

# Freedom of Religion and Blasphemy Laws of Pakistan: A Constitutional Discrimination against Minorities.

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### Introduction:

The protection of human rights depends upon the principles of the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings and it is the obligation of all Member states of the United Nations to take effective measure to promote universal respect and fundamental freedom for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.

In some countries where religion plays a prominent role, there are tendencies to protect the dominant or state religion from blasphemy as is the case in many Muslim countries including Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria etc.

**According to a study published in 2011 by PEW research centre, 59 countries prohibited the conduct of blasphemy as of mid-2009, where 44 of them enforced the laws.**

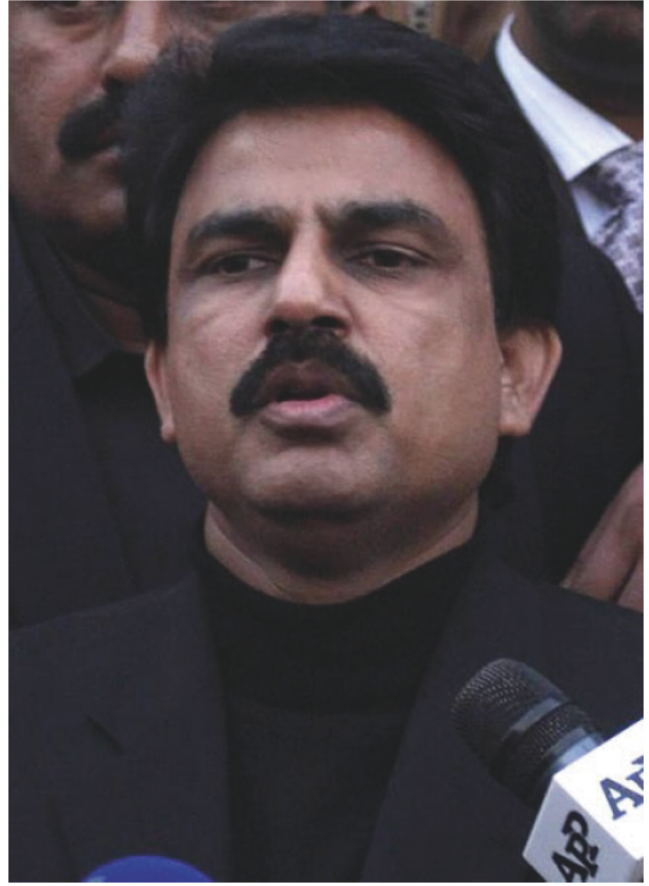
### What is Blasphemy?:

Even though there is no universal consensus on what exactly constitutes the blasphemy, the definition in dictionaries, religious books and many national and international legal documents has helped a bit in understanding the concept of blasphemy. In a policy brief published by the freedom house in 2010, it was evident that in all reported cases, the blasphemy laws lacked clear and precise definition which made them prone to manipulation and arbitrary application.

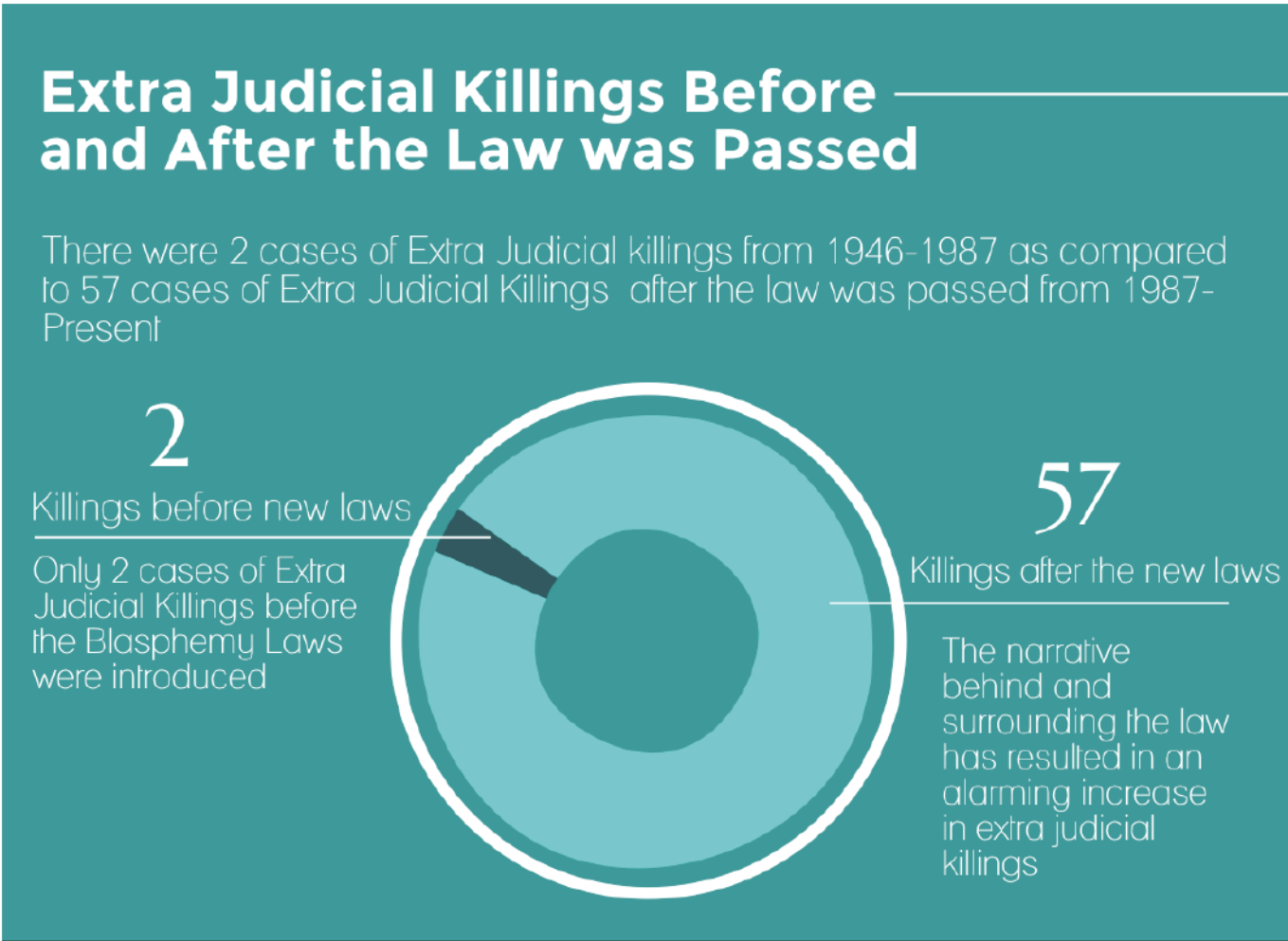
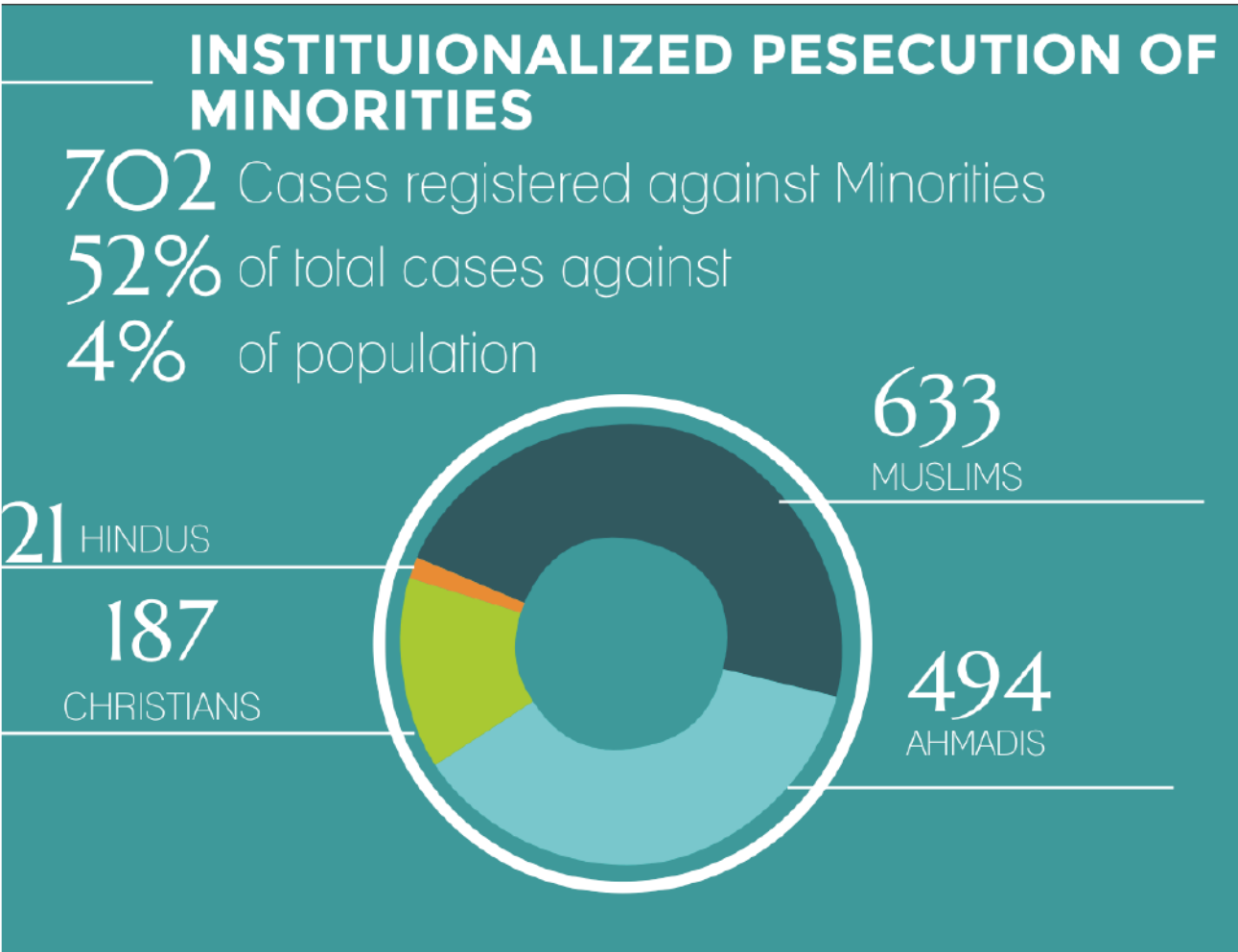
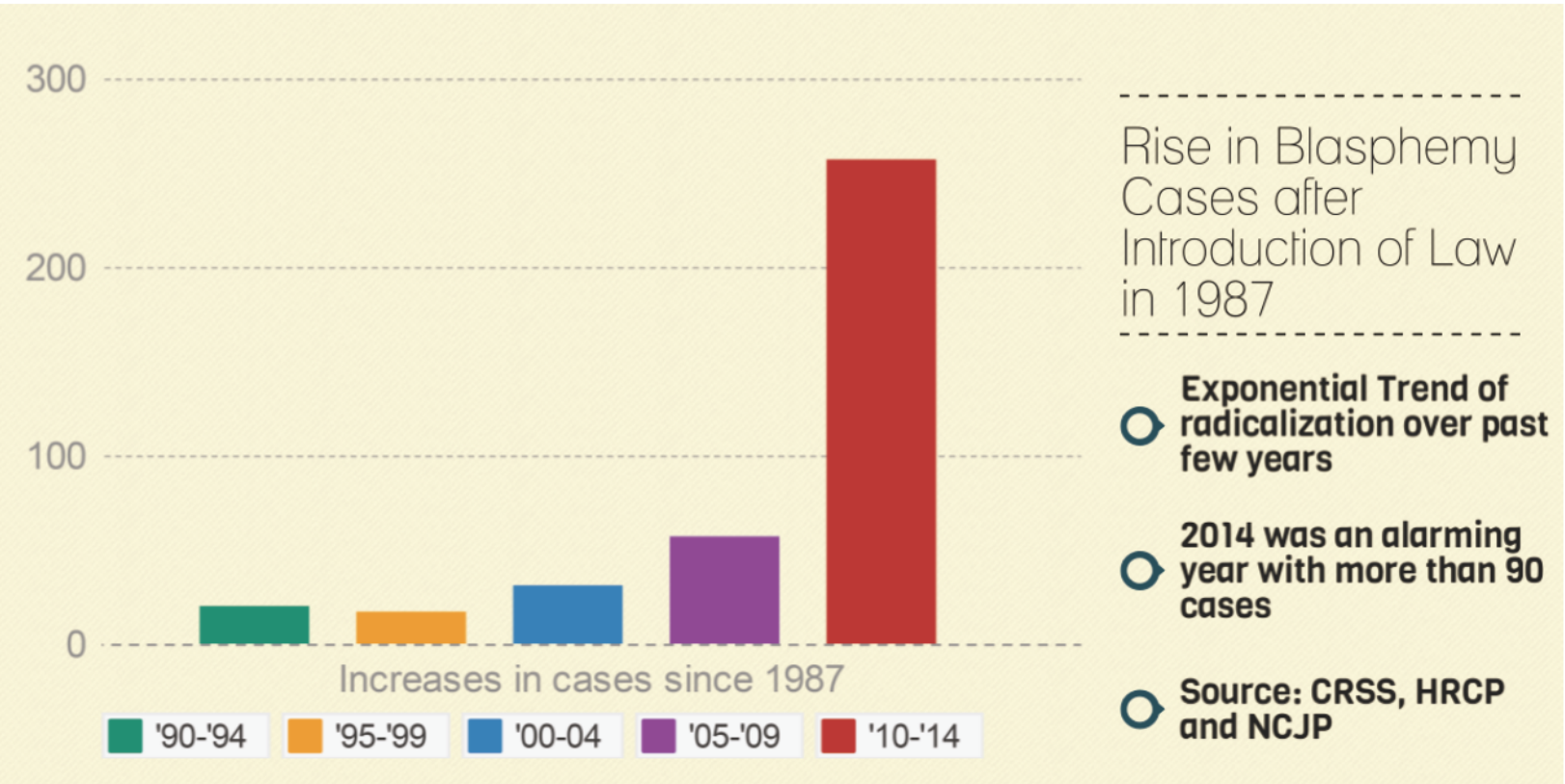
### Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws and their effects on Minorities:

Pakistan's blasphemy laws are inconsistent with the international human rights standards and restrict the freedom of religion. Two of the five anti-blasphemy codes, referred to as Martial Law Ordinance XX, explicitly target by name the activities of **Ahmadi Muslims** and virtually any public act of worship, devotion, or propagation by an Ahmadi Muslim can be treated as a criminal offense punishable by **fine or a three-year jail term** (in the case of Ordinance XX) or **death** (in the case of Section 295-C)

In 2010, the laws garnered wider global attention when **Asia Bibi**, a Christian, was sentenced to death for a trivial offense, and two senior government officials within Pakistan, **Salman Taseer**, the governor of Punjab, and **Shahbaz Bhatti**, the minister of minorities affairs, were subsequently assassinated for voicing their condemnation of the laws and support for Bibi.

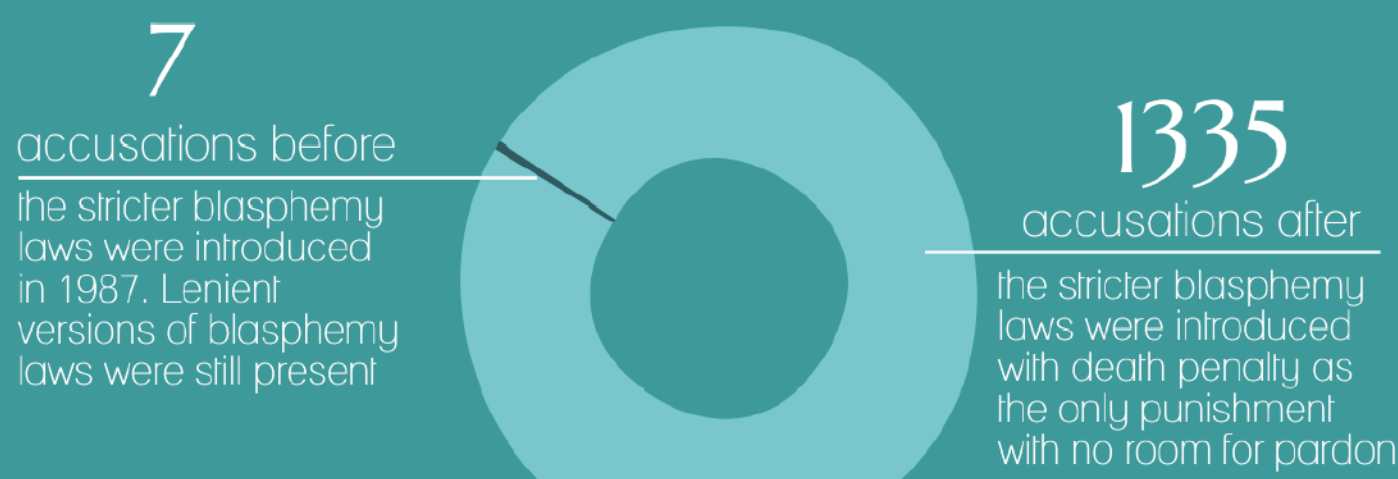


Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has made attacking blasphemy its raison d'être. They routinely group Ahmadi Muslims and Christians as "infidels" who insult Islam. In 2010, TTP claimed responsibility for the massacre of 86 Ahmadi Muslims in Lahore. In 2013, TTP and its affiliates were linked to the massacre of 127 Christians in Peshawar.



### Comparison of Blasphemy Accusations from 1927-1986 and 1987-2014

Before and after the introduction of the stricter blasphemy laws in 1987



### Research Benefits, Implications and Future work

This research will critically determine the gaps present between the Pakistani laws and its international human rights obligations and will then provide possible solutions to the problem. The idea raised through this research will be to put forward the argument that it is necessary and important for the government of Pakistan to repeal and/or amend these blasphemy laws in order to fully comply with its international human rights law obligations.

### References:

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- The Effect Of Blasphemy Laws On Human Rights: A Freedom House special Report (2010)