



1. How many Pakistanis are not practising Muslims but also either not followers of other religions or actually agnostic/atheist, where do they live and is there any evidence of them being targeted for harm because of their non-practice of Islam/agnosticism/atheism?

According to the US Department of State, “[l]ess than 0.5 per cent of the population, as recorded in the 1998 census, was silent on religious affiliation or claimed not to adhere to a particular religious group. Social pressure was such that few persons claimed no religious affiliation”. Of a total population of 174 million people, 95 per cent of Pakistanis consider themselves Muslim. Of these, 75 per cent identified as Sunni, and 25 per cent as Shi’a. Of the remaining 5 per cent, major religious groups include “Hindus, Christians, Parsis/Zoroastrians, Bahais, Sikhs, Buddhists, Ahmadis and others”.¹

In September 2010, *IBN Live* reported that “[a] handful of Pakistani Muslim youths is [*sic*] beginning to question the existence of God and, in the process, giving up Islam to become atheists”. The report referred to the establishment of a Facebook group for Pakistani agnostics and atheists that – at the time – had attracted over 100 members, including “young Pakistani students studying in New York University to Oxford University to the prestigious Lahore University of Management Sciences”.²

As of January 2012, the group – Pakistani Atheists and Agnostics – purported to have enlisted over 800 members. According to the group’s founder, most of the members are aged between the ages of 16 and 32, and work as doctors, engineers, computer programmers, lawyers and business people. He also claims that “[m]ost of the members also tend to be from the three major cities: Lahore, Karachi & Islamabad”. The founder noted that his family do not know that he is involved in the organisation, and that he uses a pseudonym to protect his identity. He said that while the response from Pakistani Muslims to the group has been largely encouraging, “there is the odd individual who expresses his desire to behead me”.³

Please refer to the response to [Question 2](#) for further information regarding the risk of harm against atheists.

2. Is there any evidence of the blasphemy laws being used recently (in the last five years or so) against individuals who do not practice or follow Islam but also do not practice or follow another religion?

¹ US Department of State 2011, *International Religious Freedom Report – Pakistan*, 13 September, Section I

² ‘Pakistani Muslim youths turning into atheists’ 2010, *IBN Live*, source: <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/pakistani-muslim-youths-turning-into-atheists/130354-19-93.html> – Accessed 20 January 2012

³ Hussain, G. 2012, ‘The rise of atheism in Pakistan’, *The Commentator*, 9 January
http://www.thecommentator.com/article/782/the_rise_of_atheism_in_pakistan – Accessed 20 January 2012

Limited information was located regarding the recent use of blasphemy laws specifically against atheists or agnostics in Pakistan. In November 2011, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) called for Sweden to “provide asylum to Khalid Saeed, a Pakistani atheist and apostate from Islam who fled his homeland to live in Sweden”. According to the IHEU, “Khalid’s initial request for asylum was rejected by Swedish authorities because they did not accept that his outspoken atheism had made it unsafe for him and his family in Pakistan”.⁴

Saeed reportedly arrived in Sweden seeking asylum in 2009, after having received threats and abuse in Pakistan after he had “openly declared himself to be an atheist and publicly renounced any adherence to Islam”. Such actions, according to the IHEU, are regarded in Pakistan as “defamation of the Prophet Muhammad and so leave him open to trial for blasphemy, a charge that can bring the death sentence”. Despite the rejection of his claim for asylum, one of the lay judges reportedly provided a dissenting opinion on the case, saying that “[a]s an active member of an atheist society in Pakistan...Mr Saeed is a target for extreme Islamic groups in his native country, and may even be at risk of action against him by the state”.⁵

According to *Pakistan Today*, apostasy is punishable by death under Islamic law, unless the apostate repents and reverts to Islam within three days. In 2007, the Apostasy Act 2006 was tabled in the Pakistani parliament, proposing the “death sentence and life imprisonment for male and female apostates, respectively”. The bill was reviewed by a parliamentary standing commission, and ultimately failed to pass, preventing the changing of one’s faith becoming a crime. However, if the “prosecution can prove that one had committed blasphemy in the act of committing apostasy, then the accused could be charged under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code”.⁶

On the basis of numbers, Shi’ites appear to be the largest single religious group charged with blasphemy. However, according to the US Department of State, members of other religious minorities, such as Christians and Ahmadis, are charged with blasphemy in disproportionately high numbers.⁷ The British High Commission in Pakistan reported in January 2009 “that although apostasy was not illegal, people who change their faith are regularly charged with blasphemy and insulting Islam”. Although there have not yet been any executions for blasphemy, some individuals have been sentenced to death, while those accused have been attacked, and some killed, by violent extremists.⁸

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in February 2010 “the minister for minorities’ affairs stated that Pakistan planned to change its blasphemy law to check its misuse by extremists”. The HRCP noted that previous attempts to reform the law had failed due to opposition from extremists, and that despite the minister’s announcement, no changes were made to the law during 2010. According to the HRCP, an estimated 64 people were charged under the blasphemy law during 2010, many of whom remained in prison. Three were reportedly killed in police custody, despite their respective trials awaiting

⁴ ‘IHEU calls for asylum for Pakistani atheist’ 2011, International Humanist and Ethical Union website, 17 November <http://www.iheu.org/iheu-calls-asylum-pakistani-atheist> – Accessed 20 January 2012

⁵ ‘Let Khalid Saeed stay in Sweden’ 2011, International Humanist and Ethical Union website, 17 November <http://www.iheu.org/let-khalid-saeed-stay-sweden> – Accessed 23 January 2012

⁶ Farooqi, B. 2011, ‘Being Pakistani and atheist a dangerous combo, but some ready to brave it’, *Pakistan Today*, 17 September <http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/09/being-pakistani-and-atheist-a-dangerous-combo-but-some-ready-to-brave-it/> – Accessed 20 January 2012

⁷ US Department of State 2010, *International Religious Freedom Report – Pakistan*, 17 November, Section II

⁸ UK Home Office 2010, *Country of Origin Information Report – Pakistan*, 18 January, pp.93-94, 97

judgement. The HRCP further noted that “[v]igilantes and radical elements continued to treat as fair game anyone accused of blasphemy, or anyone voicing support for such accused”.⁹

⁹ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan 2011, *State of Human Rights in 2010*, April, pp.112, 124 <http://www.hrcp-web.org/Publications/AR2010.pdf> – Accessed 27 April 2011

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