



FORIS Policy Report

May 2021

*The Intersection of Blasphemy
Laws & Institutional Religious
Freedom: Egypt, Indonesia,
Pakistan, and Turkey*

*Freedom of Religious
Institutions in Society Project*

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Foreword

I am honoured to be writing this foreword for two key policy reports of the Religious Freedom Institute's (RFI) Freedom of Religious Institutions in Society Project (FORIS), which aims to clarify the meaning and value of institutional religious freedom. I pay tribute to the work of RFI and all other NGOs working to champion freedom of religion or belief around the world.

Religious freedom is a defining part of my life, as someone who came to the United Kingdom from Pakistan at the age of six to join my father, who was an Imam in Gillingham, Kent. Gillingham, a predominantly Christian community, was a place where my family and I could practise our Muslim faith freely and openly. Even more, we felt accepted and respected. It is this same community that has elected me to serve as their Member of Parliament for the last ten years.

I recognize that my experience is not a reality for most people. According to a Pew Research Center study in 2018, 83% of the world's population live in countries where the right to freedom of religion or belief is restricted or banned. In this context, I believe we have a moral obligation to work towards building a world where everyone can freely practise their faith, without undue restrictions or any fear of persecution.

These RFI policy reports provide conceptual clarity and concrete recommendations needed to advance religious liberty. The report entitled, "America's International Religious Freedom Policy Must Account for Competing Local Definitions of Religion and the Common Good" starts by focusing on how a good society is understood and the role religion plays in shaping and advancing that understanding. Policy makers, diplomats, and campaigners for religious liberty will be more effective in their work if they recognize and appreciate differences in how the common good is defined and advanced. Simply put, there needs to be awareness of how religion or belief impacts the way people see the world and the way their society's common life should be ordered.

Expanding on this theme, the complexity of world religions, especially the diversity within religions, requires specific training and education efforts aimed at diplomats, advocates, and policy makers alike. During my time as the UK Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief, religious literacy was a key focus area, and I led efforts to provide specific training on how religion is defined and the variations within religions. As the FORIS report states, *"it is often the case that religious minorities within a country's dominant religion may be even more severely restricted than adherents of other religions. Advocacy for religious freedom, then, necessarily entails advocacy for religious majorities as well (particularly minorities within the majority)."* Understanding these complexities will enable advocates to work more effectively towards cultivating religious liberty.

Furthermore, the report asserts that a purely individualistic view of religious freedom is not enough. We must work to build institutional freedom of religion or belief. This is achieved by working collectively through multilateral fora, including the International Religious Freedom of Belief Alliance (IRFBA), the UN Human Rights Council, the OECD, and other organizations. These partners must cooperate to take decisive action to hold perpetrators of abuses to account. We have seen this recently with the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and European Union imposing sanctions on Chinese officials over abuses in Xinjiang. In Sudan, international partners, including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Holy See, have worked together to bring about reforms to improve freedom of religion or belief, such as the removal of the death penalty for apostasy and blasphemy. Similarly, the IRFBA worked together in the wake of the pandemic to successfully secure the release of prisoners detained for their religion or beliefs in countries including Yemen, Eritrea, and Uzbekistan.

In different parts of the world, we see how rapidly religion-state relations can change, shaped by political actors and global conditions. Over the last year, we have seen a worrying uptick in discrimination against religious minorities. While change can be achieved through advocacy and diplomacy, the effectiveness of these efforts depends on whether the approaches are nuanced and tolerant of different forms of religious regulation. This policy report, and RFI's work more broadly, set out a number of guiding principles to ensure that advocacy efforts accomplish the goal of religious liberty for all, in line with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

A key challenge with this work is understanding how public policies, such as blasphemy laws, can lead to the persecution of religious minorities. As discussed in the second policy report entitled, "The Intersection of Blasphemy Laws & Institutional Religious Freedom: Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey" these laws are often used to target individuals from a minority faith to settle individual conflicts. I saw this firsthand during a campaign with other UK parliamentarians to bring attention to the case of Asia Bibi, which highlighted the devastating effects of blasphemy laws in Pakistan. This policy paper from RFI looks at how legislation impacts religious minorities around the world. It examines how existing laws can be repealed or their enforcement mitigated and how to prevent new restrictive or discriminatory laws from being introduced.

I want to thank diplomats, policy makers, scholars, and faith leaders around the world for taking forward this critical work. When we all work together for the common good, we can achieve so much in ensuring religious freedom for all, and these FORIS policy reports will be an important resource for those striving toward this vital goal.

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Former UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief
(2019 – 2020)

Introduction

The Religious Freedom Institute's (RFI) Freedom of Religious Institutions in Society (FORIS) Project is a three-year initiative funded by the John Templeton Foundation that aims to clarify the meaning and value of institutional religious freedom, examine how it is faring globally, and explore why it is worthy of public concern.

FORIS seeks to advance scholarship, inform policymakers, and influence cultural understandings on institutional religious freedom in the United States and around the world. Religious liberty is not an individual right alone, but rather includes the right of religious communities to gather in synagogues, churches, mosques, temples, and other houses of worship. Freedom of religion also includes the right of faith communities to establish religious institutions such as schools, hospitals, ministries to the poor, universities, and countless others that seek to embody the teachings of their respective religious traditions. Institutional religious freedom encompasses this full range of congregational and organizational expressions of religious faith. FORIS critically engages with both the proper meaning and scope of that freedom as well as its contributions to a society's common good.

About the Religious Freedom Institute

A non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., RFI is committed to achieving broad acceptance of religious liberty as a fundamental human right, a source of individual and social flourishing, the cornerstone of a successful society, and a driver of national and international security. RFI seeks to advance religious freedom for everyone, everywhere.

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

“ *Institutional religious freedom is the presumptive freedom of a religious institution thus understood to define itself and its core convictions, govern itself by its core convictions, and express itself and its core convictions in society and public life to the extent and in the manner it wishes to do so.* ”

More than half the 49 Muslim-majority countries in the world have laws punishing blasphemy—sacrilegious statements and acts against Islam. This rate is only around ten percent among non-Muslim countries. The blasphemy laws in Muslim-majority countries also tend to have more severe punishments than similar laws in other countries. There is also a trend in the Muslim world of passing new blasphemy laws.

Other studies have documented how blasphemy laws restrict individual freedom. This policy paper aims to contribute to this literature by examining how these laws limit institutional religious freedom. Institutional religious freedom is the presumptive freedom of a religious institution thus understood to define itself and its core convictions, govern itself by its core convictions, and express itself and its core convictions in society and public life to the extent and in the manner it wishes to do so.

Regarding this threefold freedom of religious institutions, blasphemy laws are deeply restrictive. This paper examines how blasphemy laws in four significant Muslim-majority countries—Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey—can exact tremendous harm on certain religious communities by restricting their religious institutions.

This policy paper has two sets of policy recommendations.

To policymakers in these Muslim-majority countries:

In order to promote institutional religious freedom, secure equal citizenship, and maintain democratization, it is necessary to a) avoid passing new laws or amendments that punish blasphemy, b) suspend implementation of the existing laws, and, if possible, c) repeal the existing laws.

In many Muslim-majority countries, blasphemy laws already exist. The first recommendation, therefore, is not crucial for these countries. The third recommendation—repealing these laws—is crucial but may not be feasible. Hence, policymakers in these countries may prioritize the second recommendation—suspending their implementation. This may be a crucial and feasible option for policymakers of many Muslim-majority countries.

To policymakers in the United States:

The United States could encourage the governments of Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey to a) avoid passing new laws or amendments that punish blasphemy, b) minimize the implementation of existing blasphemy laws, and c) repeal those existing laws, to the extent practicable.

In general, collaboration between U.S. government agencies and international organizations, such as the United Nations, is needed in order to promote an international commitment to institutional religious freedom as a universal value and to uphold a global understanding that blasphemy laws contravene this universal value.

Overview

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In 2020, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) published a comprehensive global report on laws punishing blasphemy.¹ USCIRF has categorized 30 out of the world's 49 Muslim-majority countries as "[c]ountries with criminal blasphemy laws and reported cases."² Among non-Muslim-majority countries in the world, only 14 out of around 150 are in this category.³

In addition to this disproportionality, Muslim countries also have a worrisome trend of passing new blasphemy laws. From 2014 to the present, six countries in the world passed new or amended blasphemy laws, out of which five have a Muslim majority (Brunei, Kazakhstan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Oman) and only one (Nepal) does not. This happened while nine non-Muslim-majority countries (Canada, Denmark, Greece, Iceland,

Ireland, Malta, New Zealand, Norway, and Scotland) repealed their blasphemy laws.

Another dimension of these blasphemy laws in some Muslim-majority countries involves the strict punishments they impose. For instance, Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, all require the death penalty for blasphemy.⁴

Several scholars have recently documented how blasphemy laws in Muslim-majority countries restrict individual freedom,⁵ while others have analyzed how these laws contradict certain Islamic principles and values.⁶

In this policy paper, we aim to contribute to this growing literature by examining how these laws limit institutional religious freedom.



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Institutional Religious Freedom

Religious freedom has both individual and institutional aspects.⁷ While the former means the liberty of individuals, the latter refers to the liberty of religious organizations, which include religious congregations and educational institutions. A purely individualistic notion of rights and freedoms, as is common in liberal democracies, may assume that individual religious freedom can be secured without institutional religious freedom. In reality, however, the two types of religious freedom depend on each other. One cannot stand without the other.

Institutional religious freedom is the presumptive freedom of a religious institution thus understood to define itself and its core convictions (*self-definition*, or *substantive*), govern itself by its core convictions (*self-governance*, or *vertical*), and express itself and its core convictions in society and public life to the extent and in the manner it wishes to do so (*self-expression*, or *horizontal*).

Regarding this threefold freedom of religious institutions (substantive, vertical, and horizontal), blasphemy laws are deeply restrictive. If a country has laws punishing sacrilege against the majority religion—which is Islam in the cases examined here—then minority religious institutions find themselves under constant threat of being punished when they a) define their convictions in contradiction to the majority religion, b) govern themselves with certain principles and practices that could be perceived as offending the majority religion, and c) express their convictions publicly in a way that could be seen as challenging the majority religion.

Such threats and limitations, however, can exist even for religious institutions that belong to the majority religion in that some of them have convictions that differ from the hegemonic interpretations of that religion by powerful religious and civil authorities. In other words, blasphemy laws may restrict the freedoms of Muslim

institutions that have dissenting convictions in certain Muslim-majority countries.⁸

In this paper, we will examine how blasphemy laws in four significant Muslim-majority countries – Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey – can exact tremendous harm on certain religious communities by restricting and otherwise targeting the most visible of religious expressions in society, their religious institutions. We will argue that in the Muslim world, historical restrictions on institutional religious freedom have caused contemporary limitations on both dimensions of religious freedom.



“ A purely individualistic notion of rights and freedoms, as is common in liberal democracies, may assume that individual religious freedom can be secured without institutional religious freedom. In reality, however, the two types of religious freedom depend on each other. One cannot stand without the other.

The blasphemy law in Egypt is related to charges that come under Article 98(f) of the Egyptian Penal Code, which provides a jail sentence or fines for “extremist thoughts with the aim of instigating sedition and division or disdaining and contempting any of the heavenly religions or the sects belonging thereto, or prejudicing national unity or social peace.”⁹ The language of this law is so vague that it has allowed radical and abusive interpretations.¹⁰

Ironically, Article 98(f) was originally introduced to quell incitement to violence after a 1981 incident that resulted in dozens of Christians being killed after a rumor was spread that land allocated to a mosque was to be given to a church. Yet, the law has been primarily used instead to harass religious minorities and others with accusations of offending Islam.¹¹

A 2014 study that analyzed 36 blasphemy cases over a two-year period

found that only one case was about defaming Christianity and all other cases involved accusations of defaming Islam. Among those who were accused with blasphemous acts that could result in criminal charges, minorities were disproportionately represented; Christians constituted 40% of the accused, although they represented only 8-10% of the population. Nearly 20% of the accused were Shiite Muslims, while the rest were Sunni Muslims.¹²

The Egyptian ulema (Islamic scholars) have played a major role in the implementation of Egypt’s blasphemy law. Although Islamic courts do not preside over blasphemy cases, the ulema are still effective in instigating or filing lawsuits accusing people of blasphemy. An analysis reveals such a role for the ulema of the al-Azhar—the Sunni madrasa/university—and notes that the al-Azhar ulema have served as “unofficial enforcers of blasphemy laws.”¹³ This is a reflection of the symbiotic relationship

between the ulema and the state in Egypt. By mutually enforcing the blasphemy laws, the ulema have used the state’s coercive power to maintain their religious monopoly. Meanwhile, the rulers have used the ulema’s religious credibility to maintain political domination.¹⁴

The results have been troubling for a number of religious communities, which endeavour to maintain their institutional identity by establishing houses of worship, training religious leaders, and carrying out civil activities.¹⁵ The blasphemy law has also restricted freedom of expression in Egyptian society in general. The law has been used against people of certain faiths and persons of no faith who publicly claim atheism. The blasphemy cases have targeted several artists, musicians, and other public figures as well. This has circumscribed literary expression and led to many imposing self-censorship so that they would not become targets of witch-hunts.

The situation of the Shiite religious community in Egypt can be analyzed within this context.¹⁶ Charges under the Egyptian blasphemy law have been brought against Shiites on a number of occasions for propagating their beliefs or worshipping in ways that have been interpreted as blasphemy against Sunni Islam. As the judgment in the 2014 case against Amr Abdullah argued, freedom of belief provided in the constitution would not allow for someone to oppose the rules and foundations of the majority religion—Sunni Islam. According to this court decision, therefore, Shiite teaching contravenes the beliefs of the majority of Egyptians. This decision restricted the freedom of belief of not only Shiites but also all other religious groups that diverge “from the belief of the majority and the dominant Islam.”¹⁷

In short, the blasphemy law in Egypt presents a clear example of how such laws can intertwine the ulema with the state, which then becomes the arbiter of the “right religion.” The Egyptian blasphemy law has been used to violate not only the individual rights of expression but also institutional religious freedom of minority religious communities who seek to define their beliefs, govern their organizations, and express their views in an autonomous manner.

“ This is a reflection of the symbiotic relationship between the ulema and the state in Egypt. By mutually enforcing the blasphemy laws, the ulema have used the state’s coercive power to maintain their religious monopoly. Meanwhile, the rulers have used the ulema’s religious credibility to maintain political domination.

In 1965, the secular-nationalist president of Indonesia, Sukarno, issued a Presidential Stipulation (No. 1/PNPS/1965) on “Preventing the Misuse and Defamation of Religion.”¹⁸ The main targets of the regulation were non-Islamic mystical groups, which were becoming increasingly numerous in Indonesia. The ranks of such heterodox spiritual organizations were growing, and some of the movements were calling openly for nominal Muslims to apostatize from Islam.

The fact that in January 1965 it was President Sukarno who put in place the legal edifice for far-reaching controls on religion and heterodoxy has long struck Indonesian observers as paradoxical. The community that was most harmed by the regulation included the syncretic Muslims who figured among Sukarno’s most loyal followers. However, the rationale for the edict lay less in the president’s personal religious preferences than in his determination to

uphold an eroding base of support in the Muslim wing of his ruling coalition, the traditionalist Muslim Nahdlatul Ulama.¹⁹

What made the defamation edict of such lasting importance, however, was that it affected not just mystical groups but the entire infrastructure for state regulation of religion in Indonesia. Buried in the edict’s four articles were two regulations long advocated by Muslim political parties but opposed by the country’s varied secular nationalist parties. The first of the two regulations designated Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism as official religions (*agama*). For the first time in the republic’s history, the state afforded a special legal status to these six religions, among the nation’s hundreds of faith traditions.

The second of the two regulations embedded in Article 1 of the 1965 edict was a regulation prohibiting all state support for spiritual movements deemed

to be “deviating from” or showing “enmity” toward the country’s state-recognized religions. Articles 2 and 3 put in place sanctions through which the president can warn, ban, or jail those who misuse or defame any of Indonesia’s recognized religions. Article 4 put in place provisions threatening violators with up to five years of imprisonment. In short, the 1965 edict laid the legal foundation for the defense of what state authorities and the mainstream community came to regard as religious orthodoxy and the prosecution of all determined to be deviating from that norm.²⁰

Notwithstanding their vast scope, the 1965 edict and the 1969 law that formalized it did not result, at first, in a groundswell of prosecutions against alleged religious deviants. In the period from 1965 to the dawn of democratic reform in 1998, only about ten cases were brought to trial. By contrast, in the first five years following Indonesia’s return to electoral democracy in 1998, some 130 cases were prosecuted.²¹

In 2010, despite bitter opposition from religious freedom advocates and in the aftermath of several attacks on Indonesia’s small Ahmadiyah community, Indonesia’s Constitutional Court upheld the Law on Religious Defamation. The Court’s ruling was deeply disappointing to Indonesia’s human rights proponents and Muslim democratic communities as well as its religious minorities.

In 2017, the law was ingeniously used by Islamist activists to mount a successful campaign to oust the Chinese Christian Governor of metropolitan Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (commonly

known as “Ahok”) for remarks he made concerning some verses in the al-Ma’ida chapter of the Quran. Islamist militias regularly invoke the regulation to justify their assaults on religious minorities and Muslims professing a non-Sunni variety of Islam.

In sum, the blasphemy laws have increasingly restricted institutional religious freedom in Indonesia for dissenting Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Ahmadis, for example, have been persecuted as a group, generally with the accusations of apostasy and blasphemy. Among the four countries analyzed in this report, Indonesia has been the most democratic one over the last decade.²² Paradoxically, however, democratization in Indonesia has coincided with an increase in the public prominence and political influence of radical groups that use blasphemy accusations to limit the religious freedom of dissenting Muslim and non-Muslim communities.²³

Pakistan inherited the basic structure of its existing blasphemy laws from British colonial rule, which aimed to avoid conflict among various religious groups. These laws were later amended by Zia ul Haq, who ruled the country from 1978 to 1988 as a military dictator. The amended laws became exclusively about promoting Sunni Islam and included the death penalty as the maximum punishment for violators.²⁴

From the 1920s to the Zia era, blasphemy laws had been applied only about a dozen times in Pakistan.²⁵ Since then, however, they have been used effectively to crush dissent. From the 1990s to the present, about 1,500 people have been charged with blasphemy in Pakistan. Although no executions have taken place yet, 70 of those who were charged have been lynched by mobs.²⁶

The Pakistani blasphemy case that received the most attention among

international media has been that of Asia Bibi. Bibi, a Christian woman, was sentenced to execution by hanging in late 2010. In early 2011, the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer (a Muslim), and the federal minister of minority affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti (a Catholic), were both assassinated. Their assassination was primarily a result of their opposition to her sentence and a more general consequence of their fearless opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws.²⁷ After years of protracted and intense public controversies, Bibi was acquitted in 2019 and fled Pakistan.

Both blasphemy cases and related assassinations have continued in Pakistan. In 2019, Junaid Hafeez, a university lecturer, was sentenced to death for insulting the Prophet Muhammad on Facebook. Prior to his sentencing, Hafeez had been in prison for six years. Additionally, one of his lawyers was assassinated.²⁸

The blasphemy laws, as well as their radical legal and social consequences, have violated not only individual religious freedom, but also institutional religious freedom in Pakistan. In a country where thousands of individuals have been charged over decades for using offensive language against the dominant religion and the minister of minority affairs was murdered for opposing such charges, it is unthinkable that amid such oppressive conditions religious minority institutions could have the freedom of self-definition, self-governance, and self-expression.

The most visible example of the connection between Pakistan's blasphemy laws and the violation of institutional religious freedom is the Ahmadi case. Since Ahmadi faith and practices are defined as an offense to the established Sunni faith and practices, Ahmadis have been generally charged with apostasy and blasphemy as a community. Ahmadis do not have the freedom to define their religion, govern their temples, or express their beliefs in Pakistan.²⁹

“ *The blasphemy laws, as well as their radical legal and social consequences, have violated not only individual religious freedom, but also institutional religious freedom in Pakistan.* ”



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Turkey

Secularism has been a principle in the Turkish constitution since 1937. Yet, the Turkish Criminal Code (Article 216, Section 3) still punishes blasphemy: “A person who openly denigrates the religious values of a section of the population shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a term of 6 months to 1 year in case the act is likely to distort public peace.”³⁰

There have been few publicly known blasphemy charges in Turkey in the last decade. One was against the famous pianist Fazil Say in 2012 due to some of his tweets critical of Islam’s teachings about the hereafter. A year later, he was sentenced to 10 months in prison, though the court suspended the sentence. After the Supreme Court of Appeals reversed the sentence, he was acquitted in 2016.³¹ More recently, in 2018, actress Berna Lacin was charged with blasphemy due to her tweet, “if capital punishment had been the solution, then the Medina would not have had

the record number of rape cases.” After two years of court procedure, she was acquitted in 2020.³²

As seen in these two examples, the blasphemy charges in Turkey have primarily restricted individual religious freedom. Yet these charges have also created an atmosphere in which non-Muslim communities, as well as Alevis and other dissenting Muslim groups, understandably have concerns that Turkey’s blasphemy laws might be directed toward them and against their institutional religious freedoms.

“...the blasphemy charges in Turkey have primarily restricted individual religious freedom. Yet these charges have also created an atmosphere in which non-Muslim communities, as well as Alevis and other dissenting Muslim groups, understandably have concerns that Turkey’s blasphemy laws might be directed toward them and against their institutional religious freedoms.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy paper examines the deleterious effects of blasphemy laws on institutional religious freedom in four major Muslim-majority countries. Blasphemy laws in these countries have restricted institutional religious freedom in substantive, vertical, and horizontal aspects. They have directly or indirectly prevented various dissenting Muslim and non-Muslim communities from freely defining their beliefs, governing their organizations, and expressing their religious views, given that these beliefs, organizations, and views could be presented as offensive by some Muslim actors who claim to represent the established notion of Islam. Based on our analysis, we have two sets of policy recommendations.

8.1 *To policymakers in these Muslim-majority countries*

Blasphemy laws restrict three fundamental freedoms (self-definition, self-governance, and self-expression) of religious communities and organizations. In order to promote institutional religious freedom, secure equal citizenship, and maintain democratization, it is necessary to a) avoid passing new laws or amendments that punish blasphemy, b) suspend implementation of the existing laws, and, if possible, c) repeal the existing laws.

In many Muslim-majority countries, blasphemy laws already exist; for them, the first recommendation—avoid passing new laws or amendments that punish blasphemy—is not relevant. The third recommendation—repealing these laws—is crucial but may not be feasible. Hence, policymakers of these countries should prioritize the second recommendation—suspending their implementation. In fact, this is a lesson to be learned from the European experience. In many European countries, the governments stopped enforcing the blasphemy laws and made them “dead letter” laws. This may be a crucial and feasible policy option for policymakers of many Muslim-majority countries. Obviously, there are risks to keeping these laws in the legal codebooks. Notwithstanding, this administrative approach may still be a good short-term policy to avoid the deeper and more volatile public battles that come with undertaking the repeal of these laws altogether.

Recommendations

“ *This report makes the case that blasphemy laws not only target individuals’ religious freedom but also undermine certain institutions of disfavored religious groups that do not adhere to the religion that is given priority by a country’s blasphemy laws. Based on these laws’ tremendous potential for harm, any and all legitimate arguments against them must be courageously marshalled to oppose their enactment, minimize their implementation, and repeal them, as applicable.* ”

8.2 *To policymakers in the United States*

The United States could encourage governments of the countries examined in this paper to enhance institutional religious freedom, in part, by addressing the issue of blasphemy laws. More specifically, it can encourage them to a) avoid passing new laws or amendments that punish blasphemy, b) minimize the implementation of the existing laws, and c) repeal, to the extent possible, the existing laws.

Collaboration between U.S. government agencies and international organizations, such as the United Nations, is also needed to promote an international commitment to institutional religious freedom as a universal value and to uphold a global understanding that blasphemy laws contradict this universal value.

This report makes the case that blasphemy laws not only target individuals' religious freedom but also undermine certain institutions of disfavored religious groups that do not adhere to the religion that is given priority by a country's blasphemy laws. Based on these laws' tremendous potential for harm, any and all legitimate arguments against them must be courageously marshalled to oppose their enactment, minimize their implementation, and repeal them, as applicable. And this report adds another layer of analysis to these arguments by highlighting how blasphemy laws infringe on the freedom of religious institutions in societies where they are enacted and enforced.



Endnotes

- 1 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), “Violating Rights: Enforcing the World’s Blasphemy Laws” (Washington, D.C.: USCIRF, 2020), https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Blasphemy%20Enforcement%20Report%20_final_0.pdf.
- 2 These 30 countries are: Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Gambia, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritania, Moldova, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE, and Yemen.
- 3 Eight additional Muslim-majority countries have blasphemy laws but no reported cases: Brunei, Comoros, Eritrea, Morocco, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.
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- 13 “Issue Brief: Egypt’s Blasphemy Laws,” *Eshhad*, March 2016, <https://eshhad.org/issue-briefs-1/2017/11/24/egypts-blasphemy-laws>.
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