JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
*An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal*

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

# A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MINORITIES IN PAKISTAN: CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS, SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THE LIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23154551

**Keywords**
*Minorities Rights, Constitution of Pakistan, Socioeconomic Development, Social Discrimination, Human Rights Standards*

**Article History**
***Received:*** *25 June 2026*
***Accepted:*** *16 September 2026*
***Published:*** *05 October 2026*

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## Abstract

*The study explored the protection and implementation of minority rights in Pakistan including the constitutional protection, socioeconomic conditions, social discrimination, political participation, justice, and conforming to international human rights standards. The exploratory research design was used, with a qualitative approach and using both primary and secondary sources. A structured questionnaire was used to gather primary data with a six-point Likert scale from 240 respondents from the Christian, Hindu, Sikh and Bahá'í communities. Secondary evidence comprised constitutional provisions, statutes, judicial rulings, government publications, human rights materials and relevant academic literature. Descriptive and thematic analysis were used for the interpretation of the findings. Generally, the results indicated positive perceptions of formal constitutional protection, with the constitutional protection domain having a mean score of 3.99 (SD = 0.96), and 70.0% agreeing with this statement. The mean of the socioeconomic conditions was 3.97 (SD = 0.97) and of the political participation and justice was 3.94 (SD = 0.95). The mean score for perceptions of international human rights standards was also fairly high at 3.95 (SD = 0.96). Social discrimination and current issues exposed a significantly lower mean of 3.39 (SD = 0.98) with 55.2% disagreeing. This gap in overall constitutional–practice also yielded a lower mean of 3.38 (SD = 0.98). Results show that there is a clear dichotomy between the formal status of minority communities' recognition and their lived reality. The study finds that for the constitution to translate into effective protection for minorities in Pakistan, implementation, institutional accountability, equal access to public services, political inclusion, protection from discrimination and effective legal remedies all need to be strengthened.*

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The religious minorities are a significant part of Pakistan society and nation and have played a significant role in all aspects of the life of Pakistan including cultural, educational, economic, professional and public life. There are several religious communities in Pakistan, such as Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, Bahá'ís, Buddhists and Kalash, who have preserved their religious and cultural identity throughout the history of the country(Alam, 2023). Such recognition and protection is linked to wider values of equality, citizenship, religious freedom, human dignity and non-discrimination. Freedom of worship is therefore not the only minority right: Minority communities are also entitled to meaningful access to education, employment, healthcare, political participation, economic opportunities, security, and justice(Ali, 2021). Pakistan has several important guarantees of religious minorities protection at the constitutional level. The Constitution in Articles 20, 22, 25 and 36 outlines the principles relating to freedom of religion, protection against discrimination, equality before law and protecting minority interests.

These constitutional provisions align with other international human rights instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities(Bilal, 2023). These include a focus on religious freedom, cultural identity, equal participation, non-discrimination and access to social and economic rights. Islam also has a strong normative dimension with regard to the protection of minorities. Islamic teachings and historical arrangements like the Constitution of Medina embody principles of justice, equality, human dignity, religious freedom and protection of non-Muslim communities(Farooq et al., 2024). The Qur'anic concepts of freedom of religion and equitable treatment of people of different faiths also offer a different lens for the study of minority rights in Pakistan's socio-constitutional context. The study thus takes an approach of analyzing international human rights norms and the constitutional framework and Islam, and not analyzing minority protection in Pakistan in isolation from only a legal or an Islamic perspective(Human Rights Commission of, 2023). The practical experiences of minority communities are an important concern, even though they are formally safeguarded. Issues of social discrimination, socioeconomic marginalization, political underrepresentation, insecurity, limited access to justice, concerns about the misuse of blasphemy laws and forced conversions are all identified in the existing literature and in the study's main findings(Hyder et al., 2024). Minorities experiences are not uniform in Pakistan either. The study highlights experiences of discrimination and instances of peaceful interaction between minority and majority communities, indicating that geographical location, socioeconomic status, institutional practices and local social attitudes shape minority experiences(Imran et al., 2023). One of the key challenges is the discrepancy between constitutional and de facto protection. This gap is explored in the study, which connects together aspects of constitutional analysis, international human rights norms, socioeconomic aspects, as well as the experiences of minority communities in the here and now. It has a theoretical background that is mostly Human Rights Theory, supported with Multicultural Citizenship Theory and Social Justice Theory, which enable us to explore the issues of equality, identity protection, participation, and equitable access to social resources(Khan et al., 2025).

For this purpose, in this paper, the constitutional position, socioeconomic development and present issues of religious minorities in Pakistan have been discussed in a critical manner, within the framework of international human rights

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standards. The study aims to explore the relationship between rights guaranteed by the law and its realization in practice by integrating the provisions in the law, international obligations, and Islamic principles, alongside documentary evidence and primary accounts from minorities. It also explores whether current institutional frameworks offer adequate protection and participation and pinpoints areas where legal, institutional and policy instruments could enhance equality, social inclusion, religious freedom and the effective exercise of minority rights in modern Pakistan.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the constitutional safeguards and Quaid's Vision Islamic Ideology, minorities in Pakistan still have to deal with all kinds of social, economic and political problems. The gap between law and practice is quite big, as far as legal protection (Articles 20, 22, 25, and 36 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan) is concerned. Discrimination, limited socioeconomic opportunities, political underrepresentation, insecurity in everyday life are issues facing the minority communities in mostly fileds. Their situation is worsened due to issues like misuse of blasphemy laws, forced conversions, lack of access to justice, and social exclusion, etc., which the majority of minorities do not talk about. Furthermore, the international instruments such as UNDRP, ICCPR, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights all have the ideals of equality, freedom of religion and non-discrimination in their text, but these ideals are not adequately applied to the lived experiences of minorities in Pakistan. This constitutional/international gap with respect to reality necessitates an in-depth study of the minority rights, socio-economic development and challenges in the context of Pakistan.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

To examine the concept and status of minorities under international human rights frameworks and standards.

- To analyze the constitutional provisions and legal safeguards available for minority rights in Pakistan, particularly Articles 20, 22, 25, and 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan.
- To explore the role of Islamic principles regarding justice, equality, tolerance, and protection of non-Muslim communities in relation to minority rights.
- To assess the socioeconomic conditions of minorities in Pakistan, including their access to education, employment, healthcare, and economic opportunities.
- To identify and analyze contemporary challenges faced by minorities, including social discrimination, political exclusion, insecurity, misuse of blasphemy laws, and reported cases of forced conversions.

### 1.3 Research Questions

- How adequately does the Constitution of Pakistan protect the religious rights and fundamental freedoms of minority communities, particularly under Articles 20, 22, 25, and 36?
- To what extent do religious minorities in Pakistan enjoy equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and other socioeconomic opportunities?
- What contemporary challenges, including social discrimination, political exclusion, insecurity, misuse of blasphemy laws, and reported forced conversions, affect religious minorities in Pakistan?
- To what extent is Pakistan's constitutional and legal framework consistent with international human rights standards concerning minority rights, particularly the UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR, and UN Minority Rights Declaration?

### 1.4 Significance of the study

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it offers a detailed analysis of the minority situation

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in Pakistan, looking at their rights enshrined in the Constitution, their socio-economic conditions and problems they are facing at present and the international human rights set by the international human rights institutions. The research will help advance the understanding of the link between legal protection, policy and the lived experience of minority communities. The study adds to the existing academic literature on minority rights, citizenship, human rights and social inclusion in Pakistan from an academic perspective. Previous research tended to deal with specific problems like religious discrimination, blasphemy laws, or with individual minority groups, but this work gives a comprehensive analysis of constitutional provisions, socioeconomic development and human rights obligations. The study has policy significance as it highlights the gaps between constitutional guarantees and effective implementation, and could be useful for policy makers, government institutions, and human rights organizations. It identifies key issues to be addressed, such as access to and opportunities in education, employment, political participation, security, and effective legal protection for minority groups. In addition, the research also contributes to the awareness of the value of religious tolerance, equality, and social harmony in a diverse society. The study can compare Pakistan's minority rights mechanism with international human rights standards and make recommendations for enhancing the legal framework, strengthening institutional mechanism and increasing the participation of minorities in national development. The overall goal of this research is to come up with contributions for the promotion of equal citizenship, protection of fundamental rights and living together in peace among different religious and cultural communities in Pakistan.

## 2 Literature Review

Tabassum and Bakht (2020) have analyzed the socio-economic status of Christians in Punjab in a comprehensive manner but their study has concentrated on three quantitative measures of education, employment and income. The lived experience of Christians is not discussed, nor are there any gender specific issues or the effect of recent socio-economic and political changes. Additionally, the association between level of education and socio-economic mobility has yet been explored, and this study aims to fill this gap(Mehfooz, 2021). Arya Patras (2024) offers important insights on the citizenship, discrimination and social exclusion experiences of Christian minorities in Pakistan. The study, however, addresses in a qualitative manner the situation of Christians in Lahore, and does not cover the constitutional status of minorities, socioeconomic development of minorities and Pakistan's adherence to international human rights standards in a comprehensive manner. Moreover, the situation of other religious minorities and the degree of effectiveness of constitutional and legal safeguards are under-researched. Hence, the present study aims to critically analyze the constitutional provisions, socio-economic situation and current problems of minorities in Pakistan with the perspective of international standards of human rights(Neelam & Khan, 2023).

In general, the study conducted by Umbreen (2023) highlights the historical and ideological background of the rights of minorities in Pakistan, including the teachings of Islam, Mughal tolerance, and Quaid-e-Azam's ideals of equality. It also refers to the guarantees of the constitution, and is descriptive and historical. However, it fails to critically analyse the current economic and social development of minorities and fails to analyse the gap in implementation of the constitutional rights at institutional and grassroot levels in depth. Most significantly, it does not have any comparative dimension with international human rights standards, a necessary element for assessing the situation of minorities in Pakistan in relation to the international norm(Saleem et al., 2023).

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There are several studies on Latif, R. A., Zaka, S., & Ali, S. Of the 2023, very few discuss about minority rights and most focus on minority communities (mainly Christians or Hindus) or on either social discrimination or political exclusion separately. There are very few studies that try to discuss all these aspects of a minority, both in the constitutional framework and in economic and social aspects, together. Furthermore, there is only a little bit of research which systematically compares Pakistan's minority rights framework with international human rights standards. The existing literature is also predominantly qualitative and descriptive, and not much attention is paid to an analysis of implementation gaps of the law and policy effectiveness. Hence, it is essential that a study be conducted which, in a comprehensive manner, looks at minorities in Pakistan from a human rights, constitutional and socioeconomic perspective, to highlight the areas of differences between constitutional text and practice and the international obligations(Sammi et al., 2024).

A study on Minorities Core Issues - Assessment Report (Peshawar District) was conducted by Khwendo Kor and SUBHASH Educational Complex (2021) that focuses on social-economic-legal-political issues facing religious and social minorities in Peshawar. The study draws attention to several issues, including: low access to quality education, unemployment, weak implementation of legal rights, discriminatory educational content, inadequate basic facilities, illegal housing occupation, and fear of forced conversion. It also highlights the issue of inadequate political representation and marginalisation of transgender persons. The findings of the study show that although the minorities are guaranteed equality under the constitution, they still suffer from inequality because of weak implementation of the policy and social discrimination. But the limitations of the study involve a local context and lack a national level or comparative analysis of the study to international human rights standards(Shah & Nawaz, 2021).

Though many studies in Pakistan has been conducted on minorities by Khalid, I. D., & Rashid, M, most of them have dealt with legal rights, social discrimination, or blasphemy laws separately and little integrated research was conducted which collectively examined the constitutional status, socioeconomic condition and contemporary issues of minorities in the context of international human rights standards. There is still a lack of detailed comparison of Pakistan's framework for minorities with the international human rights standards. The literature also reveals that although minorities in Pakistan enjoy equal rights under the Constitution, there is a difference between having the rights and exercising them. SUBHASH Educational Complex (SEC) (2021) shows that minorities are affected by discrimination in education, lack of job opportunities, weak representation in the political sphere, and lack of basic services in Peshawar. The identified literature gap is that existing studies mostly address individual issues, but not a comprehensive analysis of the constitutional status, socio-economic development and international human rights standards(Walter & Khan, 2023).

Study of Sandeep. (2023). This article identifies the gaps in minoritism rights and laws in Pakistan which are focused mainly upon the constitutional and religious aspects of the minoritism rights. The overall link between minority rights, socio-economic development, access to education, employment opportunities and political participation, and the comparison with international human rights norms, is given limited attention. Thus, more research is required to present a detailed picture of the minorities' status in the Constitution, their socioeconomic development, and the issues they are facing today in Pakistan. Ali Raza Shah and Dr. Bela Nawaz's article “Issues and State of Religious Minorities in Pakistan: A Systematic Literature Review” aimed to review and analyze the existing literature on the status, issues and challenges of religious minorities in Pakistan. The aim of the study was to uncover

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the most significant social, political, economic, educational and legal challenges faced by minority communities through a review of previous empirical research. It also emphasized the need to learn about themes of religious freedom, issues of identity, social exclusion, discrimination, religious extremism, and access to rights. In addition, the study was aimed at identifying the gaps in the previous studies and recommendations were made for better protection and inclusivity of religious minorities in Pakistan(Wilson, 2022).

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

#### 2.1.1 Human Rights Theory

This study is mainly developed on the basis of Human Rights Theory. It is based on the principle that everyone has an inherent dignity and fundamental rights irrespective of his or her religious background, ethnicity, language or cultural identity(Lashari et al., 2025). The theory attributes to states the duty to respect, protect and fulfil the rights and religion minorities. This research aims to explore the constitutional promises for Human Rights in Pakistan with special emphasis on Article 20, 22, 25 and 36 of the Constitution, and see if these promises are fulfilled in practice when it comes to protection, religious freedom, equality and non-discrimination. In addition, international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ICCPR, the ICESCR and the UN Minority Rights Declaration are used to provide a general normative framework for the analysis of Pakistan's minority rights framework.

#### 2.1.2 Multicultural Citizenship Theory

The first theoretical basis that supports this is in the work of Will Kymlicka's Multicultural Citizenship Theory. The theory suggests that there is a need to recognize and provide institutional protection for culturally and religiously distinct minority groups if equality of formal rights is to be effective in protecting them(Mehndi, 2025). The theory is useful in the analysis of religious freedom, cultural identity, political participation, minority representation, equal citizenship and protection of minority institutions in the framework of this study. It assists in examining if the constitutional and institutional arrangements of Pakistan allow for sufficient accommodation of religious diversity, and allow minorities to share in the life of the nation.

#### 2.1.3 Social Justice Theory

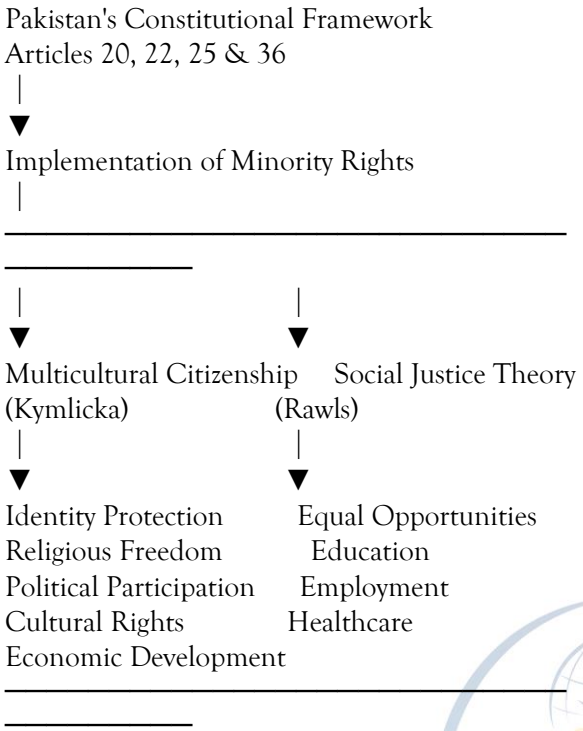
The second background perspective comes from John Rawls's Social Justice Theory. It focuses on equity in the allocation of opportunities and social resources, including for the disadvantaged. This framework can be applied to understanding the issues of minority access to education, employment, healthcare, economic participation, political inclusion and justice. It provides an explanation for why equality at the constitutional level does not necessarily mean equality in the substantive sense, where there are structural and institutional barriers that still exist, impacting on minority communities.

#### 2.1.4 Integrated Theoretical Framework

These theories can, combined, be used to investigate minority rights in three interrelated ways: legal protection, recognition and participation, and socioeconomic equality. The questions of identity, recognition and participation are explored in Human Rights Theory, whereas the question of inequitable opportunities and resources is given attention in Social Justice Theory. Their integration enables the study to evaluate the difference between Pakistan's constitutional and international obligations, and the lived experiences of minorities.

Human Rights Theory
|
▼
International Human Rights Standards
(UDHR, ICCPR, ICESCR, UN Minority Declaration)
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## 3 Research Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study used exploration, qualitative research design to critically analyze the constitutional position, Socio-economic development and current issues of religious minorities in Pakistan. The design was suitable as the study involved the analysis of legal provisions, human rights standards, institutional practices, socio-economic conditions and experiences reported by the minority community. It is important to note that the research focused on the link between constitutional guarantees and their implementation, and not only on the numerical measurement thereof.

### 3.2 Research Approach

The research method used was qualitative, provided with primary and secondary data. The qualitative approach allowed for the analysis of: constitutional provisions, International human rights obligations, Islamic principles, documentary evidence and respondents' perception of discrimination, religious freedom, socioeconomic opportunities, political participation and legal protection. There was no use of quantitative hypothesis testing or statistical modelling.

### 3.3 Study Population

The study population included religious minority community members, legal practitioners, academics, policy makers and stakeholders relating to human rights issues and the study problem. The respondents were members of various religious communities (Christian, Hindu, Sikh and Bahá'í). Finally, after obtaining the responses from questionnaires and interviews from over 200 respondents from various parts of Pakistan, the study took into account the variation in the experiences of minorities in different geographical and social settings.

### 3.4 Primary Data Collection

Structured questionnaire was used in collecting primary data, whenever necessary interviews were also used. The survey instrument was a 6-point Likert scale for respondents to indicate their perceptions of constitutional protection, religious freedom, social discrimination, political participation, education, health care, and legal protection. Multiple religious communities

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enabled the research to look at the minority experiences in a context that was beyond a single-community case study. Contextual information from interviews and survey respondents was used to inform the results on respondents' experiences and perceptions of rights protection.

### 3.5 Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data was collected through systematic review of peer reviewed journal articles, research literature, government publications, constitutional provisions, statutory laws, judicial decisions, UN documents, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan documents and statistical data. The study was limited to the study of the Articles 20, 22, 25 and 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan, and on the international instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the UN Declaration on Minority Rights. Islamic sources, such as the Constitution of Medina, and Qur'anic texts and the scholarly work on minority protection were also analyzed.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of the collected evidence was done using doctrinal and thematic analysis. The following constitutional provisions, domestic legislation, judicial decisions and international human rights instruments were analyzed doctrinally: Primary responses were used for thematic analysis to identify common themes around issues of discrimination, religious freedom, socio-economic opportunities, political participation, insecurity, access to justice and implementation of minority rights, while documentary evidence was used for thematic analysis.

### 3.7 Comparative and Interpretive Analysis

Finally, the findings were analyzed by juxtaposing the constitutional protection as well as the institutional practice of Pakistan with international human rights standards and Islamic principles. This comparison was employed to uncover disparities between the legal obligations and the reality. The analysis also included the extent to which reported challenges were minority-specific or related to general governance issues including weak law enforcement, slow justice processing and/or lack of adherence to laws.

## 4 Results

The sample consisted of 240 respondents. Christians constituted the largest religious group (50.8%), followed by Hindus (37.5%), Sikhs (10.8%), and Bahá'ís (0.8%). Males represented 55.0% and females 45.0%. The largest age category was 26–35 years (32.5%), followed by 36–45 years (22.5%). Educationally, Bachelor-level respondents formed the largest group (35.8%), followed by Master's-level respondents (31.7%). Private employees represented the largest occupational category (23.8%). Geographically, Punjab accounted for 45.8% of the sample and Sindh for 35.0%, together representing 80.8% of respondents.

**Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 240)**

| Demographic Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Religious Community | Christian | 122 | 50.8 |
| | Hindu | 90 | 37.5 |
| | Sikh | 26 | 10.8 |
| | Bahá'í | 2 | 0.8 |
| Gender | Male | 132 | 55.0 |
| | Female | 108 | 45.0 |

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| Demographic Variable | Category | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age Group | 18–25 | 49 | 20.4 |
| | 26–35 | 78 | 32.5 |
| | 36–45 | 54 | 22.5 |
| | 46–55 | 33 | 13.8 |
| | 56+ | 26 | 10.8 |
| Education | Secondary | 28 | 11.7 |
| | Intermediate | 30 | 12.5 |
| | Bachelor | 86 | 35.8 |
| | Master | 76 | 31.7 |
| | MPhil/PhD | 20 | 8.3 |
| Occupation | Private Employee | 57 | 23.8 |
| | Business/Self-employed | 49 | 20.4 |
| | Government Employee | 43 | 17.9 |
| | Professional | 37 | 15.4 |
| | Student | 35 | 14.6 |
| | Other | 19 | 7.9 |
| Region | Punjab | 110 | 45.8 |
| | Sindh | 84 | 35.0 |
| | Balochistan | 20 | 8.3 |
| | Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | 16 | 6.7 |
| | Islamabad Capital Territory | 10 | 4.2 |
| Total | — | 240 | 100.0 |

### 4.1 Constitutional Protection of Minority Rights

The results suggest that in general people have a favorable attitude towards constitutional protection for religious minorities in Pakistan however, they also highlight that there is some variation in terms of individual aspects of constitutional awareness and protection. Overall, the mean of this domain was 3.99 (SD = 0.96); 70.0% of respondents agreed and 30.0% disagreed. In the ten indicators, the item with the highest mean (M = 4.04, SD = 1.02) showing the highest level of agreement was the constitutional principle of equality before law (Article 25). Likewise, the constitutional provisions afford meaningful protection to religious minorities received rating of M = 4.05 (SD = 0.97) and 72.1% agreement, suggesting that generally there is a recognition of the constitutional framework as affording protection.

Relatively high was the awareness of Article 22 also, with 72.9% saying they knew the constitutional protection with respect to educational institutions (M = 4.01, SD = 0.94). Awareness of Article 36 produced 72.1% agreement (M = 3.98, SD = 0.95). But attitudes towards actual religious freedom were somewhat lower. 66.7% agreed that they felt safe in practicing and professing their religion and 67.1% agreed that communities could freely celebrate

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religious festivals and practices. Equal treatment before the law was agreed upon by 71.7% of the respondents (M = 4.00, SD = 0.91), and institutional respect for minority religious rights 69.6% (M = 3.95, SD = 0.91).

### 4.2 Socioeconomic Conditions of Minorities

The socioeconomic indicators provide a relatively positive picture on access to education, employment, health and economic participation. The overall mean for the domain was: 3.97 (SD = 0.97); and 70.0% of the respondents agreed with the statements and 30.0% disagreed. Healthcare was the top socioeconomic dimension. The mean score for the statement on adequate access to healthcare services was the highest in the domain (M = 4.09, SD = 0.97) and the percentage of agreement was 73.8%. In the same way, 70.0% affirmed that no religious discrimination was practiced in providing healthcare services (M = 3.95, SD = 0.95). In general, the results indicated that the respondents' attitudes toward access to health care were relatively positive as compared to other socioeconomic issues.

**Table 2 Domain-Level Descriptive Results for Minority Rights, Socioeconomic Conditions, and Contemporary Challenges**

| Results Domain | No. of Items | Mean | SD | Agree (%) | Disagree (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constitutional Protection | 10 | 3.99 | 0.96 | 70.0 | 30.0 |
| Socioeconomic Conditions | 10 | 3.97 | 0.97 | 70.0 | 30.0 |
| Social Discrimination & Contemporary Challenges | 10 | 3.39 | 0.98 | 44.8 | 55.2 |
| Political Participation & Justice | 10 | 3.94 | 0.95 | 68.6 | 31.4 |
| International Human Rights Standards | 8 | 3.95 | 0.96 | 67.8 | 32.2 |
| Overall Findings & Constitutional–Practice Gap | 10 | 3.38 | 0.98 | 44.8 | 55.2 |

Generally, positive responses were also received for access to education. Approximately 70% of respondents felt that their communities' members' access to quality education was sufficient (M = 4.01, SD = 1.00), and 68.3% indicated that minority students' access to education was equal to their majority peers' access to education (M = 3.91, SD = 0.93). Slightly less but still largely positive results were generated by employment-related indicators. Participating in the religion negatively affects employment opportunities was agreed by 68.8% (M = 3.93, SD = 0.96) while fair access to employment was agreed by 70.4% (M = 3.93, SD = 0.96).

### 4.3 Social Discrimination and Contemporary Challenges

There is a generally favorable socioeconomic profile regarding access to education, employment, health care and economic participation. Results for the domain showed a mean score of 3.97 (SD = 0.97) and 70.0% of the respondents were in agreement with the domain and 30.0% disagreed. Healthcare was the most favorable socioeconomic dimension. The responses on adequate access to health care services had the highest mean within the domain, (M = 4.09, SD = 0.97, 73.8% agreed). Likewise, 70.0% confirmed that there was no religious bias in healthcare services (M = 3.95, SD = 0.95). The results indicate that the perceptions of access to health care among the respondents were relatively favorable as compared to other indicators of the socio-economic status. Generally, positive responses were also received for access to education. Three-fourths of community members believed that their communities provided quality education for their members (M = 4.01, SD = 1.00) and 68.3% agreed that minority students had

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ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
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equal education opportunities (M = 3.91, SD = 0.93).

**Table 3 Item-Level Descriptive Results for Constitutional Protection, Socioeconomic Conditions, Social Discrimination, and Contemporary Challenges**

| Code | Mean | SD | Min | Max | Agree (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CP01 | 3.99 | 0.99 | 1 | 6 | 68.3 |
| CP02 | 3.96 | 0.97 | 2 | 6 | 68.8 |
| CP03 | 4.01 | 0.94 | 1 | 6 | 72.9 |
| CP04 | 4.04 | 1.02 | 2 | 6 | 70.8 |
| CP05 | 3.98 | 0.95 | 1 | 6 | 72.1 |
| CP06 | 4.05 | 0.97 | 1 | 6 | 72.1 |
| CP07 | 3.98 | 1.03 | 1 | 6 | 66.7 |
| CP08 | 3.94 | 0.96 | 2 | 6 | 67.1 |
| CP09 | 4.00 | 0.91 | 1 | 6 | 71.7 |
| CP10 | 3.95 | 0.91 | 2 | 6 | 69.6 |
| SE01 | 4.01 | 1.00 | 2 | 6 | 70.0 |
| SE02 | 3.91 | 0.93 | 2 | 6 | 68.3 |
| SE03 | 3.93 | 0.96 | 1 | 6 | 70.4 |
| SE04 | 3.93 | 0.96 | 1 | 6 | 68.8 |
| SE05 | 4.09 | 0.97 | 2 | 6 | 73.8 |
| SE06 | 3.95 | 0.95 | 1 | 6 | 70.0 |
| SE07 | 3.96 | 0.96 | 1 | 6 | 70.0 |
| SE08 | 3.93 | 1.02 | 1 | 6 | 67.9 |
| SE09 | 3.95 | 0.94 | 2 | 6 | 69.2 |
| SE10 | 4.01 | 0.96 | 1 | 6 | 71.2 |
| DC01 | 3.44 | 1.00 | 1 | 5 | 52.9 |
| DC02 | 3.38 | 1.01 | 1 | 6 | 45.0 |
| DC03 | 3.41 | 0.88 | 1 | 6 | 42.1 |
| DC04 | 3.44 | 1.02 | 1 | 6 | 48.3 |
| DC05 | 3.37 | 0.96 | 1 | 6 | 45.0 |
| DC06 | 3.32 | 0.99 | 1 | 6 | 38.8 |
| DC07 | 3.41 | 0.96 | 1 | 6 | 43.3 |
| DC08 | 3.32 | 0.99 | 1 | 6 | 41.2 |
| DC09 | 3.46 | 0.92 | 1 | 6 | 46.7 |
| DC10 | 3.38 | 1.08 | 1 | 6 | 44.6 |

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The results for the indicators related to employment were slightly less positive, but still positive. Participating in the religion negatively affects employment opportunities was agreed by 68.8% (M = 3.93, SD = 0.96) while fair access to employment was agreed by 70.4% (M = 3.93, SD = 0.96). The participation in the economy was found to be similar. Fair treatment among public institutions of the minority-owned businesses (M = 3.93, SD = 1.02) and a free participation of minority community members in business and economic activities (M = 3.96, SD = 0.96) received 67.9% and 70% agreement, respectively. In general, the results indicate that participants did not consider socioeconomic exclusion to be the same level of exclusion across all. However, about one-third of the responses within the domain were still in disagreement, suggesting unequal socioeconomic opportunities experienced by the respondents in general.

### 4.4 Political Participation and Justice

The findings on social discrimination and challenges to contemporary times vary significantly from other positive results found in constitutional protection and socioeconomic conditions. The overall mean score for this domain was very low at only 3.39 (SD = 0.98), with 44.8% of people agreeing with the challenge and 55.2% disagreeing. This agreement is therefore higher when the respondents were asked about the existence and level of intensity of the specific contemporary challenges. Despite this religious discrimination was still a major issue, with 52.9% saying that it was a significant issue in their communities (M = 3.44, SD = 1.00). The perception of religious insecurity gave rise to 48.3% agreement on the scale (M = 3.44, SD = 1.02).

**Table 4 Item-Level Results for Political Participation, Justice, and International Human Rights Standards**

| Code | Mean | SD | Min | Max | Agree (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PJ01 | 3.92 | 0.93 | 1 | 6 | 67.9 |
| PJ02 | 3.99 | 0.98 | 1 | 6 | 67.9 |
| PJ03 | 4.00 | 0.94 | 2 | 6 | 70.4 |
| PJ04 | 3.98 | 0.99 | 1 | 6 | 70.0 |
| PJ05 | 3.92 | 0.97 | 1 | 6 | 66.2 |
| PJ06 | 3.95 | 0.96 | 1 | 6 | 71.7 |
| PJ07 | 3.89 | 0.94 | 2 | 6 | 67.5 |
| PJ08 | 3.92 | 0.95 | 2 | 6 | 66.2 |
| PJ09 | 3.94 | 0.96 | 2 | 6 | 70.8 |
| PJ10 | 3.88 | 0.92 | 1 | 6 | 67.5 |
| IH01 | 3.94 | 0.96 | 1 | 6 | 67.1 |
| IH02 | 3.90 | 0.93 | 1 | 6 | 65.8 |
| IH03 | 3.95 | 0.99 | 1 | 6 | 68.8 |
| IH04 | 4.01 | 0.94 | 1 | 6 | 70.0 |
| IH05 | 3.94 | 0.95 | 2 | 6 | 67.9 |
| IH06 | 3.89 | 0.99 | 2 | 6 | 65.0 |
| IH07 | 3.99 | 0.97 | 2 | 6 | 69.2 |
| IH08 | 4.00 | 0.97 | 2 | 6 | 68.8 |

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There was a high level of agreement that people face social exclusion due to religion (45.0%, M = 3.38, SD = 1.01), and a high level of agreement that religious intolerance has an impact on normal social life (42.1%, M = 3.41, SD = 0.88). There was 45.0% agreement (M = 3.37, SD = 0.96) with regard to concerns about attacks or threats against places of worship. It is interesting that agreement was less for indicators related to blasphemy. Fewer than 40% agreed that there were concerns about the misuse of blasphemy-related allegations or laws (M = 3.32, SD = 0.99); 43% agreed that fear of such allegations had an impact on freedom of expression (M = 3.41, SD = 0.96).

### 4.5 International Human Rights Standards

Overall, the respondents were generally satisfied with the constitution and legal framework of Pakistan in terms of being compatible with international human rights standards. The overall agreement for the international standards domain was **3.95 (SD = 0.96)%.The overall agreement for the international standards domain was 67.8% agreement and 32.2% disagreement. The most common answer was on the question of compatibility with ICPR Article 27 where 70.0% agreed that minority cultural and religious rights were in general compatibility with the relevant provision (M = 4.01, SD = 0.94). The second statement that Pakistan's constitutional provisions broadly support the UN Minority Rights Declaration also had relatively high levels of agreement with an average level of 3.99 (+/- 0.97). The belief in non-discrimination, as found in the ICCPR, was agreed upon by 68.8% (M = 3.95, SD = 0.99) and the equality principle of the UDHR was agreed upon by 67.1% (M = 3.94, SD = 0.96) of the respondents. Socioeconomic protections were likewise evaluated and 67.9% agreed that they adhered to the principles of ICESCR (M = 3.94, SD = 0.95). Protection of religious freedom had a somewhat lower agreement level of 65.8% (M = 3.90, SD = 0.93), however.

Of importance, it was found that 68.8% agreed that the primary challenge was to implement the measures, not that there were no legal measures at all (M = 4.00, SD = 0.97). This finding is especially significant in the context of the central analytical approach (implementative dimension) of the study than the formal non-existence of rights. However, there was a great deal of disagreement as 32.2% of domain-wise respondents did not see full compatibility between Pakistan's framework and international standards. The outcome shows the difference between normative alignment and perceived effectiveness of the measure of the formality, however.

### 4.6 Overall Findings and Constitutional–Practice Gap

The overall findings offer the most clear indication of a sense of a gap between formal rights and realization of them. The domain recorded a relatively low mean of 3.38 (SD = 0.98), with only 44.8% agreement compared with 55.2% disagreement. The most telling finding was that access to justice continued to be a concern for minority communities, with a median of 3.47 (SD = 1.04) and 47.9% agreement. Likewise, 47.9% agreed that social discrimination had an impact on the integration of minority communities (M = 3.42, SD = 1.01). The finding for gap between constitutional guarantees and actual experiences was M = 3.42 (SD = 0.94) and agreement rate was 45.0%. There was not consistent implementation of legal protection resulting in a mean of 3.32 (SD = 1.00); 42.5% agreement. Socio-economic inequalities as a barrier to minority inclusion also had a high level of consensus (M = 3.35, SD = 1.02) with 42.5% agreement. 46.2% of the respondents (M = 3.40, SD = 0.95) indicated that political participation still had some room for improvement.

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**Table 5 Overall Findings and Perceived Constitutional–Practice Gap**

| Code | Statement | Mean | SD | Min | Max | Agree (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| OG01 | Noticeable gap between constitutional guarantees and practical experiences | 3.42 | 0.94 | 1 | 6 | 45.0 |
| OG02 | Legal protections are not implemented consistently across institutions | 3.32 | 1.00 | 1 | 6 | 42.5 |
| OG03 | Socioeconomic inequalities remain an important barrier to inclusion | 3.35 | 1.02 | 1 | 6 | 42.5 |
| OG04 | Social discrimination limits full integration of minority communities | 3.42 | 1.01 | 1 | 6 | 47.9 |
| OG05 | Political participation and representation require improvement | 3.40 | 0.95 | 1 | 6 | 46.2 |
| OG06 | Access to justice remains an important concern | 3.47 | 1.04 | 1 | 6 | 47.9 |
| OG07 | Minority experiences differ across regions | 3.30 | 0.96 | 1 | 5 | 45.0 |
| OG08 | Minority experiences differ across religious communities | 3.34 | 0.93 | 1 | 6 | 43.3 |
| OG09 | Stronger implementation and accountability would improve protection | 3.35 | 0.94 | 1 | 6 | 42.9 |
| OG10 | Greater social inclusion is necessary for practical equality | 3.42 | 1.01 | 1 | 6 | 44.2 |
| Domain Overall | Overall Findings & Constitutional–Practice Gap | 3.38 | 0.98 | — | — | 44.8 |

The data also show that there is a perceived variation between contexts. 45% agreed on that the experiences varied between the different minority groups in the various regions (M = 3.30, SD = 0.96), and 43.3% agreed on that the experiences varied between the different religious communities (M = 3.34, SD = 0.93). Lastly, 42.9% agreed that there should be greater implementation and accountability to improve minority protection (M = 3.35, SD = 0.94), and 44.2% agreed that increased social inclusion would help to bring legal equality to practical equality (M = 3.42, SD = 1.01). The findings therefore reveal that both the dimension of implementation and of practical inclusion are more conflictual than the formal constitutional protection dimension.

### 4.7 Integrated Interpretation of Constitutional Protection, Socioeconomic Conditions, and Contemporary Challenges

The seven domains show a coherent pattern in terms of the difference between respondents' perceptions of formal institutional and legal frameworks and their perceptions of the practical social realities. The mean scores were: constitutional protection (3.99), socioeconomic conditions (3.97), political participation and justice (3.94), and international human rights standards (3.95). Compare these percentages with the agreement percentages of the other domains: 67.8% to 70.0%. The shared pattern suggests that the majority of respondents were aware of the presence of constitutional protection, socioeconomic opportunities, institutional structures, and the overall compatibility of both with international standards. The mean of the social discrimination and contemporary challenges domain was lower at 3.39 than that of

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the overall constitutional–practice gap domain, which was at 3.38. There was a high level of disagreement on both domains (55.2%) versus the formal protection domains, which had a low level of disagreement. This is significant as it indicates that respondents did not necessarily believe that minority rights were not protected by law or institutions within Pakistan, rather the more divided responses came with the questions relating to everyday experiences, social barriers, insecurity and implementation.

This is confirmed by the item-level results. A total of 72.1% agreed that Constitution provided meaningful protection and 68.8% agreed that the main challenge was implementation of the constitutional protection, not the lack of it. Meanwhile, just 42.5% said there was legal protection in place at all institutions. The main empirical pattern in the data is this difference between formal recognition and perceptions of implementation. The results thus suggest that minority rights are seen more favorably when they are formally guaranteed and when they are consistently implemented in their institutional form, than when they are realized in practice and socially included.

## 5 Discussion

The findings reveal a crucial difference between a formal recognition of minority rights and their actual implementation in Pakistan. The respondents' attitudes to the constitutional protection, socioeconomic situation, political participation and justice, and compatibility with international human rights standards were generally positive. The mean score of constitutional protection was 3.99, socioeconomic conditions 3.97, political participation and justice 3.94, and international human rights standards 3.95. By contrast, the mean recorded for social discrimination was relatively low at 3.39, as was the overall mean for the constitutional-practice gap (3.38). This contrast implies that there was a general understanding of the presence of legal and institutional protections, with some respondents more skeptical about the actual impact(Gopang et al., 2026). The constitutional findings are especially relevant as Articles 20, 22, 25, and 36 are the key constitutional framework upon which this study rests. In general, respondents demonstrated relatively high awareness of the provisions with highest constitutional mean being for meaningful constitutional protection (M = 4.05). Knowledge of Article 25 and Article 22 also was relatively high. The results show that a significant number of respondents can see formal constitutional guarantees. A comparatively lower level of consensus about feeling protected while practicing religion, however, indicates that increased awareness of rights does not necessarily mean an increased sense of security or liberty in daily life. This difference is relevant to the main focus of this study on the difference between constitutional guarantees and implementation(Mehboob, 2025).

The socioeconomic outcomes were also favorable. In the individual dataset, healthcare access had the highest individual mean (M = 4.09); education, employment, and economic participation were mostly above the middle of the scale. That these findings indicate a lack of agreement about how socioeconomic exclusion is experienced amongst minority communities. About 30% of respondents did not agree with statements related to socioeconomic equality, however. The results thus suggest variation instead of uniformity of the socioeconomic experience. Even if there are relatively positive perceptions in the overall domain, there may be differences in education, employment, business opportunities and access to services that continue to be relevant. The results for the current challenges are more varied. The religious dimension, insecurity, social exclusion, intolerance, threats to places of worship, blasphemy-related concerns, forced conversions and forced marriages revealed significantly lower levels of agreement than the constitutional and socioeconomic dimensions. The relatively mixed results are significant as they show that these matters were not seen the same way by everyone

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responding. Religious discrimination was the most highly agreed-upon issue within this area, and issues of the use of blasphemy-related allegations and reported forced conversions were less highly agreed-upon. This difference may be attributed to the variations in the geographical, religious, occupational and social experiences of the respondents(Saeed et al., 2023).

Overall, political participation and justice were rated positively, especially with respect to access to courts and legal remedies, and inclusion of minority voices in policymaking. The results also demonstrate some limitations regarding fear of retaliation and the overall institutionalization. This trend is similar to the international human rights results. Overall, the respondents considered the framework as being in line with the international standards and particularly in accordance with ICCPR Article 27 and UN Minority Rights Declaration. Importantly, 68.8% agreed that the main challenge was implementation not the absence of legal protections. The link revealed in this finding is direct and empirical, and can therefore be interpreted as a direct link between the legal environment and the gap between what is done and what is perceived. In general, the findings show that the main problem revealed from the data is not just that minority rights, both constitutional and international, are not recognized. Instead, the results suggest that there is a mismatch and/or inconsistencies in how the formal protections are experienced in social, institutional, and legal arenas(Saeed & Rafique, 2019). This distinction is supported by relatively low scores on contemporary challenges and constitutional–practice gap items and relatively high scores on formal protections. The findings therefore help to justify an implementation-focused interpretation of minority protection, which does not simply rely on constitutional recognition, but also contributes to social inclusion and access to effective remedies.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

Based on the findings, Pakistan has a significant formal system in place to safeguard the rights of minorities, however, there are significant gaps between the constitutional protection and its effective implementation. Overall, the study suggests that constitutional safeguards should be enhanced, with clear institutional responsibilities, regular monitoring, and robust accountability systems. Configurable rights with respect to religious freedom, equality, education, political participation and discrimination protection must be implemented uniformly among minority groups by relevant government institutions. Legal protection should be complemented by easy complaint procedures, swift investigation of violations of rights and effective judicial remedies. Special emphasis should be placed on tackling discrimination in education, employment, health care and other public services. Awareness and sensitivity programmes for public institutions officials, teachers, health care providers and law enforcement personnel to enhance knowledge about minority rights. There should be greater political participation by providing meaningful opportunities for the representation of minorities or by removing social and institutional obstacles so that all minority citizens can participate.

The government should also strengthen its cooperation with civil society organizations and human rights institutions in order to better oversee and track the situation of the minorities and areas needing to be addressed. The contribution may be made by education, which aims to teach people about equality, respect for religious diversity, social inclusion and respect for cultural diversity in the constitution. Overall, the study finds that minority rights are fairly well known at the constitutional and normative level in Pakistan, but are not always well protected in practice. The mean scores for the six-point Likert scale domains were constitutional protection (3.99) and socioeconomic conditions (3.97). The 3.94 and 3.95 were for political participation and justice, respectively. Means 3.46 and 3.38 for

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social discrimination and contemporary challenges, respectively, and 3.38 for overall findings on the constitutional–practice gap, respectively, were recorded. The findings revealed that most respondents were aware of laws and institutions in place, but raised more awareness issues regarding the implementation of those laws and institutions in everyday life. The study thus recommends that future policy shift away from formal recognition to regular enforcement, institutional accountability, social inclusion and mechanisms to reach minority communities that provide remedies.

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