



**EX-MUSLIMS
OF NORTH AMERICA**

**PERSECUTION
TRACKER
SUMMARY
REPORT**

2024

“Anti-apostasy and anti-blasphemy laws, enacted under the guise of protecting religious sanctity, have shown themselves to be nothing less than tools of persecution.”

*Aysha Khan
EXMNA Director of Operations*

WHAT IS THE PERSECUTION TRACKER?

Ex-Muslims of North America (EXMNA)'s Persecution Tracker catalogs global incidents of state prosecution and vigilante violence resulting from accusations of blasphemy against and apostasy from Islam.

The Persecution Tracker offers a comprehensive view of the impact of such accusations, cataloging persecution by both state and non-state actors. Incidents include arrests, fines, imprisonment, death sentences, executions, death threats, kidnappings, torture, and murder. Each entry is organized by date, country, and, when available, the victim's name. Only verified incidents or those reported by reputable news sources are included.

In 2024, Muslim-majority countries continued to enforce apostasy and blasphemy laws, targeting individuals for exercising their right to freedom of expression as protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Pakistan remained the most severe offender, driven by escalating vigilante activity¹ and widespread extrajudicial killings. From January to July 2024, Pakistan's National Commission on Human Rights reported 767 individuals imprisoned for blasphemy—a sharp increase from 213 in all of 2023 and just 9 in 2021.² This surge in prosecutions also led to a significant rise in cases from Pakistan logged in the Persecution Tracker, accounting for the majority of 2024 incidents.

In Iran, the government's ongoing crackdown on social and political dissent has included blasphemy offenders, albeit less frequently. The Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights recorded 930 executions in 2024, up by more than 100 from 2023³, with the Islamic Republic continuing to carry out executions for blasphemy convictions.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban showed a growing tendency to issue blasphemy charges and punishments, with two cases reported in 2024 and documented in the Persecution Tracker.

Blasphemy and apostasy persecution persisted in other Muslim-majority countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. However, no significant systemic improvements have been observed across these regions.

Some noteworthy Persecution Tracker statistics include:

- 509 total incidents cataloged from 1989 to present
- 54 new incidents added in 2024
- 49 of these new incidents occurred in 2024, while the remaining 5 occurred in years prior
- 34 of the cases in 2024, an overwhelming majority, occurred in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
- 157—over 30%—of all incidents cataloged in the Tracker occurred in Pakistan

Other countries with more than one recorded incident in 2024:

- Bangladesh (4 incidents)
- Iran (3 incidents)
- Malaysia (3 incidents)
- Afghanistan (2 incidents)

NOTEWORTHY INCIDENTS IN 2024 From USCIRF Countries Of Particular Concern

Pakistan

The frequency of arrests and sentences for blasphemy increased significantly in Pakistan in 2024. The law continues to be used disproportionately against Christians, though other religious minorities such as Ahmadis and nonbelievers are also targeted.

Of the 34 recorded Tracker incidents in Pakistan from 2024, seven involved death sentences.

Notable cases of arrests and sentences:

- July: Christian Ehsan Shah was sentenced to death for having reposted an image of a desecrated Qur'an from an earlier blasphemy incident in 2023.⁴
- July: A man named in news reports as "Shahid alias Shayan"⁵ was sentenced to death following a guilty verdict for blasphemy.⁶
- August: Four Ahmadi Muslims were accused of burning a Qur'an, at least one of whom was arrested.⁷
- December: The perpetrator of the shooting of Tahir Naseem, an American citizen and former Ahmadi Muslim who was accused of blasphemy and murdered in 2020, was sentenced to life in prison. Despite abundant evidence and even a confession⁸, his co-conspirators were acquitted.⁹

Extrajudicial killings, including lynchings, of those accused of blasphemy remain common in Pakistan, with several high-profile incidents occurring throughout 2024.

Notable cases of extrajudicial killings/violence:

- February: A woman wearing a dress with Arabic writing was nearly lynched after a mob mistook the writing for verses from the Qur'an.¹⁰
- June: Mohammad Salman, a tourist from another part of Pakistan visiting the Swat Valley, was accused of desecrating a Qur'an and murdered by a mob who then burned his body in the street.^{11 12}
- June: 55-year-old Shia man named Nazir Hussain Shah was stabbed to death by a 14-year-old Sunni boy after being accused of blasphemy.¹³
- September: Blasphemy suspect Syed Khan was shot and killed by a police officer while in custody.¹⁴
- September: Blasphemy suspect Shahnawaz Kumbhar was shot and killed by a police officer while in custody, likely after being tortured.¹⁵ This information only came to light after a botched cover-up, where police claimed there had been a shootout.¹⁶

Of the 34 recorded Tracker incidents in Pakistan from 2024, nine involved mob attacks, extrajudicial killings, or attempted murder.

"I want justice for my son who was killed when he was in the custody of police ... I did not know that police would kill him."

- Rehmat Kumbhar, mother of Shahnawaz Kumbhar, a Pakistani doctor accused of blasphemy and killed in custody by a police officer

Iran

Although blasphemy charges in Iran are currently rare in comparison with political charges, the state has demonstrated a continued willingness to use them, including in cases of imminent execution.

Notable cases of arrests and sentences:

- March: Shahriar Bayat, a 64-year-old man who participated in the 2022 protests, was sentenced to hanging for “insulting the Prophet.”¹⁸
- April: Atena Farghadani, an artist, was imprisoned for blasphemy and other charges and refused bail in an act of protest.¹⁹
- December: 26-year-old Mohammad Amin Mahdavi Shayesteh, previously sentenced to death in 2023, was transferred to pre-execution solitary confinement.²⁰

Afghanistan

Where reports have emerged, they have suggested that the Taliban have shown increased willingness to pursue punishments for those accused of blasphemy, though incidents may remain relatively rare due to an effective climate of fear and intimidation.

Notable cases of arrests and sentences:

- April: Habibur Rahman Taseer, a journalist for Radio Free Europe, was arrested and detained by the Taliban with the given reason of blasphemy.²¹ The charge may have been a pretense for retaliation against his reporting.
- August: The Taliban publicly flogged an unnamed man for “insulting religious sanctities” in an unspecified way.^{22 23}

NOTEWORTHY INCIDENTS IN 2024 From Special Watch List Countries

- May: Four foreigners in Malaysia were arrested over blasphemous comments they had reportedly written on a Domino’s receipt.²⁴
- June: Aulia Rakhman, a comedian in Indonesia, was sentenced to seven months in prison after making a joke about the name Muhammad that some deemed blasphemous.²⁵

NOTEWORTHY INCIDENTS IN 2024 From Other Countries

- September: Utsav Mondal, a Hindu student in Bangladesh, was beaten nearly to death by a mob of thousands after being accused of insulting the Prophet Muhammad.²⁶
- December: Akash Das, a 17-year-old Hindu in Bangladesh, was arrested under the country’s far-reaching Cyber Security Act for purportedly committing blasphemy on social media.²⁷ Mob violence and vandalism against Hindus and their property followed.²⁸

APPENDIX

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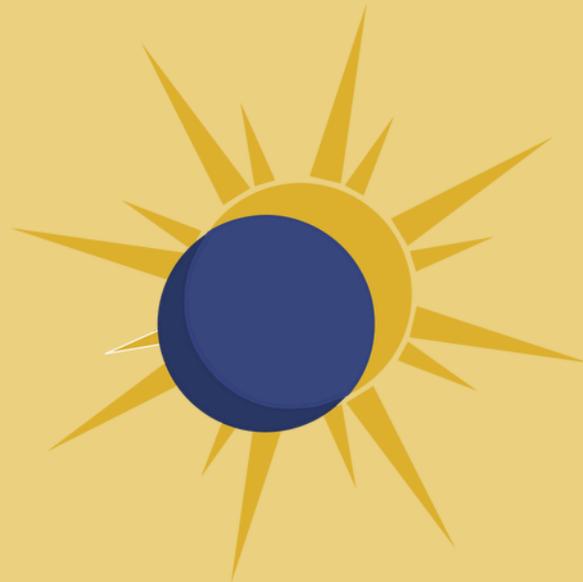
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