BLASPHEMY VIGILANTISM IN PAKISTAN: LEGAL PLURALISM, GOVERNANCE FAILURE, AND THE BREAKDOWN OF FORMAL JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the recurring phenomenon of vigilantism related to blasphemy in Pakistan, a contradictory trend in light of the country's codified legislation and formal institutions. Blasphemy laws were first established under British colonial occupation in the form of preventive legislation but have evolved in the contemporary era to become a system of ideological enforcement, characterized by mob attacks, extra-judicial executions, and general impunity. The research uses a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative data from 319 survey respondents with qualitative observations from expert interviews and thematic analysis of case studies like those of Asia Bibi, Mashal Khan, and Dr. Shahnawaz Kumbhar. The research shows that ambiguous legal terminologies under Section 295-C, ideological radicalization by clerical actors, and institutional weaknesses converge to power vigilantism. Based on the theories of legal pluralism and the failure of governance, the paper explores how the coexistence of state law with informal religious norms contributes to the erosion of procedural justice. The research presents evidence-based recommendations toward bridging Islamic jurisprudence with international human rights standards and the redress of public trust in formal institutions.

Keywords: *Blasphemy laws, Vigilantism, Section 295-C, Legal pluralism, Governance failure, Ideological radicalization, Institutional weakness, Mob violence, Extra-judicial executions.*

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's blasphemy vigilantism has become one of the nation's most intractable socio-legal issues, eroding judicial authority, civic trust, as well as the protections of human rights. Although the blasphemy laws in Pakistan, specifically the Pakistan Penal Code's Section 295-C, are intended to protect the sensibilities of religion, their enforcement has consistently degenerated into violent, extrajudicial conduct. This conduct is not driven by legal process but by ideological mobilization, social hysteria, as well as the failure of institutions.

The historical roots of Pakistan's blasphemy laws go back to the colonial-era Indian Penal Code of 1860, brought in by the British to preserve communal harmony in a multi-faith population (Robb, 2007). The laws, such as Sections 295–298, were seldom used and were more concerned with defusing intercommunal tensions rather than doctrinal policing (Ahmed, 2020). After independence in 1947, Pakistan kept this legal framework but kept it in abeyance for decades. A radical change came with General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization drive in the 1980s. The addition of Section 295-C in 1986, which prescribed the death penalty for offending the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), turned

blasphemy from a civic sin to a religious duty (Federal Sharia Court, 1991; Mazhar,2018).

This transition paved the way for what scholars recognize as the politicization and weaponizing of blasphemy. High-profile incidents such as the murder of Governor Salman Taseer in 2011 and the years-long saga of Asia Bibi demonstrate the ways in which legal uncertainty and clerical overreach contribute to empowering vigilante actors while silencing voices of reform (Human Rights Watch, 2022; USCIRF, 2021). In more recent times, online entrapment and disinformation have further escalated this dynamic, in which manipulated content and online calls to action have driven real-world violence (NCHR, 2024; Iqbal, 2022).

The question this paper attempts to answer is: how can there be continued extrajudicial violence in the face of formal legal institutions in Pakistan? In contrast to an emphasis on the political or theological discourse across blasphemy, this research places the issue in the context of a wider legal and government framework. Particularly, this paper explores how legal pluralism—where formal codes and informal religion-based codes co-exist and collide—combined with chronic governance failure contribute to creating an enabling context for vigilantism (Merry, 1988; Migdal, 1988).

The importance of this question goes far beyond the realm of scholarly curiosity. It touches critical issues of Pakistani governance, including the undermining of the power of the state, politicized religion, and diminishing public trust in the institutions of justice. Beyond this, the issue is of profound consequence to the human rights of religious minorities and vulnerable communities who are the target of these extrajudicial practices. It is also a direct challenge to the commitments of Pakistan to international norms, such as Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Sustainable Development Goal 16, which advocates for justice and well-functioning institutions (United Nations Pakistan, 2022).

To investigate this convergence of law, ideology, and institutional failure, the paper relies on an interdisciplinary theoretical model of Legal Pluralism and Governance Failure theories. This is used to account for the coexistence of disparate normative systems and the inability of the state to maintain its monopoly over the application of the law. The paper is approached through the process of literature review, theoretical discussion, empirical data from a mixed-methods study, and concludes with recommendations for the development of policies in both Islamic jurisprudence and international human rights law.

2. Literature Review

The persistence of vigilantism against blasphemy in Pakistan can be explained through the intersection of imprecise laws, religious mobilization, institutional resistance, and online manipulation. The literature upholds these factors to enable the structural context in which mob violence is accepted and celebrated.

2.1 Structural and Institutional Disaggregation

Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which was enacted in 1986 as part of General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization campaign, is controversial for its vague wording. Concepts such as "defiling the name of the Prophet" have no well-defined legal boundaries, thus giving room for subjective and malevolent interpretations (Siddique & Hayat, 2008). The Federal Sharia Court judgment in 1991 also prescribed the death sentence for blasphemy without accommodation of judicial discretion (Federal Sharia Court, 1991), thus solidifying its inflexibility.

Delays in institutions and failures in prosecution only added to the abuse. FIRs tend to be filed under public or bureaucratic pressure without prior inquiry (Hussain, 2017). Prosecution investigations don't include forensic examination, while the accused are refused bail and kept in extended pre-trial custody (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Acquittals, like in the case of Asia Bibi, also don't ensure post-verdict security or social rehabilitation (Amnesty International, 2016) and the legal vacuum in turn continues to reinforce public mistrust and validate informal mechanisms of justice.

2.2 Religious and Sectarian Mobilization

The ideological aspect of blasphemy attacks is typically led by clerics, whose emotive religious discourse defines the accused blasphemy as an assault on communal identity and prophetic

sanctity (Haider, 2019). Fatwa, mosque sermons, and street processions are common mediums of mobilizing the masses. Clerical activism dissolves the distinction between legitimate grievance and mob action. While the classical Hanafi tradition emphasized procedural safeguards, assessment of intent, and opportunities for repentance (Ibn Abidin, n.d.; Imam Malik, n.d.), contemporary practice has sidelined these principles. Modern clerical discourse often demands absolute reverence without legal due process, reinforcing a punitive culture over one of reconciliation or inquiry (Saeed, 2016; Brown, 2014).

2.3 The Blasphemy Business

Besides ideological fervour, the blasphemy laws also function as tools of coercion and opportunism. The literature also verifies the common pattern of false allegations which are used in settling personal feuds, to acquire assets, or eliminate competitors (Bano, 2012; Amnesty International, 2016). The literature, for example, shows that land grabs and business rivalries regularly turned into blasphemy allegations in the form of religion-based offense. It is an ecosystem—famously referred to as the "blasphemy business"—that is based on networks of informers, complicit clergy, and even law enforcement personnel who profit reputationally or financially. The NCHR (2024) established that in more than 60% of the cases analysed, the complainants were in conflict with the accused before. The ability to weaponize religious sentiment with little prospect of legal repercussions makes such laws an invaluable instrument of social and political repression.

2.4 Digital Media as a Tool of Radicalization

Social media is a powerful driver of blasphemy hysteria. Viral posts, usually fabricated, manipulated, or taken out of context, have the ability to mobilize crowds before the legal process is initiated. Social media applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok are the mediums for speedy dissemination of misinformation that escapes verification standards (Shaheen, 2019; Khan & Ahmed, 2020).

Additionally, entrapments conducted with the help of false religion-based online profiles or doctored online interactions have resulted in fabricated FIRs and mob lynching. The NCHR (2024) also documented that more than 90% of the reported cases of blasphemy from 2021 to 2024 were digitally fuelled. Inadequate cybercrime enforcement and the lack of content moderation policies enable online radicalization to occur unchecked (Iqbal, 2022).

2.5 Case Studies of Vigilantism (2011–2024)

A number of well-publicized incidents reveal the institutional collapse to control mob justice:

- **Asia Bibi (2009–2018)**: A Christian female blasphemy accused remained under a death sentence for almost a decade. Her subsequent acquittal by the Supreme Court prompted nationwide protests and compelled her to go into exile (BBC News, 2018).
- **Mashal Khan (2017)**: A student of a university in Mardan was lynched by fellow students on the basis of false social media posts. A JIT subsequently vindicated that no blasphemy took place, revealing intra-institutional complicity (The Express Tribune, 2017).
- **Shama and Shahzad Masih (2014)**: Punjab saw a Christian married couple burned to death in a kiln on allegations of desecrating the Quran, which were later attributed to work-related issues (Human Rights Watch, 2014).
- **Priyantha Kumara (2021)**: A Sri Lankan factory manager was lynched in Sialkot on suspicion of blasphemy over removing a poster. Police did not respond in time (HRCP, 2022).
- **Dr. Shahnawaz Kumbhar (2024)**: A doctor in Umerkot was assassinated in a fabricated police shootout having been wrongly accused via manipulated digital content (Dawn, 2024).

These instances highlight recurring trends; swift rumour diffusion, religious provocation, paralysis of the police, and popular acclaim of the perpetrators. They document the normalization of unofficial enforcement in the context of procedural failure.

2.6 Comparative Perspectives

Pakistan is not unique in maintaining blasphemy laws, but its model of enforcement is the most violent and socially destabilizing. In Indonesia, blasphemy cases are typically litigated in court, although public pressure is still vocal,

as in the trial of Governor Ahok (Santoso, 2015). Malaysia focuses on intent and imposes administrative sanctions; vigilante violence is uncommon owing to closer clerical control and more robust judicial autonomy (Karim, 2016).

Egyptian blasphemy trials under Article 98(f) target such reform-minded Muslims, as well as minorities, but tend to go through regular judicial processes, rather than mob action (Ghanea, 2013). Bangladesh has also experienced deadly attacks on bloggers but has a more assertive attitude toward curbing online incitement, proscribing hate publications (Haynes, 2007).

Saudi Arabia's blasphemy law is based upon Wahhabi jurisprudence and is administered through a highly centralized judicial apparatus, reducing public vigilantism. Nevertheless, legal proceedings are not transparent, and safeguards for due process are absent, and punishment is typically severe (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

These comparative cases illustrate how institutional integrity, mobilization of civil society, and procedural transparency are the major bulwarks against mob violence. Pakistan's inability to activate such protections leaves it unusually susceptible to vigilantism.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research applies an integrated theoretical model of Legal Pluralism and Governance Failure Theory to explain why blasphemy-based vigilantism endures in Pakistan. The dual model provides an in-depth lens to see how formal legal institutions and informal religious norms interact in a setting of degraded state capacity.

3.1 Legal Pluralism

Legal pluralism is the co-existence of heterogeneous legal systems in a single social space. According to Griffiths (1986), there is "weak" legal pluralism in which the statutory government acknowledges the existence of other legal systems but reserves final authority, and "strong" legal pluralism where different legal systems co-exist independently of hierarchical subordination. Building on this, Merry (1988) states that legal pluralism is the recognition of the co-existence of the operation of state law with customary, religious, and other normativism.

In Pakistan, legal pluralism is evident as the coexistence of the operation of the state law and uncodified religious norms, particularly in the enforcement of blasphemy. The enforcement of codified legislation such as Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code is constantly carried out through unofficial channels—judgments of clerics, community tribunals, or mob justice—eroding the protections of procedure. The coexistence gives rise to a fragmented legal context in which the agents of religion regularly claim normative authority at the cost of the state (Merry, 1988; Griffiths, 1986).

3.2 Governance Failure Theory

State failure theory asserts the failure of institutions of government to provide key political goods, such as justice, enforcement of the law, and security. Rotberg (2004) describes a failed state as one which cannot execute these basic functions and thus has lost legitimacy as well as incurring more lawlessness. Migdal (1988) also contends that failed states do not institute central steering or monopolize legitimate coercion, but rather create informal systems of governance.

In the Pakistani context, such features are starkly apparent. Law enforcement agencies systematically fail to prevent or respond to mob violence, as they often invoke fear of popular reprisals or clerical pressure. Judicial actors are also subject to threats, delays, and politicized constraints resulting in delayed trials or abandonment of blasphemy cases (Rotberg, 2004; Migdal, 1988). Such failures compound the general erosion of institutional control, filling a void increasingly with the actions of religious vigilantes.

3.3 Integrative Model

The feedback loop of the relationship between legal pluralism and failure of governance perpetuates vigilantism on blasphemy. In this framework, poor enforcement and vague legal frameworks open the way for religious agents to serve as the de facto implementers. Their practice—described as divine justice—is also reinforced by public views that the government is not willing or not able to secure accountability.

With the increased prevalence of informal adjudication, there is a heightened decrease in

public trust in institutions of the state, further cementing dependence on non-state processes. This cyclical collapse—weak institutionalization → informal justice → loss of state legitimacy—creates a climate of impunity and encourages further acts of vigilantism (Griffiths, 1986; Migdal, 1988; Rotberg, 2004).

It will take more to address this dynamic than legal reforms. Revisions of the blasphemy laws need to go hand in hand with enforcement mechanisms and civic engagement strategies that delegitimize informal justice frames. Tackling only the institutional drivers and not the normative drivers of vigilantism will make vigilantism a continued threat to the rule of law and social cohesion in Pakistan.

4. Methodology

To unravel the multi-faceted drivers of vigilantism against blasphemy in Pakistan, the current research applies a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This research design marries quantitative scope with qualitative in-depth analysis, enabling both empirical generalizability as well as context-dependent interpretation of results. The design is especially well suited to investigate multi-level social phenomena that interplay with law, ideology, and institutional functioning.

4.1 Quantitative Component

A structured survey was used for the first phase, which was administered via the purposive and snowball sampling approaches in the four provinces of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Baluchistan, as well as in Islamabad and Gilgit-Baltistan. There were 319 valid replies gathered. It was used to measure variables including judicial trust, support for extrajudicial actions, perceived misuse of the blasphemy laws, legal awareness, and ideological leaning. The replies were statistically analysed via the use of descriptive and inferential methods (e.g., Pearson correlation, Chi-square, ANOVA, and multiple regression). To supplement this, social media sentiment analysis was carried out through publicly available posts on the Facebook, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp forwards related to significant blasphemy-related events. Key words were monitored with the help of NVivo and keyword mapping software to see common themes, actors, and triggers of mobilization.

4.2 Qualitative Component

Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders such as lawyers, retired judges, clerics, journalists, and victims' family members were the second phase. A detailed interview was also carried out with Dr. Muhammad Aslam Khaki, a lawyer and a human rights activist, whose thoughts on doctrinal abuse and paralysis of the judiciary contributed empirical richness. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted on all the transcripts using NVivo to seek out repeated themes, discursive frames, and institutional criticism.

In addition to this, a case study documentation strategy was used, centring on eleven major blasphemy-related incidents between 2011 and 2024, including the assassinations of Salman Taseer, Mashal Khan, and Dr. Shahnawaz Kumbhar. Institutional responses, media frames, and outcomes were triangulated from official documents, court documents, and publications of the human rights community.

4.3 Justification and Ethical Issues

The mixed-method design was used to gather both the quantifiable aspects (public attitudes, regional trends) as well as subjective processes (fears, beliefs, rationalizations) underlying vigilantism. Triangulation was used to increase the internal validity of the findings so that convergent findings from more than one instrument would substantiate key arguments. (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Due to the political and religious sensitivity of the subject matter, rigorous ethical controls were in place. Secondary and publicly available data were used only. Anonymous interviewing was carried out with the informed consent of the respondents, and identifying information was covered. The research was approved by the University Committee of Research Ethics and was compliant with WHO (2011) and APSA (2012) guidelines on ethics. This research design provided empirical credibility as well as research participant protection while yielding concrete insights into the ideological and structural dynamics of Pakistani blasphemy-related violence.

4.4 Limitations

The research was based upon secondary data and non-probability sampling, which limited generalization and availability of widespread opinions. Also hindering the examination were incomplete legal files and possible media bias, although triangulation ensured credibility.

5. Findings and Discussion

The empirical observations of this research corroborate the explanatory value of legal pluralism and governance failure in explaining vigilantism regarding blasphemy in Pakistan. Quantitative as well as qualitative data identified patterns of legal scepticism, ideological justification, and procedural malfunction that sustain extrajudicial actions.

5.1 Legal Pluralism in Action

Survey research and case studies attest to the coexistence of formal legal institutions with informal adjudication based on religion. Although the Penal Code formally regulates offenses of blasphemy, its jurisdiction is more often replaced with clerical statements and popular consensus. In Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—where most of the alleged blasphemy-related violence took place—respondents (71%) largely reported deferring to "religious scholars" as against the courts in the event of alleged blasphemy. This is in agreement with the "strong legal pluralism" (Griffiths 1986) concept in which non-state judicial orders function independently and enjoy legitimacy.

For instance, in the Mashal Khan (2017) case, even without formal allegations, a student mob lynched the victim on the basis of unverified social media posts. The official investigation subsequently established that no blasphemy occurred, but the presumption of guilt arising from religious discourse was enough to justify deadly action. This is the kind of way informal religious norms supplant procedural protections, in effect bringing community-based justice to the point of substituting community justice for the state (Merry, 1988).

5.2 Institutional Weakness and Governance Failure

Failure of governance was best evidenced in the inability of the judiciary and the police to provide due process. A paltry 26.8% of respondents in the survey were confident in the ability of the police to investigate claims of blasphemy in a just manner. Surveys of legal practitioners uncovered institutional reluctance to file counter-FIRs against false accusers, judicial protection failures for defence counsel, and persistent delays in trial proceedings of up to five years. In such well-publicized matters as the case of Dr. Shahnawaz Kumbhar (2024), not only did the police fail to prevent mob violence but were also complicit in the concealment of online entrapment strategies that provoked the crowd. This is representative of the "delegitimization of state institutions" as termed by Rotberg (2004), in which the public servants turn passive observers or else active agents of unofficial enforcement. Migdal's (1988) fragmented state control notion is also evident: the enforcement authorities are hampered by social pressures, religious lobbies, and bureaucratic apathy.

5.3 The Fear-Failure Feedback Loop

These tendencies indicate a self-reinforcing cycle of public fear, paralysis of the government, and informal enforcement. This feedback cycle can be understood in four phases:

- **Fear**: Blasphemy allegations—especially against minorities or the marginalized—elicit immediate emotional reactions, fuelled by religious discourse and online misinformation. According to survey results, 63% of respondents were afraid of retaliation in the event that they spoke out against allegations of blasphemy.

- **Failure**: Police and judicial forces, fearing retaliation or violence, tend to take the non-interventionist or appeasement approaches. These include FIR registration evasion, hesitation to protect the accused, and court pressure to put off judgments.

- **Vigilante Action**: Communities take matters in their own hand in the absence of decisive government reaction. Mobs, usually organized via mosques and social media, take action swiftly and brutally. The killings of Priyantha Kumara (2021) and Shama & Shahzad Masih (2014) have vividly portrayed this stage.

- **Weakening of the State**: Each episode of unpunished mob justice detracts from the reputation of legal institutions. This empowers subsequent vigilante actors, reaffirming the

notion that unofficial justice is effective as well as divinely justified.

5.4 Intersection of the Institutional Decay with Religious Legitimacy

The relationship between institutional fragility and religious legitimacy is key to the blasphemy-vigilantism complex. Clerical networks—whose role is strongest in Punjab—have successfully established themselves as moral authorities. Their sermons in most instances double as ideological rationale and functional mobilization for acts of vigilantism.

The Asia Bibi case (2009–2018) is emblematic of this phenomenon. Despite her eventual acquittal by the Supreme Court, mass protests erupted nationwide, and prominent religious leaders labelled the verdict "against Islam." The state's inability to enforce the court's decision without subsequently negotiating with extremist clerics illustrated its compromised authority.

In addition, there is quantitative support for this dynamic: those people who reported attended gatherings promoting religiously charged rhetoric were almost twice as likely to approve of mob action in "severe" cases of blasphemy ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that clerical influence is not only reflective of public opinion but actually shapes it.

As noted by Dr. Muhammad Aslam Khaki, the above sermons ignore fundamental legal requirements for Islam, namely established intent (niyyah), testimony of sound witnesses (tazkiyat ush-shuhud), due process and inquiry (taʾammul), and right to repentance (tawbah). None of these, he insisted, permit the use of vigilante justice.

6. Policy Recommendations

Vigilante violence in Pakistan, especially in the name of blasphemy, is not just a result of extremist ideology. It's also the product of weak laws, broken institutions, and widespread public confusion. To stop this pattern, we need reforms that don't just punish—but prevent. That means improving laws, rebuilding trust in the justice system, cleaning up the digital space, and reshaping public understanding.

6.1 Legal Reforms

Pakistan's blasphemy laws, especially Section 295-C, need urgent revision—not to weaken them, but to make them fair. Based on Dr. Muhammad Aslam Khaki's interpretation and understanding of Pakistani legal principles and Sharia Law, reforms may include:

- **Proof of Intent (Niyyah)**: Accusations must show that the accused meant to offend, in line with Islamic teachings that emphasize intent (niyyah) as a condition for punishment. This is a foundational principle in both Maliki and Hanafi religious traditions (Saeed, 2016; Brown, 2014).

- **Integrity of Witnesses** (Tazkiyah-tuz-Shuhood): Only those testimonies are acceptable that are presented by unbiased, morally upright individuals. Consistent with Islamic standards of evidence, a min of two reliable adult male witnesses is required.

- **Right to Repent (Tawbah)**: In cases of lapse in testimony, 1st time offenders and non-Muslim (Dhimmi) defendants, courts may be empowered to provide repentance based legal mitigation. According to Dr. Khaki, this provision was even acknowledged in the 1991 ruling of the Federal Sharia Court. (Federal Sharia Court, 1991).

- **Tighter rules for FIRs**: No more knee-jerk arrests. A senior officer must confirm that an allegation has basic credibility before a case proceeds. These provisions already exist in Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) under sections 156-A and 196 (ICJ, 2015).

- **Differentiation of Legal Thresholds**: The Islamic legal tradition differentiates public, malicious defamation from private, ambiguous behavior. The legal test must be consistent with this differentiation to forestall harassment of individuals for personal or political score-settling (Saeed, 2016).

- **Muslim Best Practices**: Comparison of blasphemy legislation from other Muslim countries like Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia and KSA reveals that it can be enacted with procedural safeguards like verification of Intent (niyyah), judicial supervision and regulated religious mitigation. Pakistan can greatly benefit from incorporating such types of frameworks.

These changes don't undermine the law—they strengthen its ability to deliver justice without becoming a tool for revenge.

6.2 Institutional Reforms

Mob violence thrives when people lose faith in the system. To rebuild that trust:

• **Train the police properly**: Officers need to know how to calm down tense situations and handle blasphemy cases without bias (UNDP Pakistan, 2021).

• **Protect those who speak up**: Defendants, witnesses, and even lawyers often face threats. A basic protection program is long overdue.

• **Make courts stronger**: Judges shouldn't have to look over their shoulders. Shielding them from clerical and political pressure will help ensure fair outcomes.

These steps will encourage people to trust the courts instead of taking matters into their own hands.

6.3 Digital Reforms

In today's Pakistan, a single WhatsApp message or Facebook post can spark nationwide chaos. Digital reform is urgent:

• **Hold platforms accountable**: Companies must downrank hate speech, flag fake content, and respond quickly to false allegations (Iqbal, 2022).

• **Boost FIA's capacity**: The Cyber Crime Wing needs resources to track down those running digital smear or entrapment campaigns.

• **Fight misinformation with the law**: Like other countries, Pakistan should adopt laws that punish incitement while still respecting freedom of speech (UNESCO, 2022).

Social media shouldn't be a courtroom—or a firing squad.

6.4 Public Education & Engagement

Laws work best when people understand and respect them. Public education is the long game:

• **Spread legal awareness**: Schools, TV, and community events can teach people what blasphemy laws actually say—and what they don't.

• **Rethink madrassa education**: Teaching due process, tolerance, and respectful disagreement can help immunize young minds against radical ideas (NCHR, 2024).

• **Let religious leaders lead wisely**: Ulema from all schools of thought should issue public statements reminding people of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) mercy, not just his majesty (Saeed, 2016).

7. Conclusion

The goal of this study was to find out why many in Pakistan continue to take matters into their own hands because of blasphemy charges, despite the fact that there are official laws in place. My findings, informed by combined research approaches and drawn from the theories of legal pluralism and governance failure, indicate that the major factor at play is the relationship between accepted ideology and a lack of effective government. Although Section 295-C was created to cover offenses like blasphemy, often the punishment comes from religious families, social media pressure or mob violence rather than the law.

Legal pluralism's theorists discovered that sometimes religious rules which are not part of formal law, can override state laws and form separate justice systems. Similarly, the governance failure model explains that insufficient state functions in the fields of policing, courts and prosecutions allow such pluralism to appear. Consequently, the cycle—fear, inaction, reactions by vigilantes and weakened laws—makes mob violence a typical response to accusations of blasphemy.

The results have significant consequences. The law must correct its blasphemy statutes to ensure they are not abused and to allow judges to decide on them justly. A major part of updating institutions is to ensure laws are followed and safeguard the vulnerable from the influence of fast-rising populists. Since minorities and those who speak out are regularly targeted in Pakistan, it is important for human rights that both Pakistan and other countries actively ensure the country honours its ICCPR and related promises.

Any new approach should mainly focus on restoring the faith people have in the legal system. In doing so, one must focus on learning about the law, computer ethics and speaking responsibly about religion. As long as there is no change, blasphemy vigilantism will continue to endanger innocent lives and damage the country's system of justice.

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