.
3. **Blasphemy Laws as a Shield:** Families contesting abductions face blasphemy accusations, a feature not paralleled in most other contexts.
4. **Peacetime Normalization:** Whereas conflict situations normalize sexual violence (Bosnia, Iraq), Pakistan's abuses occur in peacetime, demonstrating institutional rather than wartime complicity.
5. **Minority Erasure as Policy Outcome:** The cumulative effect is not only gendered violence but also demographic pressure on minorities, reinforcing migration and attrition.

9.6 Lessons from Comparative Contexts

Comparative analysis offers lessons for advocacy:

- **Egypt** shows how international advocacy combined with domestic church mobilization can bring visibility to coerced conversions, though systemic change remains elusive.
- **Bangladesh** illustrates the importance of harmonized laws: even partial reforms on child marriage create advocacy footholds.

- **Nigeria** highlights the danger of conflating extremist violence with state complicity — but also shows the possibility of differentiated governance.
- **Bosnia and Iraq** demonstrate that framing gendered violence as a form of genocide can mobilize international accountability mechanisms, a framing some Pakistani advocates have begun to employ.[14]

For Pakistan, these lessons suggest that combining domestic advocacy, diaspora mobilization, and international accountability mechanisms could incrementally shift the landscape, even if entrenched clerical resistance remains formidable.

Conclusion of Section 9

Pakistan's crisis is not unique in its basic contours — abduction, coercion, and patriarchal control recur globally. But its distinctiveness lies in the institutional embedding of coercion within clerical and judicial authority, under peacetime governance. Comparisons with South Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and global conflict zones highlight both parallels and divergences. Recognizing these comparative lessons can strengthen advocacy by showing that forced conversions are not cultural anomalies but violations of universal human rights norms.

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Section 10. Human Rights Frameworks and International Law

The abduction, forced conversion, and coerced marriage of minority girls in Pakistan is not only a domestic issue but also a clear violation of international human rights law. Pakistan, as a signatory to multiple human rights treaties, has legally binding obligations to prevent such practices, protect victims, and punish perpetrators. A human rights law perspective situates these abuses within a broader global framework, demonstrating how Pakistan's inaction contravenes established international norms.

10.1 The Universal Declaration and Foundational Norms

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**, adopted in 1948, provides the foundational principles of modern international human rights law. Article 16 affirms that marriage must be "entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses."[1] Article 18 enshrines the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including the freedom to change one's religion.

While the UDHR is not legally binding, it has become part of customary international law, and its principles are reflected in binding treaties. Forced conversions and marriages of minors clearly contravene these provisions. Pakistan frequently invokes the UDHR in international forums, yet its tolerance of systemic coercion undermines its credibility as a rights-respecting state.

10.2 The ICCPR and Religious Freedom

The **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)**, which Pakistan ratified in 2010, codifies many UDHR principles. Article 18 guarantees freedom of religion, including the right not to be coerced in matters of faith.[2] The Human Rights Committee has clarified that coercion includes the use of threat, violence, or undue pressure, all of which characterize Pakistan's forced conversion cases.[3]

Article 24 of the ICCPR requires states to provide children with special measures of protection.[4] The systemic abduction of minors for forced conversions represents a direct violation of this obligation. Pakistan's periodic reports to the Human Rights Committee have repeatedly been criticized for failing to address this issue. In its 2017 review, the Committee expressed concern about the lack of safeguards against coerced conversions and child marriage.[5]

10.3 The CRC and Child Protection

The **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**, ratified by Pakistan in 1990, is the most relevant treaty regarding protection of girls. Article 19 obligates states to protect children from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation."[6] Article 34 specifically requires states to prevent sexual exploitation, while Article 35 prohibits the abduction, sale, or trafficking of children.

Forced marriages of minors also violate Article 12 (the right of the child to express their own views) and Article 28 (the right to education). Abducted girls are denied both voice and education, often permanently. During the CRC's 2021 review of Pakistan, the Committee criticized child marriage exemptions and urged harmonization of laws to raise the minimum age of marriage to eighteen nationwide.[7]

10.4 The CEDAW and Gendered Violence

The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, ratified by Pakistan in 1996, addresses gender-based discrimination. Article 16 requires states to ensure free and full consent in marriage.[8] General Recommendation 21 of the CEDAW Committee specifies that child marriage has no legal effect and must be prohibited.

The CEDAW Committee's 2020 Concluding Observations on Pakistan highlighted the disproportionate impact of forced conversions on Hindu and Christian girls, urging legislative action and protection mechanisms.[9] Pakistan's delegation, however, claimed that conversions were voluntary, a stance that contradicts survivor testimonies and NGO documentation.

10.5 The CAT and State Complicity

The **Convention against Torture (CAT)**, which Pakistan ratified in 2010, prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.[10] Abducted girls who are confined, beaten, or raped fall within this framework. State complicity — for example, when police refuse to investigate or when courts validate coerced conversions — represents a violation of Article 2, which requires states to prevent torture with no exceptions.[11]

Although Pakistan has submitted periodic reports under CAT, the Committee has expressed concern about gender-based violence and impunity. Forced conversions remain underexamined in these reviews, underscoring the need for targeted advocacy.

10.6 Regional Human Rights Frameworks

Unlike Europe or the Americas, South Asia lacks a strong regional human rights court. The **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)** has no enforceable human rights mechanism, limiting regional accountability. However, frameworks such as the **Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990)** — which Pakistan has endorsed — emphasize religious freedom in principle, though they are often invoked selectively.[12]

In practice, Pakistan relies on Islamic human rights instruments to deflect criticism, arguing that Western frameworks fail to respect cultural particularities. Yet, even within Islamic jurisprudence, coercion in matters of faith is prohibited, suggesting that Pakistan's tolerance of forced conversions lacks legitimacy under both universal and Islamic frameworks.

10.7 Customary International Law and Jus Cogens Norms

Certain norms — such as the prohibition of torture, slavery, and racial discrimination — are recognized as **jus cogens**, binding on all states regardless of treaty ratification. Forced marriage and sexual slavery, as established in international criminal law precedents (e.g., the ICTY and ICC cases), fall within this category.[13]

Pakistan's systemic tolerance of coerced marriages arguably amounts to a breach of jus cogens obligations, opening the door for universal jurisdiction claims or advocacy that frames the abuses as violations of peremptory norms.

10.8 International Criminal Law: Gendered Atrocities

International criminal jurisprudence has increasingly recognized forced marriage, sexual slavery, and religious persecution as crimes against humanity. The **International Criminal Court (ICC)** has prosecuted cases where women were abducted and coerced into marriage, recognizing such acts as distinct crimes beyond rape.[14]

While Pakistan is not a party to the Rome Statute of the ICC, these precedents provide a normative framework. If the international community were to recognize the abduction and coerced conversion of minority girls as a form of cultural or religious genocide, Pakistan could face extraordinary scrutiny.[15]

10.9 Avenues for Accountability

Pakistan's international obligations create avenues for accountability:

1. **Treaty Body Reviews:** NGOs can submit shadow reports to CRC, CEDAW, CAT, and ICCPR reviews, ensuring that forced conversions remain on the agenda.
2. **Universal Periodic Review (UPR):** States can press Pakistan to adopt specific reforms, linking compliance to aid and trade benefits.
3. **Special Procedures:** Mandate holders such as the Special Rapporteur on FoRB can issue urgent appeals and communications, generating visibility.
4. **International Advocacy Coalitions:** Diaspora groups, in collaboration with global NGOs, can frame coerced conversions as violations of jus cogens, mobilizing broader accountability.
5. **Sanctions and Conditionality:** The U.S. and EU can tie economic privileges (CPC waivers, GSP+ access) to measurable reforms, creating material incentives for compliance.

Conclusion of Section 10

International human rights law provides a clear and binding framework that Pakistan is violating through its tolerance of forced conversions and coerced marriages. Treaties like the ICCPR, CRC, and CEDAW impose explicit obligations, while jus cogens norms prohibit such practices universally. While enforcement is limited by political realities, international law offers advocacy tools that can amplify survivor voices, mobilize global pressure, and establish that Pakistan's practices are not cultural anomalies but violations of fundamental human dignity.

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Section 11. The Role of Pakistani Institutions: Police, Courts, and Parliament

The abduction and forced conversion of minority girls in Pakistan is sustained not merely by private actors but by the complicity, inaction, or structural failures of state institutions. The police, judiciary, and parliament each play pivotal roles in either reinforcing or challenging coercive practices. Examining these institutions reveals a system where protection mechanisms exist on paper but are systematically undermined in practice.

11.1 Police: Gatekeepers of Justice or Instruments of Complicity?

The police are the first line of state response when families report abductions. Yet, in most documented cases, their role is characterized by negligence, bias, or active collusion with abductors.

11.1.1 Refusal to Register FIRs

Families frequently report that police stations refuse to register **First Information Reports (FIRs)** when minority girls are abducted.[1] Officers cite claims of conversion to Islam as justification for inaction. In Sindh and Punjab, NGOs have documented repeated instances where families waited days or weeks for FIRs, only to find that conversion and marriage certificates had been procured in the interim.[2]

11.1.2 Collusion with Local Elites

Police often operate under the influence of feudal landlords, clerics, or political figures.[3] In Sindh, landlords frequently use their influence to pressure police into ignoring abduction cases, particularly when perpetrators are connected to shrine networks. In some cases, abductors are relatives of police officers themselves.[4]

11.1.3 Failure to Protect Victims

Even when FIRs are registered, police fail to protect survivors. Girls placed in police custody pending hearings have reported harassment and pressure to reaffirm conversions.[5] In extreme cases, police have returned girls to abductors despite court orders, citing “community pressure.” This pattern reveals how law enforcement reproduces rather than mitigates coercion.

11.2 Courts: Between Law and Intimidation

Judicial institutions have the formal responsibility to adjudicate abduction and conversion cases. However, courts often validate coerced conversions under pressure from clerics and mobs.

11.2.1 Age Disputes and Legal Fictions

Courts frequently accept affidavits declaring abducted girls to be eighteen, even when birth certificates or school records indicate otherwise.[6] In several high-profile cases, including the 2019 Ghotki and 2020 Karachi conversions, judges prioritized conversion certificates over official age documents.[7] This legal fiction enables child marriage under the guise of religious freedom.

11.2.2 Courtroom Intimidation

Survivors testifying in court often face intimidation from clerics and supporters of abductors. HRCP has documented cases where mobs surrounded courthouses, chanting slogans, and pressuring judges.[8] Survivors recount being unable to speak freely due to threats of violence. This climate transforms the courtroom into an extension of coercion.

11.2.3 Positive Precedents

Despite systemic failures, some rulings offer hope. In 2019, the Sindh High Court annulled a marriage after ordering medical tests that confirmed the girl was underage.[9] In 2020, the Islamabad High Court emphasized that conversion must be free and voluntary, particularly for minors.[10] Such judgments, while rare, demonstrate judicial capacity for reform when insulated from mob pressure.

11.3 Parliament: Legislative Attempts and Political Cowardice

Pakistan's parliament has been inconsistent in addressing forced conversions. While minority lawmakers and some progressive legislators have pushed for reform, political will has faltered under clerical pressure.

11.3.1 Provincial Legislation

Sindh's 2016 bill criminalizing forced conversions marked a landmark attempt, but was withdrawn under clerical protest.[11] Despite reintroductions in 2019 and 2021, resistance has persisted. Sindh remains unique for its **Child Marriage Restraint Act**, which sets eighteen as the minimum marriage age, but this law is often bypassed when conversions are involved.[12]

11.3.2 Federal Parliament

At the federal level, parliamentary committees have repeatedly rejected bills to restrict conversions of minors. In 2021, the parliamentary committee on religious affairs rejected a draft law, citing clerical objections.[13] Major parties, including PTI, PML-N, and PPP, have avoided confronting religious lobbies head-on. This reluctance reflects a broader political culture in which clerics exercise veto power over reform.

11.3.3 Minority Representation

Pakistan reserves seats for minorities in both national and provincial assemblies, but these members are often marginalized within party structures.[14] Minority legislators who raise the issue of forced conversions face backlash and lack the votes to advance bills independently. Their role, while symbolically important, has not translated into substantive legislative gains.

11.4 National Commissions and Oversight Bodies

Several commissions exist nominally to protect minority and human rights, yet their impact remains limited. The **National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR)** and the **National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)** have issued reports condemning forced conversions, but lack enforcement power.[15] Recommendations often languish without parliamentary action.

The **Council of Islamic Ideology (CII)**, meanwhile, has consistently opposed protective legislation, claiming that restrictions on conversions violate Islamic principles.[16] This creates institutional asymmetry: bodies meant to protect minorities lack authority, while religious councils wield veto power.

11.5 The Bureaucracy and Administrative Complicity

Beyond the formal institutions, bureaucratic practices contribute to systemic abuse. Officials who issue marriage certificates, conversion affidavits, and national identity cards often fail to verify age or consent.[17] This administrative complicity transforms coercion into bureaucratic normalcy.

Similarly, education and welfare departments rarely intervene when girls disappear from school or workplaces, reflecting an institutionalized indifference to minority suffering. The result is a state apparatus that not only fails to prevent abuses but structurally facilitates them.

11.6 Prospects for Institutional Reform

Reforming Pakistani institutions will require structural changes:

1. **Police:** Establish independent complaint mechanisms, disciplinary oversight, and training on child and minority rights. International funding could be tied to measurable improvements in FIR registration and victim protection.
2. **Courts:** Create specialized benches for child marriage and conversion cases, with witness protection measures to insulate survivors from intimidation. Judicial training on international obligations could shift interpretive practices.
3. **Parliament:** Empower minority representatives, ensure cross-party coalitions for reform, and integrate international trade leverage to incentivize protective legislation.
4. **Commissions:** Strengthen NCHR and NCSW with binding authority to implement recommendations and sanction noncompliance by government agencies.

While reform faces entrenched opposition, sustained advocacy can exploit openings within institutions. Positive precedents, even if rare, demonstrate that state organs can act protectively when insulated from political and clerical pressure.

Conclusion of Section 11

The Pakistani state's complicity in abductions and forced conversions is not the result of isolated failures but of systemic dysfunction across institutions. Police inaction, judicial bias, parliamentary cowardice, and bureaucratic complicity together sustain a cycle of impunity. Yet, each institution also contains potential pathways for reform. Positive precedents in courts, the courage of minority legislators, and the persistence of commissions suggest that transformation, while difficult, is not impossible. Aligning domestic advocacy with international leverage may help shift institutional incentives from complicity to accountability.

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Section 12. The Role of Civil Society, Media, and Diaspora Advocacy

The resilience of Pakistan's minority communities in the face of systemic coercion owes much to civil society, independent media, and diaspora activism. These actors have documented abuses, pressured institutions, amplified survivor voices, and mobilized international solidarity. Yet, their efforts remain constrained by political repression, threats of violence, and resource limitations. Examining their roles reveals both the promise and fragility of non-state advocacy in Pakistan.

12.1 Civil Society within Pakistan

Civil society organizations (CSOs) remain at the forefront of advocacy against abductions and forced conversions. Despite shrinking civic space under successive governments, NGOs continue to provide critical documentation, survivor assistance, and policy advocacy.

12.1.1 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)

The **HRCP**, Pakistan's oldest independent human rights body, has systematically documented forced conversions. Its *State of Human Rights* reports highlight patterns of abduction, clerical complicity, and judicial bias.[1] HRCP field teams have verified cases often ignored by state agencies, making its documentation central to both national debates and international advocacy.

12.1.2 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)

The **CSJ**, based in Lahore, has played a pivotal role in quantifying cases and exposing trends. Its annual *Human Rights Observer* reports provide disaggregated data on forced conversions, highlighting age, religion, and regional dynamics.[2] CSJ's evidence-based advocacy has informed parliamentary debates and shadow reports to UN treaty bodies.

12.1.3 National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR)

Though a statutory body, the **NCHR** has operated with NGO-like independence under strong leadership. Its 2023 report on forced conversions was one of the most comprehensive official acknowledgments of the crisis.[3] The Commission recommended harmonization of child marriage laws, shelters for victims, and accountability for complicit officials, giving NGOs a powerful advocacy tool.

12.1.4 Faith-Based and Minority NGOs

Christian-led NGOs, such as the **Cecil & Iris Chaudhry Foundation**, provide legal aid and shelter for abducted Christian girls. Hindu community organizations in Sindh, including those linked with mandirs and caste-based associations, mobilize locally to contest conversions.[4] These groups operate under constant threat of blasphemy accusations, making their advocacy both courageous and precarious.

12.2 The Role of Media

The media has been a double-edged sword in the fight against forced conversions. While some journalists expose systemic abuses, others reproduce narratives of "love marriages" and "voluntary conversions," undermining survivors.

12.2.1 Investigative Journalism

Independent outlets such as *Dawn*, *Herald*, and *The News on Sunday* have published investigative pieces on high-profile cases.[5] Journalists like Rafia Zakaria and Beena Sarwar have amplified survivor stories, critiqued judicial complicity, and challenged societal silence. Such reporting has occasionally sparked public debate, though often at great personal risk to journalists.

12.2.2 Mainstream Framing

Conversely, many Urdu-language outlets, influenced by clerical narratives, frame conversions as consensual. Families are portrayed as oppressors preventing their daughters' "free choice," while abductors are celebrated as pious men.[6] This discursive framing normalizes coercion, making public opinion less sympathetic to victims.

12.2.3 Social Media

Platforms like Twitter (X), Facebook, and YouTube have amplified advocacy but also intensified harassment. Hashtags like **#JusticeForArzooRaja** trended in 2020, mobilizing international awareness.[7] At the same time, activists and survivors faced online threats, doxxing, and defamation campaigns. Diaspora-led digital campaigns often generate visibility that domestic media avoids, though their reach inside Pakistan is uneven.

12.3 Diaspora Advocacy

Pakistani and South Asian diaspora organizations have been critical in sustaining international advocacy. Their distance from domestic repression allows them to speak more freely, while their networks in host countries enable lobbying of foreign governments.

12.3.1 CHINGARI (HinduPACT)

The **CHINGARI project of HinduPACT** has documented cases of abducted Hindu girls, produced advocacy reports, and mobilized U.S. lawmakers to raise the issue in Congress.[8] By framing forced conversions as a human rights violation and gendered violence, CHINGARI has secured attention from bipartisan groups concerned with religious freedom.

12.3.2 Christian Diaspora Networks

Pakistani Christian diaspora groups in the UK, Canada, and the U.S. have mobilized around cases like that of Maira Shahbaz. Their advocacy has included petitions to grant asylum to survivors and lobbying for sanctions on Pakistan under USCIRF recommendations.[9] Churches have been particularly active in mobilizing grassroots support, framing forced conversions as part of global Christian persecution.

12.3.3 Secular and Interfaith Networks

Beyond faith-based advocacy, secular human rights organizations and interfaith coalitions have amplified the issue at forums such as the **UN Human Rights Council** and the **European Parliament**.[10] These groups emphasize international law obligations, ensuring that advocacy is not dismissed as sectarian lobbying.

12.4 Challenges Facing Civil Society and Media

Civil society and media actors operate under severe constraints:

- **Legal Repression:** NGOs face restrictive registration laws and threats of deregistration. Journalists risk sedition or blasphemy charges.[11]
- **Violence:** Activists have been harassed, abducted, or attacked by mobs. Police often fail to protect them.
- **Resource Scarcity:** Shelters and legal aid services are chronically underfunded. NGOs rely on donor cycles that limit sustained support.
- **Narrative Marginalization:** Minority voices are often dismissed as biased or foreign-influenced, reducing their impact in mainstream discourse.

These challenges create an environment where advocacy persists but remains fragile.

12.5 The Promise of Transnational Advocacy

Despite constraints, transnational advocacy offers significant potential. By linking domestic documentation to international platforms, diaspora and civil society actors can amplify pressure on Pakistan's institutions. Strategies include:

1. Submitting **shadow reports** to UN treaty bodies (CRC, CEDAW, CAT, ICCPR).
2. Leveraging **GSP+ trade conditionality** in the EU to pressure for protective legislation.
3. Lobbying for **CPC (Country of Particular Concern)** designations by USCIRF to impose accountability.
4. Building **interfaith solidarity campaigns** that reframe forced conversions as violations of universal human rights, not sectarian grievances.

By weaving local testimonies into global advocacy, these networks counter the state's narrative that conversions are voluntary.

Conclusion of Section 12

Civil society, media, and diaspora advocacy form the backbone of resistance to Pakistan's culture of coerced conversions. NGOs like HRCP and CSJ provide documentation; journalists amplify survivor voices; diaspora organizations mobilize international pressure. Their work demonstrates that even in a hostile environment, non-state actors can create cracks in the edifice of impunity. However, their effectiveness is constrained by legal repression, violence, and resource scarcity. The future of reform will depend on sustaining these networks, linking them to international leverage, and protecting them from reprisals.

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