# Hate Speech Versus Free Speech - Shrinking Spaces For Minority Voices Online

A study on threats to online freedom of expression
faced by religious minorities, information practitioners
and online media platforms in Pakistan

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pakistan has a strong background in public movements on civil and political rights. The development sector is strong on advocacy for equal rights. While mainstream media and online information landscape have expanded rapidly in Pakistan in recent years with greater focus on development and public interest issues, religious minorities and other marginalized communities in Pakistan often get little or no coverage.

The theme of minority perspectives in a supposedly pluralistic and inclusive media landscape in the evolving information world of Pakistan has not been examined as a thematic focus or recently. This study is part of a broader effort to expand an engagement with media on improving diversity and inclusivity of opinions, views, perspectives and news in Pakistan.

The Institute for Research Advocacy and Development (IRADA), a registered Pakistani organization focusing on civil liberties, conducted a baseline study on the content analysis of coverage of religious minorities in Pakistani Media in late 2018. Key findings of the study included:

- The overall media coverage of religious minorities in quantum terms is generally low and the most widely available media – TV and radio – carry very little or no coverage of them at all. Hindus and Christian communities are the focus of almost all of what little coverage of religious minorities is available with other minorities such as Ahmedis, Sikhs, Buddhists, Kailash, etc., get almost no coverage. Most coverage of religious minorities has a principal focus on them but nearly a third don't.

- The overall media coverage of religious minorities in qualitative terms is generally stereotypical linked to sensitive themes such as blasphemy. The minorities are generally painted in a victimhood framework. Most coverage about them does not even include their views, opinions or perspectives, rendering them voiceless to their own cause. While tonally a significant size of the coverage about religious minorities is inclusive and non-hostile toward them, most news stories and images are about them, not for them – most coverage is neutral, not sympathetic towards them. Almost all news coverage about religious minorities is reactionary or event-related, rarely stories about them because there are millions of them and deserve coverage regardless of their minority status.

While these findings are revealing instructive of the effort required to remedy the situation in public interest and in favour of religious minorities in Pakistan, a need was felt that better understanding of the predicament for minorities was need for thorough understanding to be grounded in a concrete context.

Hence this study was designed and conducted by IRADA with support of the International Media Support (IMS) in the first half of 2019 in Pakistan to study online

freedom of expression challenges, including hate speech, threats, threat actors, response mechanisms, technical shortcomings and resource constraints faced by religious minorities, online information practitioners, civic activists and online media platforms in Pakistan.

An engagement with human rights commissions, civil liberties campaigners, online information activists, online activists with religious minorities backgrounds and online media and community information platforms produced the following key findings:

**Human rights commissions**
- ❖ All four commissions approached in this survey recognized hate speech and general hostility towards religious minorities in both a social context and in the online environment in Pakistan.

- ❖ All four had strong official positions on hate speech, recognized it as a clear and present hazard to civil liberties, and were committed to combating it with the help of stakeholders to safeguard fundamental rights of all citizens, especially religious minorities.

**Civil liberties campaigners**
- ❖ All 10 civil society campaigners approached in this survey had strong views on the undesirability and wide prevalence of hate speech in society and the alarming general indifference or inadequate attention to it by the state.

- ❖ Eight out of ten respondents agreed that neither the state nor society in Pakistan adequately recognize hate speech as a problem including in policy, social and online contexts or the general hostility it promotes, especially towards religious minorities.

**Online information activists**
- ❖ All 10 respondents reported facing hate speech and harassment for their activism online with threats, abuse and trolling as the most common forms of bullying to their social media activities coming from various threat actors including individuals, political entities, religious groups, unknown organized groups and even official sources.

- ❖ The respondents identified religious minorities, security agencies, human rights, gender, politics and development as the main discussion themes online that elicit the most hostile reactions from detractors online.

**Online activists with religious minorities backgrounds**
- ❖ Almost all 10 respondents reported facing hate speech and harassment for their activism online with threats, abuse, trolling, stalking and hacking as the most common forms of bullying to their social media activities coming from various threat actors including individuals, political parties, religious groups, unknown organized groups and even official sources.

❖ The respondents identified religious minorities, religion, security agencies, human rights and gender as the main discussion themes online that elicit the most hostile reactions from detractors online.

**Online media and community information platforms**
❖ All five online news media platforms reported facing hate speech, hostility and organized targeting for their content related to religion, religious minorities and human rights and face threats, abuse, trolling, hacking, blocking and charges of treason from various threat actors including individuals, political parties, religious groups, unknown organized groups and even official sources.

This study not only sought information about the range of challenges to online freedom of expression faced by religious minorities and other civil society actors in Pakistan but also elicited from them the range of solutions and actions required to remedy the challenges.

This study will hopefully help organize a public discussion in Pakistan on challenges religious minorities and other marginalized communities face in the online sphere in terms of freedom of expression a pluralist discourse. It will also hopefully help inform the design of any subsequent potential interventions on mitigation strategies aimed at promoting a pluralist and inclusive discourse online and safer online spaces in Pakistan for marginalized communities.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by the Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA) with support of the International Media Support (IMS) in the first half of 2019 in Pakistan under the following parameters:

Theme
Study on online freedom of expression challenges, including hate speech, threats, threat actors, response mechanisms, technical shortcomings and resource constraints faced by religious minorities, online information practitioners, civic activists and online media platforms in Pakistan.

Participants
- Four state and independent human rights commissions
- Five online news media and community information platforms
- Ten human rights activists with religious minority backgrounds
- Ten digital rights campaigners and online information practitioners

Results
Qualitative study on state of freedom of expression and civic activism online in Pakistan based on reflections and perspectives of religious minorities, civil society supporters of religious minorities and digital media.

Rationale
This study will potentially help organize a public discussion on challenges religious minorities and other marginalized communities face in the online sphere in terms of freedom of expression a pluralist discourse. It will also help inform the design of any subsequent potential interventions on mitigation strategies aimed at promoting a pluralist and inclusive discourse online and safer online spaces in Pakistan for marginalized communities.

Collecting perspectives and experiences
This study relied on the following forms of data collection:
- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with managers of online news media and community information platforms (both minority-owned and others)
- KIIs with online information practitioners (both with religious minority backgrounds and other human rights defenders and digital rights activists)
- Literature review
- List of challenges and threats that religious minorities face in terms of their freedom of expression identified during a series of five consultations with religious minorities, rights commissions, media and civil society in the first half of 2019 in all four provinces of Pakistan and Islamabad.

Tools and Sampling
1. Literature review
2. Interviews with 30 individuals (10 online information practitioners + 10 religious minorities' activists + key / prominent personalities) through semi-structured questionnaires
3. Interviews with 05 online / digital media and community information platforms through semi-structured questionnaires
4. Interviews with 04 four human rights institutions/commissions through semi-structured questionnaires
5. Consultation reports (resulting from five focused group consultations)

## PART 1: Commissions on human rights – committed to combating wrongs

**National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR)**
The National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR)[1] is a statutory body, which was established as a result of the National Commission for Human Rights Act 2012. The purpose of the Commission is to comply with the international obligations "for the purpose of promotion and protection of Human Rights as provided in the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan and various international instruments to which Pakistan is state party or shall become a state party."

**National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW)**
National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)[2] is also a statutory body, which was established in 2000. The NCSW is empowered to, among other functions, monitor mechanisms and institutional procedures for redress of violation of women's rights and individual grievances.

**People's Commission on Minorities' Rights (PCMR)**
People's Commission on Minorities' Rights (PCMR) is a civil society led initiative, which was established in 2018. The Commission aims to advocate for a statutory institution, as ordered by the Supreme Court Pakistan in 2014, to give meaningful role to minorities in making of public policies to remove disparities of rights as well as implementation of existing safeguards to enjoyment of fundamental rights. The PCMR also strives to overcome the challenges that have caused delay in the establishment of an official body in this area.

**Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)**
The Human Right Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)[3] was established in 1987 as an independent non-government organization. The HRCP has a leading role in providing a highly informed and objective voice on a national level in the struggle for the provision of human rights for all and democratic development in Pakistan.

**Summary findings**

❖ All four commissions approached in this survey **recognized hate speech and general hostility towards religious minorities** in both a social context and in the online environment in Pakistan. All four had strong official positions on hate speech, recognized it as a clear and present hazard to civil liberties, and were committed to combating it with the help of stakeholders to safeguard fundamental rights of all citizens, especially religious minorities.

❖ All four commissions had a **consensus on the need for charting a course of affirmative action** and emphasized the need for a collaborative approach identifying human rights commissions, religious minorities, media, civil society, federal and provincial governments, rights activists and individuals and legislatures and legislators as stakeholders in this movement.

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1 www.nchr.gov.pk
2 www.ncsw.gov.pk
3 http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/

❖ All four commissions also elicited a remarkable **consensus on a broader strategy** for this objective that includes advocacy on minorities rights; sensitization of media on portrayal of religious minorities; dialogue among stakeholders on minorities rights; networks and partnerships among key stakeholders; awareness and education against hate speech; and promotion of pluralism, diversity and inclusivity' as priority actions.

**Detailed findings**
The following are the detailed findings of the survey resulting from an outreach to the four commissions on a standard questionnaire.

**Q#1: What is the Commission's position on hate speech, including in social and online contexts?**

**National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR):** The presence of hate speech is a sad reality. Government measures are currently insufficient to curb hate speech. This is because of emergence of social media, which poses a challenge. The current steps are mainly focusing on traditional media. The government is not cognizant of the scale of challenge posed by hate speech. The NCHR is working on the issue of hate speech and its challenges and has conducted consultations with various stakeholders on the subject.

**People's Commission on Minorities' Rights (PCMR):** The PCMR came into existence in early 2019 but has set about focusing on key issues, including hate speech. We seek solutions including logical measures to ensure respect and realization of fundamental rights of all citizens, including religious minorities, especially safeguards against any hate crimes and accountability of these violations.

**National Commission on Status of Women (NCSW):** The NCSW considers hate speech as a serious issue both in social and media contexts. Hate speech is being used as a political tool to silence dissent and being used by certain segments to achieve vested goals and targets. The blasphemy law is being misused against those who strive for pluralism and diversity in society. Use of hate speech and misuse of blasphemy law are kinds of violent extremism. The NCSW does not yet have a formal strategy to deal with the issue of hate speech but it has worked on issues of religious minorities and their freedoms.

**Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP):** The HRCP opposes hate speech in any form and through any medium. Those guilty of hate speech at public forums and through publications must be punished. About the social media, HRCP would like the users to be informed, educated and sensitised to the need to eschew hate speech. This is because it may not be advisable to choke the social media, which the government may be inclined to do, without being serious about curbing hate speech.

**Q#2: Does the Commission recognize hate speech and general hostility in Pakistan towards religious minorities, including in social and online contexts, as a problem?**

All four commissions – NCHR, PCMR, NCSW and HRCP – answered an emphatic "Yes" to this question, recognizing hate speech as a serious problem and general hostility in Pakistan towards religious minorities, including in social context and online.

**Q#3: If yes [to Question 2], how serious does the Commission consider this phenomenon as a problem that needs attention of the stakeholders?**

- Three of the four human rights commissions – PCMR, NCSW and HRCP – declared hate speech as "extremely serious" and requiring "urgent action of the stakeholders."
- One of the commissions – NCHR – declared hate speech as "serious" and requiring "attention of the stakeholders."

**Q#4: If the matter requires attention, who should be the key stakeholders for engagement to chart a course of affirmative action?**

- Representatives of all four human rights commissions suggested that statutory and non-statutory **human rights commissions** and bodies are the primary stakeholders for engagement to chart a course of affirmative actions to combating hate speech.
- All four considered representatives of **religious minorities** groups as key stakeholders.
- All four declared **media** to one of the primary stakeholders in creating awareness against hate speech.
- All four respondents mentioned that rights-based **civil society** groups are also among key stakeholders.
- All four agreed that **federal and provincial governments** are among the stakeholders for engagement.
- All four stated that prominent **rights activists and individuals** have key role in championing the cause of combating hate speech.
- Three of the four commissions identified federal and provincial **legislatures and legislators** as stakeholders in this movement.
- One of four commissions sought to engage **law enforcement agencies**, **education ministries**, **Higher Education Commission**, **curriculum departments**, **teachers** and **lawyers** as partners.

**Q#5 & #6: What possible steps could be pursued as part of a broader course of action to protect religious minorities against hate speech and promote pluralism and inclusivity?**

- All four commissions mentioned '**advocacy on minorities rights**' as a key action.
- All four commissions identified '**sensitization of media on portrayal of religious minorities**' as a priority action.
- All four commissions picked '**dialogue among stakeholders on minorities rights**' as an urgent action.

- All four commissions agreed on the need for '**networks and partnerships among key stakeholders**' as a key course of action.
- All four picked '**awareness and education against hate speech**' as a preferable joint mission.
- All four emphasized policy actions on 'promotion of pluralism, diversity and inclusivity' as a priority.
- Some additional desirable key action points highlighted by the commissions included:
  - HRCP: Implementation of Supreme Court of Pakistan verdict of 2014 [in which the Supreme Court of Pakistan directed the state to remove disparities of rights for religious minorities as well as implementation of existing safeguards to enjoyment of fundamental rights by religious minorities.]
  - NCHR: Inclusion of representatives of religious minorities in all initiatives; and engagement of law enforcement agencies in policy actions.
  - NCSW: Proactive involvement of women in all initiatives; and engagement of existing provincial-level rights groups in action plans.
  - PCMR: Countering supremacist, religio-nationalist, ultra-conservative narratives in media and online debates; and engagement of state institutions in action plans.

**Q#7:  How do you see the role of the Commission in the above initiatives to strengthen partnerships among key stakeholders on rights of religious minorities?**

- NCHR is ready to commit itself to a 'lead role' in all the above possible course of action for protection of religious minorities, but only until a statutory-based commission on religious minorities is formed after which it sees itself in a 'support role'.
- PCMR is willing to assume a 'lead role' on some of the urgent parts of a possible course of action and in a 'support role' on others.
- NCSW is willing to commit itself to a 'lead role' in all or any of the parts of an eventual course of action.
- HRCP sees its involvement in an 'issue-based advocacy' related to any course of action.

# PART 2: Campaigners on human rights – firm on empowerment activism

As anywhere else, civil society is a key driver of the human rights agenda in Pakistan. It was imperative, as part of the qualitative analysis on the state environment for vulnerable segments of society such as religious minorities, if the views of activists representing a broad section of this society with vocal views from a range of backgrounds (such as politics, civic activists, media, academia and legal) and geographies (all four provinces of Pakistan) and gender were elicited.

**Summary findings**

❖ All 10 civil society campaigners approached in this survey had strong views on the undesirability and **wide prevalence of hate speech** in society and the **alarming general indifference** or **inadequate attention** to it by the state.

❖ All 10 emphasized an **urgent need for collaborative approaches** by a variety of stakeholders for **protection of vulnerable segments of society**, especially religious minorities.

❖ All 10 wanted a multi-pronged course of action undertaken with engagement of key stakeholders including r**eligious minorities** groups, **statutory or non-statutory commissions, media,** rights-based **civil society** groups, federal and provincial **governments** and **legislatures,** prominent rights **activists** and **champions, legal community** and **academia** to combat hate speech**.**

❖ All 10 identified key actions including **advocacy on rights of minorities**; **awareness against hate-speech**; **sensitization of media** on portrayal of minorities; **dialogue** among key stakeholders; **networks and partnerships** among stakeholders; **reforms in legal frameworks**; and **revision of curriculum** as part of a course of affirmative action to protect religious minorities and to promote pluralisms and inclusivity.

**Detailed findings**
The following are the detailed findings of the survey resulting from an outreach to the 10 civil liberties campaigners based on a standard questionnaire.

**Q#1: What is your position on hate speech, including in social and online contexts?**

**Mr Asad Jamal** – *background in legal and human rights advocacy*
Hate speech, which clearly incites people to violence on basis of race/ethnicity, gender or religion, is offensive and must be dealt through criminal law. But all offensive speech is not 'hate speech'. Specific speech inciting to violence is 'hate speech'. Therefore, several provisions of Pakistani laws especially the ones included in Pakistan Penal Code 1860 and Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 need to be repealed. They include but are not limited to chapter XV PPC and sec. 8-9 ATA. Other laws also need reforms.

**Ms Diep Saeeda** – *background in rights activism*
There's a difference between 'free speech' and 'hate speech'. In Pakistan any individual challenging state narratives becomes a target because the state perceives 'free speech' as 'hate speech'. 'Hate speech' that incites violence is unacceptable, 'free speech' that proffers dissent from established opinions and perspectives should not be treated as 'hate speech.' The bottom-line is that all citizens have inalienable rights to freedom of expression and access to information.

**Mr Farhatullah Babar** – *background in parliamentary politics, constitutionalism, civic activism and analysis*
Hate speech must be curbed. Pakistan's existing legal framework, namely the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016, does provide for prevention of hate speech on online. However, this section of the law is not being implemented. Unfortunately hate speech flourishes while those with dissenting opinions and presenting alternate narratives on security policies are harassed, intimidated and punished.

**Ms Farieha Aziz** – *background in digital rights advocacy*
One is a social determination of what hate speech is and what it constitutes under law. Hate speech laws in Pakistan are problematic because they tend to be vague and the manner in which they are applied is also a cause for concern. The same is true of social/online contexts. So, first there is a need to define hate speech clearly and also have some sensible discussion on curbing it. Does a blocked website make the content or idea go away? Or a blocked/removed/restricted Facebook page/Twitter account? There is the argument that at least it pulls the plug on dissemination, which may be true. But that is temporary until another website or account is set up for dissemination of the same information. The other part of this issue and approach towards it is criminalization of speech. Going after the people responsible for making certain comments and holding them to account calls into question the process. Who and how that is to be done? And whether the powers and procedures in law are proportionate and fair, as this also becomes an instrument to curb dissent?

**Mr Habib Tahir** – *background in human rights advocacy*
Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan provides the concept of freedom of speech, However, hate speech is a speech that attacks an individual or group of individuals on the basis of their faith, race, ethnicity, gender, disability or national origin. Hate speech is a type of terrorism. In both social context and in online spaces in Pakistan, hate speech can be seen everywhere. Effective policies are need that prevent hate speech but which at the same time also protect the freedom of expression.

**Ms Nighat Dad** – *background in digital rights, women's empowerment and policy advocacy*
The term 'hate speech' is not clearly defined in Pakistani laws, which may be part of the reason why it is difficult to prevent it. The relevant definitions and descriptions in the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) and the Anti-Terrorism Act (ACT) are not

reasonable and need to be brought to a par with international best practices while ensuring that the right to free speech is protected.

**Mr Saroop Ijaz** – *background in human rights activism and legal advocacy*
I believe in freedom of expression excluding hate speech and incitement to violence. In the Pakistani context, the consequences of unchecked hate speech have been grave, impacting already vulnerable groups, in particular.

**Mr Tahir Mehdi** – *background in journalism and community information networks*
I think the online space is more or less a reflection of what exists in a society. The social media in Pakistan, however, has been instrumental in validating and efficient in spreading hate speech which has aggravated the situation, especially for the vulnerable sections of society. The young killer of a professor in Bahawalpur in Punjab province was motivated to kill his teacher on his understanding of blasphemy based on validation by a senior preacher through social media. If hate speech is resulting in dead people, there is a serious problem that needs attention.

**Ms Tahira Abdullah** – *background in civic activism, women's empowerment*
There is no place for hate speech – in any form or manifestation – in either Jinnah's Pakistan, or in the 1973 original Constitution – before military ruler General Zia-ul-Haq's 8th Constitutional Amendment of 1985 distorted it beyond recognition.

**Q#2: Do the State and Society adequately recognize hate speech and general hostility in Pakistan towards religious minorities, including in policy, social and online contexts, as a problem?**

- Eight out of ten respondents agreed that **neither the state nor society in Pakistan adequately recognize hate speech as a problem** including in policy, social and online contexts or the general hostility it promotes, especially towards religious minorities.
- Two of the 10 respondents felt the state and society adequately recognize the problem of hate speech.

**Q#3: If yes [to Question 2], how serious do the State and Society consider this phenomenon as a problem that needs attention of the stakeholders?**

- Seven out of ten respondents were of the view that the state and society were "**generally indifferent**" to this phenomenon.
- Three of the ten respondents felt the state and society were taking this phenomenon "**not seriously enough**."

**Q#4: To delegate priority to the issue of protection of rights of religious minorities and to generate required policy attention to it, who should be the key stakeholders to chart a course of affirmative action?**

- All ten respondents identified the following categories of stakeholders as key to charting a course of affirmative action:

- o **Religious minorities** groups
- o **Media**
- o Rights-based **civil society** groups
- o Federal and provincial **governments**
- o Federal and provincial **legislatures**.

- Nine out of ten respondents identified **statutory or non-statutory commissions** such as NCHR, PCMR, NCSW and HRCP, as well as "**prominent rights activists** and **champions**" among key stakeholders for engagement.
- Other stakeholders identified for engagement included **lawyers**, **prosecutors**, **judges**, **law enforcement agencies**, **researchers**, **academicians**, **political parties**, and **social media and IT experts**.

**Q# 5 & #6: What possible steps could be pursued as part of a course of affirmative action to protect religious minorities to promote pluralisms and inclusivity?**

- All ten respondents consider the following as key constituents of an affirmative action:
  - o **Advocacy** on rights of religious minorities
  - o **Awareness** and education against hate-speech
  - o **Promotion** of pluralism, diversity and inclusivity

- Nine out of ten respondents also wanted the following key actions in addition to the above:
  - o **Sensitization** of media on portrayal of minorities
  - o **Dialogue** among key stakeholders
  - o **Networks** and partnerships among the stakeholders

- In addition, seven respondents wanted **review and reforms** in constitutional and legal frameworks as key actions
- In addition, five respondents review and **revision** of curriculum, teaching guides, policies and practices as key actions
- In addition, two respondents called for effective **implementation** of existing legal and administrative remedies as key actions.

# PART 3: Hate speech – experiences of online information activists

Pakistan has a robust online community that is growing as online access has improved tremendously over the past decade. Mirroring offline experiences, information practitioners, human rights defenders and civil society activists face hate speech and harassment online too. As part of this qualitative study on the extent and nature of freedom of expression challenges faced by the online rights groups, some of Pakistan's better-known online information practitioners, activists and bloggers were contacted to document their experiences

**Summary findings**

❖ All respondents reported facing **hate speech** and **harassment** for their activism online with **threats**, **abuse** and **trolling** as the most common forms of bullying to their social media activities coming from various threat actors including **individuals**, **political entities**, **religious groups**, unknown **organized groups** and even **official sources**.

❖ The respondents identified **religious minorities**, **security agencies, human rights**, **gender**, **politics** and **development** as the main discussion themes online that elicit the most hostile reactions from detractors online.

❖ The respondents called for the establishment of a **network or alliance of online information practitioners** that could provide **inputs to policymakers**, legal and technical **support to victims** and facilitate a range of **strategy and logistical resources** to the network members to lobby for **safer online spaces and communities**.

**Detailed findings**
The following are the detailed findings of the survey resulting from an outreach to the 10 online activists based on a standard questionnaire.

**Q#1: Do you sometimes face hostility / hate speech for your online posts and social media activities?**
• All ten respondents replied in the affirmative to this question, saying they have faced hostility or hate speech for their online posts and social media activities.

**Q#2: If yes [to Question #1], which of your thematic posts tend to attract negative or hostile comments?**
• Six of 10 respondents said posts relating to '**security agencies**' attract negative or hostile comments.
• Five of 10 respondents mentioned posts on **human rights**, **politics** and **religion** attract negative or hostile comments.

- Three of 10 respondents said they simply '**block or mute**' those who negatively target them for their social media activities.
- Two of 10 respondents said they '**reported to the authorities**' any serious negatively targeted reactions to their social media activities.

**Q#7 & #8: What do you think is needed for individuals and organizations to better combat hate speech and harassment online?**

- Seven of 10 respondents said '**legal support**' would help them better combat hate speech and harassment online.
- Five of 10 respondents said '**alliances and networks of like-minded**' persons or groups would help them better combat hate speech and harassment online.

**Q#9: Is there is a need for a network of online information practitioners to offer appropriate help against hate speech and harassment online?**

- Seven of 10 respondents endorsed the need for a '**network of online information practitioners**.'
- One of 10 respondents said a '**public sector support platform**' was needed.
- Two of 10 respondents did not respond.

**Q#10: If a support network to combat hate speech and harassment online was available, how would you envision it engaging with you?**

In response to this question, the respondents made the following suggestions:
- Should be membership-based and promote both online and offline dialogues on combating hate speech and harassment
- Should provide strategies for promoting tolerance and inclusivity
- Should facilitate meetings to strategize and provide resource support
- Should provide for a multi-faceted approach to fight hate speech and include members of religious minorities
- Should advocate for implementation of laws against hate speech and harassment
- Should engage official implementation mechanisms to educate them about ground realities
- Should engage a broad spectrum of the online community to generate broad-based support
- Should consider establishing or supporting a hate speech and harassment monitoring and reporting mechanism
- Should seek recourse to legal instruments and legal aid to protect and support victims

# PART 4: Hate speech – experiences of religious minorities online

A media content analysis study produced by the Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA) in late 2018 reflected startling findings about the generally negative and poor portrayal of religious minorities in mainstream Pakistani news media including print, television, radio and even online media. To take the examination of these findings further, this study seeks to find out from representatives of religious minorities in Pakistan about their experiences online as both private and official information practitioners. The outreach was to Pakistani citizens of Hindu, Christian, Zoroastrian, Ahmedi and Jewish backgrounds. Almost all of them are well known but their personal identities are being withheld on request.

**Summary findings**

❖ Almost all respondents reported facing **hate speech** and **harassment** for their activism online with **threats**, **abuse**, **trolling, stalking** and **hacking** as the most common forms of bullying to their social media activities coming from various threat actors including **individuals**, **political parties**, **religious groups**, unknown **organized groups** and even **official sources**.

❖ The respondents identified **religious minorities**, **religion**, **security agencies, human rights** and **gender** as the main discussion themes online that elicit the most hostile reactions from detractors online.

❖ The respondents called for the establishment of a **network or alliance of online information practitioners** that could lobby for better cybercrime control against online hate speech, legal and technical **support to victims** including religious minorities and **outreach** to other rights groups and alliances.

**Detailed findings**
The following are the detailed findings of the survey resulting from an outreach to the 10 online activists based on a standard questionnaire.

**Q#1: Do you sometimes face hostility / hate speech for your online posts and social media activities?**

- Seven out of 10 respondents replied in the affirmative, stating that they face **hostility** or **hate speech** for your online posts and social media activities
- Three of 10 said they restrict their public online activities mainly due to security reasons

**Q#2: If yes [to question #1], which of your thematic posts tend to sometimes attract negative or hostile comments?**

- Five of 10 respondents said their posts relating to '**religion**' and '**religious minorities**' tend to attract negative or hostile reactions
- Three of 10 respondents said their posts on '**human rights**' tend to attract negative or hostile reactions
- Three of 10 respondents said their posts about '**marginalized groups**' and '**gender**' attract negative or hostile reactions
- One of 10 respondents said their posts about '**security agencies**' usually generated negative or hostile reactions

**Q#3: What is the nature of negative reactions to some of your posts?**

- Six of 10 respondents said they received '**abuse**' as a reaction to some of their posts
- Four of 10 respondents said they faced '**trolling**' as a negative reaction to some of their posts
- Two of 10 respondents said they have been subjected to '**stalking**' or '**surveillance**' as result of some of their posts
- One of 10 respondents said he has received '**threats**' and faced '**hacking**' due to some of his posts

**Q#4: What are the sources of negative reactions to your posts/social media activity?**

- Eight of 10 respondents said they have faced hostile reactions from various '**individuals**'
- Three of 10 respondents said they have been targets of hostility from mostly '**unknown organized groups**'
- Three of 10 respondents said they have been openly targeted by '**religious groups**'
- One respondent said he was targeted by a '**political party**' and another by a '**government body**' for some of their posts.

**Q#5: Do you see any differences in the way you are treated compared to your male colleagues? (For female interviewees only)**

Since this question was addressed to female respondents only, therefore, three of the 10 female respondents in the group replied to this question.

- Two of the three female respondents said they had faced an additional layer of discriminator or hostility due to their gender.

**Q#6: How do you handle any serious negativity targeted at your posts or social media activity?**

- Six of 10 respondents said they simply '**ignored**' any hostility or negativity to their social media activity
- Five of 10 respondents said they simply '**block**' any person who expresses hostility or becomes abusive to their social media activity
- Four of 10 respondents said they '**responded online**' to any negativity to their social media activity
- One of the 10 respondents said he has exercised the option of '**reporting to authorities**' to hostility to him online

**Q#7: What is needed for individuals and organizations to become better at combatting hate speech and harassment online?**

- Nine of 10 respondents said an 'alliance and networks of the like-minded' can help **galvanize united action** against hate speech online
- Seven 10 respondents said availability of '**legal support**' could immensely help fight back hate speech, especially against vulnerable groups such as religious minorities
- One respondent urged a '**skill and training resource center**' to help better combat hate speech and harassment online.

**Q#8: Can a network of online information practitioners offer appropriate help against hate speech and harassment online?**

- Nine of 10 respondents endorsed the need for a 'network of online information practitioners' to offer appropriate help against hate speech and harassment online.

**Q#9: If a support network to combat hate speech and harassment online was available, how would you envision it engaging with you?**

- Should help lobby for strengthening laws on cybercrimes against hate speech and harassment
- Should create a support mechanism for religious minorities and others who are attacked online
- Should help create a reporting system that can optimize assistance
- Should have an online presence and register complains and intercede against abusers on behalf of victims
- Should be a repository of technical resources and raise awareness against hate speech and harassment
- Should provide legal aid to victims
- Should liaise with other civil society networks to create broader partnerships on freedom of expression and safe internet

# PART 5: Hate speech – experiences of online community news media

While a media content analysis study produced by the Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA) in late 2018 reflected startling findings about the generally negative and poor portrayal of religious minorities in mainstream Pakistani news media including print, television, radio and even online media, a survey of the kinds of threats and pressures faced by online news and community media of Pakistan that partly contribute to lower levels of reporting on religious minorities by them was not available. This study seeks to find out from some of the better known and active online news and community media platforms of Pakistan about their experiences online. Five platforms, including Dawn.com, Humsub, Sujag, Naya Daur and Aina-e-Absaar, were surveyed for this section.

**Summary findings**

❖ Almost five online news media platforms reported facing **hate speech**, **hostility** and **organized targeting** for their content related to **religion**, **religious minorities** and **human rights** and face **threats**, **abuse**, **trolling, hacking**, **blocking** and charges of **treason** from various threat actors including **individuals**, **political parties**, **religious groups**, unknown **organized groups** and even **official sources**.

❖ All five platforms called for the establishment of a **network or alliance of online information platforms and practitioners** that could serve as a representative platform for **engagement with the authorities** to develop and enforce **legal protection measures**, help with **safety audits** of platforms and **assist against hacking and blocking**, facilitate **peer-to-peer exchange** of experience and knowledge, provide **legal and technical support**.

**Detailed findings**
The following are the detailed findings of the survey resulting from an outreach to the five online news media platforms based on a standard questionnaire.

General Questions

**Q#1: Does your news media platform sometimes face hostility / hate speech for the content it posts online?**

- All five platforms replied in the affirmative and said they face **hostility and hate speech** for the content they post online.

**Q#2: If yes [to Question #1], which kinds of thematic posts tend to sometimes attract negative comments?**

- All five platforms said that posts or content they produce relating to '**religion**,' '**religious minorities**,' '**human rights**' and '**politics**' tend to generate hostility.
- Four of 5 platforms said posts or content they produce relating to '**gender**' and some '**personalities**' tend to attract negative reactions.
- Three of 5 platforms said posts or content they produce relating to '**marginalized groups**' and '**security agencies**' also attract negative reactions.
- Two of 5 platforms said posts or content they produce relating to '**development issues**' also attract negative reactions.

**Q#3: What is the nature of negative reactions to some of your content?**

- All five platforms said they have received '**abuse**' and '**threats**' as result of some of the content they have produced and shared.
- Four of five platforms said they face '**trolling**' due to some of the content they produce and share.
- Two of five platforms said they have become victims of '**stalking behavior**' in response to some of the content they have produced and shared.
- One platform said they have faced attempts of '**hacking**' in response to some of the content they have produced and shared.
- One platform said their website was **blocked** by Pakistan Telecom Authority for sharing content related to Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM).
- One platform said their website was branded as a '**traitor**' and accused of '**working for foreign agencies**' for some of their content.

**Q#4: Do you experience any differences in the ways your staff with different gender identities are harassed?**

- Two of five platforms said they have experienced attacks and hate speech aimed at their female staff.

**Q#5: What are the sources of negative reactions to your platform?**

- All five platforms said they have received negative reactions from specific '**individuals**.'
- Four of five platforms said '**unknown organized groups**' are a source of negative reaction to some of their posts.
- Three of five platforms said '**religious groups**' also react negatively to some of their posts.
- Two of five platforms said '**political entities**' have showed negative reactions to some of their posts.
- One platform said '**government sources**' have also reacted negatively to some of their posts.

**Q#6: Is organized negativity a recurring experience for your platform?**

- All five platforms replied in the affirmative and said they have experienced **organized targeting** for some of the content they have produced and shared.

<u>Specific Questions</u>

**Q#7: How do you handle any serious negativity targeted at your platform?**

- Four of five platforms said they usually '**ignore**' negative comments if they are not too hostile.
- Four of five platforms said they '**block**' or '**mute**' persons who either are either hostile or too negative.
- Three of five platforms said they engage with some of them or '**moderate the discussion**' to filter out hate speech.
- Two of five platforms said they '**respond**' to any serious comments online.
- One of five platforms said they it has '**reported**' online attacks to the authorities.

**Q#8: Does your platform have written editorial policies to promote journalistic professionalism and discourage hate speech?**

- Three of five platforms said they have **written editorial policies** to promote journalistic professionalism and discourage hate speech.
- Two of three platforms said they did not have written editorial policies against hate speech.

**Q#9: Does your platform have appropriate resources or measures in place to adequately protect itself against organized or serious attacks such as hacking or sustained suspension, etc.?**

- Three of five platforms said they have appropriate **measures in place** to adequately protect themselves against organized or serious attacks.
- Two of five platforms said they did not have such measures or resources in place.

**Q#10: Are your editorial and technical teams trained to professionally handle hate attacks, digital security issues and other similar challenges to protect your platform and team?**

- Two of five platforms said they **do not have either trained staff or adequate resources** to handle hate attacks or digital security challenges.

**Q11 & #12: What is needed for an organization/platform like yours to become better at combatting hate speech and harassment online?**

- Four of five platforms said they need '**skilled and trained human resource**'
- Four of five platforms said they need '**legal support**'
- Four of five platforms said they need an '**alliance and networks of like-minded**'
- Three of five platforms said they need '**technical resources**'

**Q#13: Is there a need for a network/platform to offer appropriate help against hate speech and harassment online and technical support for platforms like yours?**

- All five platforms replied in the affirmative and emphasized the **need for a support alliance** against hate speech and harassment.

**Q#14: If a support network to combat hate speech and harassment online was available, how would you envision it engaging with you?**

- Should serve as a representative platform for engagement with the authorities to develop and enforce legal protection measures.
- Should offer technical resources to train and mentor staff and offer legal support resources.
- Should provide for experts to evaluate policies and practices of online media platforms and provide technical support for implementation.
- Should help conduct safety audit of online news media platforms and assist with secure systems.
- Should assist with trainings and educating staff of online news media including advice for use of best relevant tools.
- Should facilitate among online news media platforms peer-to-peer exchange of experience and knowledge.
- Should bring together Pakistan-based digital newsrooms to work together/consistently on the issue on a professional basis.
- Should be set up on a membership basis with a proper charter, mandate and resources to be run professionally.

# PART 6: Recommendations on combating online hate speech and supporting stakeholders to help themselves

The following are consolidated recommendations from the human rights commissions, civil liberties campaigners, activists with religious minorities backgrounds and online media and community information platforms:

- ❖ **DEVELOP** a **course of affirmative action** based on **collaborative approaches** by a variety of stakeholders for protection of vulnerable segments of society, especially religious minorities in engagement with and inputs from:

  - Religious minorities
  - Statutory and non-statutory commissions
  - Media, journalists and bloggers
  - Rights-based civil society groups
  - Federal and provincial governments and legislatures
  - Prominent rights activists and champions
  - Legal community
  - Academia

- ❖ **ADOPT** a **broader strategy of priority actions** that includes:

  - Advocacy on minorities rights
  - Sensitization of media on portrayal of religious minorities
  - Dialogue among stakeholders on minorities rights
  - Networks and partnerships among key stakeholders
  - Awareness and education against hate speech
  - Promotion of pluralism, diversity and inclusivity

- ❖ **ESTABLISH** a **network or alliance of online free speech stakeholders** that could provide:

  - Inputs to policymakers
  - Legal and technical support to victims
  - A range of strategy and logistical resources
  - Advocacy strategies for safer online spaces and communities
  - Lobbying support for better cybercrime control against online hate speech
  - Outreach to other rights groups and alliances
  - Identity as representative platform for engagement with the authorities to develop and enforce legal protection measures
  - Help with safety audits of online media platforms and assist against hacking and blocking
  - Facilitate peer-to-peer exchange of experience and knowledge.

## About IRADA - A brief profile

The Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA) is a registered Pakistan-based civil society organization focusing on social development and promotion of civil liberties with the following vision and mission:

**Vision**: IRADA envisions a democratic, progressive and inclusive polity and society in Pakistan.

**Mission**: IRADA aims to
1. Strengthen democracy *through inclusivity and pluralisms*
2. Strengthen local empowerment *through devolution of powers*
3. Strengthen governance *through accountability and transparency*
4. Strengthen justice *through fundamental rights*

For more details about IRADA and its work, please visit www.irada.org.pk