

Media Diversity and Representation of Religious Minorities in Pakistan's Mainstream Media

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Abstract

The quality of media diversity is that it offers equal representation to all social and religious groups and reduces conventionalization and radicalization. In civilized democracies, the governments monitor the performance of media operators, forcing them to maintain the culture of media diversity and programming in the interest of their citizens. Diversity is indispensable for the stability and richness of democracy and the well-being of any society. Failure to maintain media diversity destabilizes democracy, increases social distance, and brings isolation, and disruption in societies. This paper examined the conditions of religious minorities in Pakistan and tried to find whether Pakistan's mainstream media equally represent religious minorities and portray their issues. The study found that the mainstream media of Pakistan neither represent religious minorities nor portray their issues. Likewise, media diversity does not exist in mainstream media, and ruling elites, parliament, and political parties failed to establish a diversified media culture, especially in the interests of religious minorities.

Keywords: Media Diversity; Religious Minorities in Pakistan; Mainstream Media & Religious Minorities;

Blasphemy; Political System in Pakistan.

1.Introduction

History shows that the press until the 16th century was under the control of powerful monarchs and dynasties. They used it to strengthen their monopoly and hegemony. Thanks to Gutenberg's printing press, and many intellectuals such as John Milton, Martin Luther, and William Tyndale who challenged the monopoly of the Roman Catholic Church and English empires and circulated new doctrines, ideas, thoughts, and the free press. The large-scale production of knowledge created a new way of seeing and understanding the world with the foundation of a free press in Europe, which then expanded to the USA, and other parts of the world [1].

Received: 12/23/2023

Accepted: 2/23/2024

Published: 3/3/2024

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However, the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press flourished only for a few centuries, and again went under the control of military dictators in Europe, especially after the outbreak of the World War I in 1914 [7]. This was the time when the free press was in the transitional process to become stronger, however, authoritarian regimes put it under censorship [8].

Until World War II, the global situation jeopardized the journalist's professional integrity and put the freedom of the press in danger. The press used to portray the interests of authoritarian and powerful groups and disregarded the weak and poor social groups. After World War II, especially, in the 1950s, the intellectual class and reformists in Europe and the USA dedicated to upholding the freedom of the press. Thanks to Time magazine's Henry Luce and other communication scholars who set up a Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press in 1942 that stressed the media operators and journalists to portray 'most faithfully' the true conditions and aspirations of the poor and weak nations, indigenous classes and rural people.

The word faithfully gave the message of the truth or more elaborately, established a sense of responsibility. Both truth and responsibility have been among the most important ethics of the Seven Canons of Journalism. Perhaps that's why Yun [9] believed that the press has a social responsibility to serve humans and societies. The press should tell the truth and investigate the facts because truth has a close connection with journalism and the integration of humanity. Rupar [10] stated that the press should responsibly and accurately highlight the issues of the masses.

Additionally, diversity in media is essential for the development of democracy and the well-being of societies. Diversification in media programs easily captures the attention of the audience and this helps to minimize conventionalization and radicalization. For instance, the news, entertainment, fashion, and beauty industries include racial, ethnic, religious, and gender diversity in their shows and advertisements to impress the respective members of diverse groups and also attract them to their products or TV shows [11]. McQuail [12] also emphasized media to adopt diversity and gives the public, the right of communication and reply.

Besides, the freedom of expression and the free press are necessary commodities for the enforcement of fair and accurate journalism in any state. In the absence of a free and liberal press, the voices of diversified communities cannot be raised. Kean [13] stated that the free press is the key condition for free interaction, fact-findings, and imposing the truth in society. In the meantime, accurate journalism strengthens the weaker groups and removes discrimination, inequality, and ignorance in society. Kaltzada [14] believed that the power of journalism either strengthens or detects those who hold political, social, and economic power.

Similarly, Verkuyten [15] argued that the responsible role of the press is to demolish radicalized thoughts and persecutions by representing all social and religious groups equally and in positive ways. Further, the press makes the government accountable in case it does not protect the rights of ethnic and religious groups, especially, religious minorities.

Failure to maintain media diversity destabilizes democracy, increases social distance and separateness, and brings isolation, and disruption in societies. In the presence of the monopolized media system, the diverse or

oppositional discussion is impossible, because the powerful classes suppress the freedom of expression. As a result, uneducated, ignorant, and uninformed citizens and societies are established [14]. Therefore, the media should build mutual consensus by providing in-depth information to the public [16].

In the meantime, the government monitors the performance of media groups through the promulgation of media and communication policies. Porto [17] mentioned that if the content of the media focuses more on diverse groups, it will have important consequences on the political system. The government needs to regulate media groups and their program content. Further, Youssaf [16] assessed that the way the national media portrays religious minorities mirrors the overall social setup of the society that handles these minority groups.

In short, the survival of weak social groups, including religious minorities; has always been at the disposal of majority dominant groups, whether these dominant groups belong to the government, state agencies, military, parliament, political leaders, or the media industry. Whatever the situation is, people look towards media and expect that the media can only address the functioning of government and make their voices be heard. If the media remains silent and does not portray public issues, it means there is something wrong with the communication and media system. Similarly, if the government of any country does not focus on public interest journals then one can easily assume that there is something wrong within the political system of the respective country.

If we talk about the history of the media landscape in Pakistan, we can find that few government-based TV channels used to serve the audiences, but after 2002 the country had a speedy media landscape in the shape of news and entertainment television channels. Currently, there are more than 124 news and entertainment television channels in Pakistan, which produce hundreds of programs daily.

However, one needs to analyze what types of programs they produce and who are their target audiences whether they produce programs that represent all social and religious groups in Pakistan, especially religious minorities such as Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and others.

Therefore, the central aim of this paper was to discuss the conditions of religious minorities in Pakistan, particularly focusing on whether or not, the mainstream media of Pakistan accurately and fairly gives representation to religious minorities and their point of view. Whether or not; the Pakistani political system supports media diversity and multiculturalism in the media industry? In addition, what is the role of the key stakeholders such as the democratic government, parliament, and political parties in monitoring the performance of media groups and promulgating the media policies and heterogeneous democratic system in the country?

The above lines visibly disclose that the social and political system excludes religious minorities and gives a sense of prejudice and intolerance. Despite being equal citizens, religious minorities face serious issues and social discrimination.

In these circumstances, people think about the role of media and the press. They may look towards state institutions such as the parliament, the judiciary, and the democratic system. People may raise questions about monitoring and checking the performance of media groups by the government and political forces. Generally,

people expect the media should address their issues and the government should provide them with pluralistic platforms for raising their voices.

Therefore, it was necessary to examine the injustices, inequalities, and cruelties faced by religious minorities in Pakistan. This article investigated the causes and consequences, which suppress the civil and human rights as well as religious freedom of religious minorities in Pakistan.

1.1 Research Questions

This paper examined the explanations of the following Research Questions:

- 1) How does the mainstream media of Pakistan represent the religious minorities?
- 2) What is the role of ruling elites, the parliament, and political parties of Pakistan in establishing a

diversified media and communication policies in favor of religious minorities?

2.Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Heterogeneity and diversification are very important parts of the global discussion in the 21st century. Civilized democracies all over the world, imposed diversity in their state affairs and political systems, including in the media industry. They seem more concerned about their citizens' rights and the freedom of expression. We see that the global media, including the US media, addressed the incident of George Floyd in responsible ways and signified the slogan of 'Black Lives Matter' without any biases.

Generally, citizens want to become the equal part of the social, cultural, political, and communication systems of their respective countries. They like and respect it when they see that the media properly and accurately gives them equal representation and portrays their issues, culture, faith, and their representatives [18]. This practice certainly gives birth to a unified, healthy, and organized society. Perhaps due to these reasons, media diversity is a key condition in a democratic system, which helps to secure the rights and identification of religious and ethnic communities [15]. Diversity in journalism, particularly matters a lot, because it helps break prejudice and discrimination. It allows innovation and social cohesion to prevail in democratic societies [14]. This means that diversity and journalism are deeply connected.

We may assume that the global media performed responsibly and impartially, while representing protests against police brutality and race relations, as well as revealing the looters that looted many business markets in some cities in America. Important to realize that, the media reported freely without state interference. Usually, the broadcasting services as well as the journalists should have a responsible role to play while developing a strong relationship among communities and representing religious minorities, labor and working class, indigenous, and rural people without any biases.

In terms of media and public relations, McQuail [19] identified three principles of diversity. The first is, Diversity of Reflection which means, the media structure and the content should represent the conditions and

issues of all social and religious groups. The second is Diversity as accessible, which means media should support critical and oppositional views of all groups. The third is Diversity as more channels and choices, which means the state, should provide multiple media platforms and choices of information [19]. In like manner, Kaltzada [14] introduced three principles of journalistic practices. The first principle is telling the truth through rigorous research and giving equal opportunities to all social classes. The second principle is independence and fairness in telling stories with facts, removing bias and commercial influences. The third principle is humanity and solidarity in coverage without hurting social or religious groups [14]. Not only this, but Napoli [20] also mentioned three responsibilities of media diversity, such as structural Diversity in which media groups have to provide numerous sources of information and give representation to all groups in their news, editorial bodies, and management system. The second is content diversity in which media should portray different thoughts, opinions, ideologies, and viewpoints of all cultures without ignoring any social group. The third is exposure content in which media groups address conflicting viewpoints and promote unity among different faiths through debate and dialogue.

After all, communication scholars have introduced diverse concepts, theories, principles, and guidelines in the area of journalism and media diversity, aiming to compel media groups, media personnel, media institutions, and government bodies to serve their public and societies under these concepts and guidelines. It now depends on countries and their media groups, whether or not they broadcast oppositional viewpoints and conduct debates on issues related to religious minorities, whether or not they recruit professionals from multicultural backgrounds and make them part of their editorial bodies, whether or not they adopt the specific content policy that favors every group of society, including the religious minorities and whether or not the government equally issues licenses to weak social and religious minority groups to open and run media outlets.

The developed world has already included media diversity in its media and communication policies. The EU Committee for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs recommended media diversity as an essential element of democracy and citizens' fundamental rights to freedom of expression [21]. Meanwhile, the Council of Europe and the European Parliament believed that public service broadcasting is the crucial institution for guaranteeing media diversity [22]. Media groups around the world adopted media and communication policies that fulfilled obligations related to the notion of public interest. For instance, Suine [23] explained that media groups in the developed world aimed to serve the notion of the public interest. Many countries adopted these policies, such as Sweden, the Netherlands, and the USA. Even, the Federal Communications Commission in the USA imposed Fairness Doctrine upon radio and television to allow free and open debate [24]. The UK established the BBC as an autonomous body, free from commercial interests and state interference [25].

In like manner, the larger media groups in Western European countries and North America established small media platforms for religious and immigrant groups in the nineteenth century. They used them for self-interests and mobilization [21]. Thus, the general aim of many countries was to make media and communication policies that serve the interests of their citizens. Saleem and his colleagues. [26] assessed that the government must make policies for media in which a vital space for religious minorities should be given. This will create a safer and more peaceful environment for marginalized groups. Similarly, Darbishire [27] believes the government should introduce policies that promote tolerance and broad-mindedness.

Accordingly, communication scholars have introduced numerous media effect theories and believe that media greatly influences the structure and the social cohesion of diverse societies. For instance, McQual [19] elaborated that the media's power either brings stability or sabotages the stability of the state. Additionally, Larrazet and Rigoni [28] explained that the influence of media develops citizens' social cohesion and identity. The media is only a driving force that needs meaningful directions and policies. It depends on the drivers of media, whether they like to establish or demolish diversity and its particular shapes [29].

Democratic governments use media to develop harmony and integration between social groups [30] and bring cohesive social change [31]. Moreover, the media points out the loopholes in the State laws, if they do not favor weak and minority groups [32]. It means the media owns the power to damage relationships between social groups and retain unity, social cohesion, harmony, and goodwill. Hence, it all depends on how the political system of any country uses the powers of media.

Thus, the above arguments clearly define that there is a strong tie or deep relationship between the media and the policymakers of the respective country. It is the political system of a country that decides how much freedom of the press should be given, what ways the transmission of information should be developed, and who should be ignored and who should be acknowledged in the communication process.

Porto [33] believed that there should be a process of political deliberation in every democratic country. Through political deliberation, the key stakeholders, like the government, parliament, and politicians; make media policies for the goodwill of the public and society. Porto [33] assumed that in the absence of political deliberation, the political system brings divisions and creates a sense of separateness. Consequently, the weaker religious groups might assume that the political system of the country controls the media and feeds them to create social distance and misinterpretations about religious minorities. This attitude certainly, puts harmony at risk [34].

At the same time, some scholars believe that the media ignores to represent weak and poor classes because these classes do not fulfill commercial or economic interests. For example, Melody [35] believed that the private media control the entire political system, including the free flow of diversified ideas. Similarly, Dewey [36] mentioned that big business icons control state affairs and use the press for publicity and propaganda. Moreover, Hart [37] assessed that economic interests make the media powerful on Earth. Additionally, Bagdikian [38] disclosed that the largest media giants make media laws in the interests of elites and no policies match the interests of religious minorities.

Let's assume the media focuses more on elites to gain commercials and advertisements, but then multiple questions arise, such as who issues licenses, and who makes the media laws and regulatory policies for media groups? I have already discussed that many European countries and the USA created communication regulations to check the performance of the media industry.

Certainly, without the state's interference, media services cannot decide citizens' fate. Particularly, ignoring religious minorities by the national media of Pakistan is not a small issue, but rather a global issue. The

government of Pakistan faces huge pressure that comes from the USA, the UK, the European Union, the European Commission, and other human rights organizations around the world. Is it possible that the national media ignore religious minorities in the presence of that pressure? Is it possible that the media ignore the national-level policies, which might put the integrity of the state at risk? If we assume that the private media does not follow state regulations, then a question arises, what about public sector broadcasters in Pakistan? Do they give any representation of religious minorities? The government or state institutions are responsible for not tackling or handling the issues in better ways.

Few arguments support the above stance. For instance, McChesney [39] believed that powerful institutions of the state control the communication system and do not tolerate free ideas or oppositional points of view. Similarly, Mughan and Gunther [40] believed that the media is a puppet of the state authorities, and they use it according to their directions. Besides, Gul et. al. [41] stated that the government of Pakistan established the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) to provide more media choices in the best interests of the public, however, the state institutions control the PEMRA and media groups. Thus, the above statements make it clear that there might be ideological problems within the government, political, and democratic system of Pakistan that undermine the rights of religious minorities, including preventing them in the national media.

In the case of Pakistan, the conditions of religious minorities sketch a horrible picture. Pakistan is a Muslim-majority but religiously diverse country. Muslims with 96.28 percent hold control of the political system of the country, including monopolizing the news and entertainment industry. The religious minorities constitute only 3.72% of the total population. According to article 260 (3-b) of the Constitution of Pakistan, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Ahmedis, and Bahais are non-Muslims. All citizens have equal rights, and they are equal before the law irrespective of their belonging to any caste, creed, ethnicity, sex, or religion [42]. Unfortunately, in the presence of the constitution, religious minorities face the worst human rights situations in Pakistan [43]. There is a huge contradiction between the state laws and their implementation on the ground. Perhaps that's why Saleem and his colleagues. [44] argued that the conditions of religious minorities in any society help analyze the effectiveness and sincerity of the government towards the implementation of constitutional clauses.

Tunisia is also a Muslim country that has a 99% Muslim population, whereas, only 1% population is a mixture of Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant faiths, along with persons belonging to newer religious or belief groups such as Salafis, Baha'i, Jehovah's Witnesses, and free thinkers [45]. Since the outbreak of the Jasmine Revolution which some call it 'social media revolution'. and the ousting of Ben Ali's doctoral regime in 2011, Tunisia made remarkable progress in its transition to a functioning democracy [46]. Tunisians passed laws protecting minority rights [47] eliminated all forms of racial discrimination, and also allowed communities to express themselves freely [46].

However, the literature shows that the situation in Pakistan has not changed despite a new government taking charge. The findings prove that 31 people have died, 58 injured, and 25 blasphemy cases have been recorded since Prime Minister Imran Khan took office in August 2018 [48]. Besides, terrorist attacks have become common in their worship places. Madhavan [49] disclosed that only 50 worship places are functional out of 1800. Due to social discrimination based on class, caste, and religion (Shaheen & Mahmood, 2018), around 10

families per month have migrated to India since 2008 [50].

Equally, forced conversion is another serious threat to them. The Aurat Foundation mentioned that more than 1,000 girls convert every year. The findings of the University of Birmingham show that at least 2,866 cases of conversion were reported between January 2012 and June 2017 [51]. Due to fear of conversion, religious minorities are migrating to other places, and as a result, there was about a 0.19 percent drop in the minority population between the censuses of 1998 and 2017. Chaudhry [50] mentioned that the national media of Pakistan never highlights these issues.

Given the above arguments, Fuchs [52] believes that the Muslims in Pakistan confidently treat religious minorities as vulnerable aliens and themselves as full citizens with guaranteed rights. Socially and psychologically, this sort of homogeneity approach shows that minority members are unidentifiable masses that do not hold any legal or social status and space within a single society. In other words, religious minorities are discriminated against and victimized by both, the state and the Muslim-majority society based on religious differences and personal enmity [53]. Due to their vulnerable social status, Pakistani cricketer Yusuf Yohana, who was a Dalit Christian; converted to Islam in 2005 to overcome the weakening social condition of being a Dalit [54]. He could not become a hero, even could not receive due respect in the media and the hearts of supporters, compared to other Muslim fellow cricketers. Before conversion, he at least, used to be considered a hero within his community audiences.

The systematic exclusion of religious minorities is not a new concept in Pakistan, but it has a connection with the history of Pakistan. Indeed, arguments reveal that the founder of Pakistan, Mr. Muhammad Ali Jinnah urged the Christian Speaker of the Punjab Assembly, S.P. Singha to vote in favor of Pakistan in the Punjab Assembly assuring him that the Christian community would equally be part of this country. Hearing this, S.P.Singh along with his two other members, Fazl Elahi and C. E. Gibbon, voted in favor of Pakistan on June 23, 1947 [55]. After a month, in July 1947, the Punjab Assembly removed S.P. Singha from the Speakership through a motion of no confidence, reasoning that a non-Muslim could not be the head of the house [56].

Even, Shahbaz Bhatti was killed in 2011, who was the only elected member of the National Assembly of Pakistan from the Christian community. He became the first Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs in 2008 [57]. Other than this, if some Muslim politicians talk in favor of the rights of religious minorities, they receive serious consequences. Such as a police guard killed Salman Taseer, who was the liberal Muslim governor of the Punjab province, in January 2010 accused of blasphemy. Eventually, the day-to-day policies of the government allow religious minorities to raise questions about the government's sincerity. For instance, the government created the Federal Ministry of Minorities Affairs for the first time in 2008. After the killing of Shahbaz Bhatti, the government replaced the Ministry of Minorities Affairs with the Ministry for National Harmony in July 2011. Then in June 2013, the Pakistan Muslim League (N) government merged it with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. A Muslim member now heads this ministry. The dilemma is, that the government has not only removed the federal Ministry for Minorities Affairs, but currently, there is no representation of religious minorities at the federal level.

We can measure the sincerity of the current government by discussing an incident that took place recently in the parliament of Pakistan. The Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Ali Muhammad, scolded a Hindu Member of Parliament Ramesh Kumar for presenting the anti-child marriage bill, blaming that he was a Hindu, and could not present a bill on this issue, which could disturb an Islamic society [50]. The dilemma is that both members of parliament belong to the same ruling party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). This kind of mindset and ideological approach can prove the sincerity, dignity, and fairness of the parliament, democratic parties, and the government that they own towards religious minorities.

The developed world has imposed the systems of democratic pluralism in their countries [58]. In contrast, Pakistan had adopted the concept of Islamic ideology at the time of its creation. This ideology perspective has not only created complexities between religions and politics but also gave birth to Islamic radicalism. As a result, religious minorities indulged in marginalization [59]. Consequently, Rizvi [60] argues that truly democratic and constitutional politics are the best institutional tools to protect and advance the interests of cultural or religious minorities in any set of social conditions, but Pakistan has never applied any of these tools during most of its history. Further, Raina [61] assessed that due to poor and weak democratic history, every citizen faced complications, but religious minorities have particularly been marginalized. Moreover, the separate electoral system in Pakistan is the worst case that puts religious minorities in deprivation in the name of having representation in parliament and provincial assemblies [62].

If we look at the Tunisian democracy, the new Constitution declared Tunisia as a civil state in January 2014, despite calls from some groups to make Sharia the basis of Tunisian law, while freedom of religion and belief was declared a constitutional right guaranteed by the state [63]. Jewish community representatives refused the proposal to allocate specific seats for Jews in Parliament and requested to be treated as citizens on an equal footing rather than on a sectarian basis [63]. Meaning to say, the historical background of Tunisia, unlikely to Pakistan; made Tunisia one of the most open-minded countries in the region, where citizens from all racial, ethnic religious, and non-religious, such as atheists, enjoy their life without any interference or discrimination [64].

Apart from the above statements, it is equally important to realize that Pakistan comes under the Hybrid Regime Democracies, which means, Pakistan, is one of those countries that conduct regular elections but does not allow the process of democracy to be free, fair, and pluralistic [65]. The Economist Intelligence Unit classifies the democracy index every year based on five categories, such as electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties [65].

In this context, Mughan and Gunther [40] disclosed that although, the people of Pakistan and their respective parties take part in the general elections; however, the military has a strong and influential control on state affairs, including in the media. Perhaps that's why Pakistan's leading political parties use a slogan selected against the current Prime Minister Imran Khan. They believe that Imran Khan was selected by the army of the country during the general elections in July 2018 [66]. Importantly, military of Pakistan has directly ruled Pakistan for 32 years since 1947. Another key point is that difference of opinion is prohibited in the so-called name of 'threats to the security of the state'. If some struggle for the freedom of expression, they are termed as

anti-state actors [67]. Hence, the army, the civil bureaucracy, and elites occupied the powers of the state formation process of Pakistan and as a result, the democratic political system could not flourish [60].

As shown above, the homogenous Islamic political system, the radicalized ideological factors, and the control of the military on the democratic process and political system, including the media, are the main causes and consequences of the failure of media diversity in Pakistan. This factor also created social, sociological, cultural, and religious differences among religious and ethnic groups, including undermining the identity factors and rights of religious minorities in Pakistan. This can be a huge challenge to those who might be struggling to enforce heterogeneous democratic norms in the country.

After all, the condition of religious minorities in Pakistan has become a worldwide issue. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom already blamed Pakistan for violating religious freedom and not protecting the rights of religious minorities [50]. Similarly, 52 members of European Union parliamentarians wrote a letter to PM Imran Khan in 2019 for ending the persecution of religious minorities. Arguably, due to hybrid regime norms, the Foreign Policy Magazine rated Pakistan as the 13th most failed state in 2020. Likewise, the Freedom House classified Pakistan as Partly Free on political rights and civil liberties in 2020.

In contrast, Tunisia ranks 53 in the Democracy Index, with the status of Flawed Democracy. Likewise, Tunisia scored 70 in the World Freedom House 2020 index out of 100. It ranks 32 in terms of political rights out of 40, and 38 in terms of Civil Liberties out of 60. Besides, it ranks 72 in the World Press Freedom Index 202 in terms of freedom of the press and expression. One can sense how this country is improving its democratic values and plurality. This is a great achievement within a 9-year-old democracy that will certainly improve with time.

3. Methodology

This study employed the Qualitative Research Approach and used secondary data to examine the conditions of religious minorities, determining diversity in Pakistani mass media and investigating the role of the political system of Pakistan in promulgating multicultural media policies and plural democratic culture in the country.

The secondary data was based on journal articles, books, book reviews, online and web materials, newspaper reports, and other available documents. The author used to identify, explain, examine, and synthesize knowledge from previous studies as well as news reports, opinions, and other data sets. Scholars suggested that existing data can be an efficient, powerful, and readily available resource for addressing questions about any issues faced by human beings, and societies.

4. Results

Indeed, the available literature gives a horrible picture of the conditions of religious minorities in Pakistan. Arguments and reports revealed that the religious minorities in Pakistan are facing segregation due to the prejudiced mindset of higher administration decisions, sponsors, and lack of information concerning religious minorities and their religious rituals [5].

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has shown considerable alarm over the state of religious freedom in Pakistan. Around 60 cases of forced conversion of under 18 years girls reported in 2021 [6]. Similarly, the United Nations expressed its serious concerns about the rise in abductions, forced marriages, and conversions of underage girls and young women from religious minorities in Pakistan [2]. UN spokesperson stated that the UN is deeply troubled to hear that girls as young as 13 are being kidnapped from their families, trafficked to locations far from their homes, made to marry men sometimes twice their age, and coerced to convert to Islam, all in violation of international human rights law [2].

Rathi [3] stated that no one is unaware of the forced conversions of young girls from minority communities. Groups and influential individuals forced innocent girls to abandon their faith against their will, robbing them of their fundamental right to religious freedom. Rathi [3] further stated that young girls from minority religious groups have the same passion and determination as any child in Pakistan. They also dream of becoming doctors, engineers, teachers, and artists to contribute to society and make a difference in the lives of others. But fate dealt them with cruel hands [3].

The study by Mehmood [5] found crucial issues in giving media coverage to the religious minorities in Pakistan. Siddique [4] mentioned that groups in Pakistan used social media as a tool for hate speech against Sikhs, Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, Shias, Jews, Americans, Indians, Afghans, women, and others.

It shows that both, the national media and political system of the country did not treat religious minorities fairly and equally. Despite 124 TV channels, the day-to-day lives of ordinary non-Muslims remain hidden from society [50]. National media did not report the views, thoughts, and issues of religious minorities and made them voiceless within a single society [74].

Likewise, the literature discloses that media do not tackle the issues of religious minorities properly, and social media are used as threats to them [67].

Besides, the media mostly emphasizes violence, discrimination, and social exclusion [52] and even creates sensation or provokes religious groups against each other by touching sensitive issues such as blasphemy [68]. Equally, Chaudhry [50] mentioned that the media reports religious minorities when there is bad news about them such as bomb blasts, blasphemy incidents, and involvement of religious members in any violence; but the media do not give priority to their stories if favored them or comes from them. It means religious minorities are not a priority for Pakistani media. That's why the media never report them in prime-time news [69]. Meantime, the media does not have an active role in creating harmony among different religious and ethnic groups [76]. One of the reasons for ignoring religious minorities could be that the national media of Pakistan are not pluralistic [69]. It means there is no media diversity in Pakistani national media.

Comparatively, the international media seem more committed to representing the religious minorities of Pakistan than the national media of Pakistan. According to Executive Director of Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) Peter Jacob, "Although, the Pakistani media do not highlight the issues of religious minorities, however; the foreign media focuses on reporting in their mainstream media" [51]. Religious Minorities facing issues, para.

Apart from the above examples, there are many more reports and shreds of pieces of evidence, that can help to explain how the national media, particularly, the private TV channels treat religious minorities in their programming. For instance, the ARY Digital TV Network of Pakistan showed a 20-year-old Hindu boy converting to Islam in one of its live shows [70]. Another theme of the drama, Maria Binti Abdullah on Geo TV Network was also about the conversion of a Christian girl to Islam. Chaudhry [71] stated that this drama downgraded and insulted the minority Christians. Not only this, but a comedian talk show Baji Irshad at the Express TV Network insulted the Christians by illustrating them as inferior and greedy [72]. The Pakistan Minorities Teachers' Association argued that if religious minorities commit to putting nicknames on Muslim characters, they will either be burnt or hanged [50]. Similarly, the Christian community in Pakistan believed that media widens the social distance between religious groups based on social, religious, racial, economic, and educational discrimination [72]. Moreover, Shams [70] argued that this is widespread legal and cultural discrimination.

Actually, by hurting other's norms and values, the national media of Pakistan are violating the ethics of media, journalistic values, socio-cultural norms, and attitudes of the weaker members of society. Shams [70] blamed the Pakistani media for promoting intolerance towards religious minorities through their programming.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The literature found a high degree of distrust that prevails in the political system of Pakistan. The coercive state response and radicalized Islamic thoughts toward religious minorities ultimately disrupted the heterogeneous political system and democratization. Likewise, the media and communication policies do not favor the interests of the public, particularly reaching the interests of religious minorities. Besides, there is no diversity in the media, and equally, the media could not maintain an equal and multi-dimensional platform and representation of religious minorities. Thus, the media and journalism industry in Pakistan neither followed the media and journalism ethics, nor the social responsibility theory of the press.

The key stakeholders, such as the government, the parliament, and democratic forces could not establish media and communication policies through political deliberation. As a consequence of this flaw, there was no notion of the fairness doctrine. Likewise, the government could not introduce any communication policy that could monitor the performance of the media groups in terms of serving the best interests of the public, including portraying religious minorities in positive ways. Meanwhile, strong evidence proved that the hybrid regime's democratic attitudes, homogeneous political system, and control by the military on state affairs also prohibit diversity in the media and communication system of the country.

It is a matter of fact that despite a poor and weak democratic history, the democratic parties have tried to bring democratic stability to Pakistan by introducing constitutional reforms. The constitution of 1973 is an example, which gives equal rights to all citizens without any discrimination. Likewise, the political forces introduced constitutional amendments, such as the 18th Amendment on April 19, 2010, in which they not only abolished the concurrent list but also, set the rights of small social groups and religious minorities. Besides, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government created the Federal Ministry of Minorities Affairs in November 2008, and the

ministry was awarded to a Christian activist, Shahbaz Bhatti. Likewise, a Hindu Dalit woman, Krishna Kumari Kolhi elected as the first-ever Senator through the direct voting system, at the Upper House in March 2018 by the Pakistan People's Party. Usually, there are some reserved seats for women minorities. The political forces are making reasonable efforts to promote a plural democratic culture, but much more needs to be done unitedly by the liberal, religious, and nationalist parties to combat anti-democratic forces.

For the goodwill of the people and, society as well as for the stability of democracy, the secularist Nidaa Tounes party and the Islamist Ennahda party formed a coalition government in Tunisia in 2014. Important to realize, that the Islamist Ennahda party subsequently dropped its Islamist label in May 2016 to redefine itself as a party of Muslim democrats [46]. Both parties showed a tendency to compromise and cooperate to ensure a stable transition to democracy. Tunisia very clearly demonstrates that democracy is possible in this part of the world, something completely compatible with Islamic values [47]. Pakistan should also adopt a similar political system to Tunisia.

Hence, in light of the above arguments, this paper aims to suggest that the restructuring of Pakistani society should be revised based on its ideological and political models. Ideologically, Pakistan must maintain a plural democratic system and heterogeneous political culture with the consciousness of tolerance, humanism, and goodwill, including building trust and confidence among diverse social and religious groups. Politically, the powers should be transferred to local institutions through the decentralization process, in which the individuals, regardless of social status and religious background, should be included in the decision-making process. This will certainly affect the political, religious, cultural, and ecological environment. All the key stakeholders should collaborate and take urgent remedial steps to protect the rights of minorities and to bring them into the socio-political mainstream system.

The notion of political deliberation and public interest should be maintained in the system so that the social, cultural, and religious groups can be allowed to discuss or debate freely. Nevertheless, the freedom of the press and freedom of expression can only be observed, if the government accepts democratic ideas, supports religious minorities allows free media practices, and emphasizes the media groups to represent the stance of religious minorities. Sayeed [69] stated that the freedom of information should become part of the democratic norms and laws should facilitate the freedom of the press rather than curbing and discouraging facts and objectivity. Tunisia ratified the most progressive constitution in the Arab world in 2014, guaranteeing freedoms of expression, assembly, and of the press; protecting the right to access information; and mandating gender equality with an active commitment by the state to ensuring it [73].

Since many European countries and the USA introduced trusteeship models and imposed upon media operators the duty to serve the public interest, the BBC adopted this model. The democratic system in Pakistan should also maintain media policies and public interest regulations based on the fairness doctrine. Media policies should promote diversity in the media environment no matter; the media is private or state-led. Media should play a mediated role by producing constructive programs to bring diverse communities together and should also introduce an interfaith dialogue for bridging the gap among all religious groups. The cultural harmony will strengthen democracy and the parliamentary system. Similarly, the media can teach the lesson of tolerance and

patience to all people. Media should hire professionals from multicultural backgrounds and also make them part of their editorial policy. The government should issue media licenses to members of religious minorities.

Moreover, journalists and editors should be provided training about the notion of fairness and balance, values, and ethics of journalism under the social responsibility theory of the Press. Editorial independence should also be given to editors of media groups, particularly at the time of political and economic pressure. In the meantime, the government should give powers to PEMRA and it should assess and evaluate the performance of media services. For example, the media content of media outlets should represent diversified views, different cultures, politics, opinions, religions, and social conditions of all social and religious groups. The media should allow critical or oppositional views and opinions as well as give more choices of information and entertainment to diverse groups.

In like manner, Forbes [57] proposed community media, such as the Radio, which should cover the community-driven content and community engagements of minority populations. This often results in community cohesion, bringing religious groups together. Even, Herman [74] proposed that the media should be owned by grassroots organizations, which can fulfill public interests, and recognize and encourage diversity of content. It happened in the USA, where the mainstream media provided media platforms to their minority communities, such as small weekly newspapers, broadcast media, and internet portals [75]. Thus, minority media can also be a suitable platform for religious communities in Pakistan.

To sum up, religious minorities are struggling to become a regular part of the Pakistani social and political system. They expect that their rights should be accepted, protected, and respected by the majority Muslim population. Mubeen and Qusien [76] suggested that their contribution will become more satisfied if the majority group considers their contribution. Thus, the media can play a vital role in recognizing their contribution and helping them to be considered by the majority group.

5.1 Limitations

There have been some limitations, which certainly affected this study. The first thing was the method of data collection method, which was the secondary approach. Although the secondary data in the shape of the existing data sets helped a lot in examining the research questions and finding the results, however, it could have been much better if the primary data had been there. Someone can include the primary data approach in the future and can conduct in-depth interviews with members of religious minorities, ruling elites, politicians, and political scientists about the phenomenon.

Meanwhile, quantitative research can be conducted in the future to conduct the opinions and views of young girls, and women from religious minorities about forced conversions and other atrocities faced by them. Meanwhile, future research can include interviews of the families that have been affected or victimized by the blasphemy law.

There might be some more limitations. For example, whether the answers to research questions could satisfy experts and other stakeholders or whether the secondary data collection method helped find the exact and definite answers to the research questions or not. Experts believe that secondary data may not have accuracy and meanwhile, it is incomplete and needs more in-depth research.

Acknowledgment

This article is part of the completion of my Ph.D. thesis that I am pursuing at the University Utara Malaysia under the supervision of Dr. Awan Binti Ismail. I, therefore, would like to express my heartfelt thanks to her for steering me on the right path. Her research academic expertise and insights were invaluable in shaping my research and helping me to overcome many challenges.

Meanwhile, I would like to thank the management and staff of the Awang Had Salleh Graduate School of Arts and Sciences as well as the faculty at the School of Multimedia Technology and Communications at University Utara Malaysia for their help and support during the study period.

Special thanks to all the distinguished participants/key informants for taking part in this thesis and providing me with their precious time, support, and valuable opinions on the phenomenon, which was no doubt a very serious and sensitive issue.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my entire family and all my friends for their moral support throughout my studies.

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