



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

FACTSHEET

October 2021

AHMADIYYA MUSLIMS

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To advance international freedom of religion or belief, by independently assessing and unflinchingly confronting threats to this fundamental right.

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Persecution of Ahmadiyya Muslims

This factsheet documents and contextualizes recent religious freedom violations against Ahmadiyya Muslims, shining a light on the worrying trend of growing state persecution of members of this community. Ahmadiyya Muslims face persecution and discrimination in a range of Muslim-majority countries, including Algeria, Pakistan, and Malaysia, the three examples highlighted here. In these countries, authorities have targeted Ahmadiyyas through hate speech and speech inciting violence against them, denied them citizenship, restricted their rights to worship, and prosecuted them for practicing their faith, including by charging them with, and in some cases convicting them of, blasphemy. Some states prohibit Ahmadiyyas from declaring their faith publicly, criminalize them for identifying as Muslim, and prohibit them from calling their houses of worship mosques. States have also tolerated violence and hate speech against Ahmadiyyas by nonstate actors.

Background

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community was founded in 1889 in Punjab, India. The group's founder, [Mirzā Ghulām Aḥmad](#), claimed to be the *mahdī* or messiah—a figure or religious leader prophesized in many religions to appear towards the end of the world. It has an estimated [tens of millions of members](#) globally, according to group advocates, including in South and Southeast Asia, West and North Africa, the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada.

Because of the differences between Ahmadiyya beliefs and beliefs in Sunni and Shi'a Islam, many Muslims consider Ahmadiyya Muslims to be heretics. Some governments that enforce an official interpretation of Islam as the state religion deem Ahmadiyya Muslims to be non-Muslims and place legal restrictions on Ahmadiyya Muslim practice. Ahmadiyya Muslims have also faced restrictions and societal discrimination in both Muslim and non-Muslim majority countries.

Pakistan

Ahmadiyya Muslims reportedly [comprise four million people](#) in Pakistan's predominately Sunni Muslim population of [220 million](#). The [constitution](#) declares Pakistan to be an Islamic Republic and Islam to be the state religion but guarantees the freedom of religion to the country's religious minorities.

In [1974](#), the Pakistani government introduced a constitutional amendment declaring Ahmadis, whom it refers to using the derogatory term Qadianis, as non-Muslims. In 1984 it adopted a [legal ordinance](#) making it a criminal offense for Ahmadis to refer to themselves as Muslims. Since Pakistani citizens by [law](#) must [declare their religious affiliation](#) to join the civil or armed services or obtain official documents—i.e., passports, birth certificates, and national identification cards—[Ahmadiyya Muslims](#) must sign a declaration stating that they are non-Muslim, contrary to their beliefs, in order to obtain such documents and attain basic civil rights such as the right to vote. In the judgment requiring this declaration, a [Pakistani court stated](#) that citizens, referring particularly to Ahmadis, who disguised their religious affiliation were guilty of betraying the state.

[Pakistan's Penal Code](#) prohibits Ahmadiyya Muslims from declaring their faith publicly, propagating their faith, printing, or obtaining material related to their faith, making citations from the Qur'an or *hadiths*, using the *kalmah* or Muslim creed (on personal lettering including invitations, gravestones, signs, jewelry, etc.), building mosques or calling their places of worship *mosques*, and making the call for Muslim prayers (the *adhaan*). Virtually any public act of worship, devotion or propagation by an Ahmadi can be treated as blasphemy, a criminal offense punishable by fine, imprisonment, or death.

These repressive laws and policies, combined with [new media regulations](#), contribute to the systemic and societal discrimination of Ahmadis in Pakistan—discrimination that government officials often publicly support and enflame. [Hardline clerics, religious groups, politicians, and political parties](#) often use the country's harsh anti-Ahmadiyya laws and blasphemy laws as a rallying point. The government has not addressed these statements, and officials' use of fiery language [incites violence](#) and harassment of Ahmadis including [targeted killings](#), desecration of graves, demolition of Ahmadiyya mosques, unofficial boycotts of businesses, [hate speech](#), including from government officials, and [online harassment](#). In 2020, the exclusion of Ahmadis from the [National Minorities](#)

[Commission \(NMC\)](#), a governmental body to promote the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities, ignited debate leading to a series of targeted attacks and hate speech directed at the Ahmadiyya community. Between July 2020 and September 2021, seven Ahmadis were murdered, including [57-year-old Tahir Naseem](#), an American citizen accused of blasphemy, who was shot in a Pakistani courtroom while awaiting trial. [At least seven others](#) were wounded in unsuccessful attempts.

During debates surrounding the question of Ahmadi inclusion in the NMC, Pakistan's Minister for Religious and Inter-faith Harmony Affairs, [Noor-ul-Haq Qadri](#), publicly stated, "Whoever shows sympathy or compassion towards [Ahmadis] is neither loyal to Islam nor the state of Pakistan." Additionally Pakistan's State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, [Ali Muhammad Khan](#), referred to Ahmadis as "agents of chaos." The government did not address statements made by Qadri and Khan or other officials who incited hatred and intolerance towards Ahmadis.

Pakistani authorities have failed to protect Ahmadiyya Muslims and other religious minorities and are often [complicit](#) in the destruction of Ahmadiyya houses of worship and tombstones that carry the Muslim creed. According to the community's records, in 2020 alone, 164 Ahmadi gravestones were desecrated, and 48 similar incidents have been documented so far in 2021. In June 2021, a violent mob obstructed the funeral procession of an [Ahmadi woman](#) in a local graveyard of Sheikhpura District, forcing the family to bury their deceased elsewhere. In 2021, mobs desecrated at least ten Ahmadiyya mosques, and some in the presence of Pakistani police.

Perpetual fear of being targeted or accused of blasphemy has caused many Ahmadis to flee to countries such as [Nepal](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Indonesia](#), and Malaysia, where they often face further discrimination.

Algeria

Algeria is a presidential republic in north Africa, and its constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. [Roughly 99 percent](#) of Algeria's 43 million people identify as Sunni Muslim, with the remaining 1 percent comprising Christians, Jews, Baha'is, atheists, and Muslim minorities including Shi'a, Ahmadiyya, and Karakaria Muslims.

Despite the Algerian constitution's protection of freedom of religion and belief for all citizens, the Algerian government began a [systematic campaign](#) of Ahmadiyya

suppression in 2016. Government authorities refused to register the Ahmadiyya Muslim community as an association, and the National Gendarmerie raided and destroyed a newly built mosque in Larbaa intended for the community's use on the day of its inauguration. The national president of the Ahmadiyya community in Algeria, Mohammad Fali, faced prosecution in six separate cases between 2016 and 2017, spending three months in prison.

During this time, government ministers made public statements denouncing Ahmadi in abusive terms. In February 2017, the Minister of Religious Affairs [declared](#) Ahmadiyya Muslims as “non-Muslim,” and in April 2017, the chief of cabinet asked all Algerians to “[preserve the country from ... Ahmadi sects.](#)” Despite international pressure from the United States and others, [nearly 300 Ahmadis](#) have been prosecuted since 2016 for crimes pertaining to their faith, including blasphemy charges.

In the latter half of 2020, the Algerian government appeared to [escalate its campaign](#) against Ahmadiyya communities in the country. In October 2020, a court in Constantine handed down two-year prison sentences to Ahmadiyya Muslims found guilty of assembling without authorization after the community sought to worship together. In December, a court in Khenchela handed down a six-month prison sentence and 20,000-dinar (roughly \$150 USD) fine for the leader of a group of Ahmadis and a fine alongside suspended sentences for others on charges that included offending the Prophet Mohammad and degrading the principles of Islam. The prosecutor has appealed the decision to pursue longer prison sentences for the accused. That same month in Tizi Ouzou, a court sentenced four Ahmadiyya Muslims to multiyear prison terms and enforced fines against them. The judge in these cases refused to divulge the accuser and questioned the defendants about their Muslim faith. Several Ahmadis who were charged publicly recanted their faith in court, reportedly under duress.

Malaysia

Malaysia's population is estimated at 32 million people, 61.3 percent of whom identify as Muslim. While most Malaysian Muslims identify as practicing Islam in line with the state-sponsored Sunni interpretation, minority Muslim communities, including Shi'a and Ahmadiyya Muslims, have resided in Malaysia since before independence. Ahmadis have had a small but persistent presence in modern day Malaysia since 1906. Currently, an estimated 2,000 Ahmadi individuals hold

Malaysian citizenship. This does not include those seeking and/or granted asylum or refugee status in Malaysia from Pakistan, who reportedly number between 5,500 and 6,500.

With independence in 1963, Malaysia's constitution named Islam as the official religion of the country, although it fell short of establishing the federation as a theocratic state. The nine monarchs of Malaysia are constitutionally positioned as heads of Islam in their respective states, with the elected monarch of the federation serving as the head of Islam for the Federal Territories and those states without a monarch. The constitution also guarantees under [Article 11](#) the right of every Malaysian citizen “to profess and practice his religion.” Malaysia maintains a dual legal system, whereby Shari'a courts that enforce a state-sanctioned Sunni interpretation of Islamic law operate alongside common law courts. In 1998, the Constitutional Amendment Act [elevated](#) these religious courts to a more equal footing with the civil courts.

State authorities in Malaysia have systematically discriminated against Ahmadiyya Muslims since 1975, when the Conference of Rulers upheld a report from the Selangor Fatwa Council, which [yielded](#) a *fatwa* stating that Ahmadis are not Muslim. Seven states and the Federal Territories currently actively maintain this fatwa. In 1998, the Mufti of Selangor state [declared](#) Ahmadis apostates and banned four books associated with the faith. Other state authorities have echoed these sentiments, displaying signs outside of Ahmadiyya community centers with derogatory language text reiterating that Ahmadis are not officially considered Muslim.

The Malaysian government has also restricted the rights of Ahmadiyya Muslims based on their Ahmadiyya identity. In 2000, lawmakers [amended](#) the fatwa to deny Ahmadis the right of succession or inheritance under Islamic Law and deny Ahmadiyya Malays the special economic privileges granted to members of the Malay ethnic group by the constitution.

In 2014, the State Islamic Religious Department of Selangor (JAIS) raided an Ahmadiyya community faith center during prayer services, arresting 39 Ahmadis for carrying out faith practices in an unsanctioned mosque. This arrest launched legal proceedings that are ongoing and yet to be determined at the High Court, the highest civil court in Malaysia. On January 11, 2021, the court [set](#) March 19 as the date to determine this case, but that deadline passed without a ruling. This court



case will determine whether Ahmadiyya Muslims can call themselves Muslim, as the community considers themselves to be.

Should the court decide that the Malaysian government does not consider Ahmadis as Muslims under Malaysian law, the decision will have significant implications for their rights to freedom of religion and belief. Such a ruling would exclude Ahmadiyya Muslims from the Shari'a court system, which enforces a Sunni interpretation of Islam, but it would also bar them from using certain Arabic words that the state has restricted for use by members of the Muslim and *Christian* faiths. If Ahmadis are declared not legally Muslim, this will also complicate the status of those Ahmadis who are ethnically Malay, since Article 160 of

the Malaysian *constitution* lists being Muslim as a criterion to identify as Malay.

Conclusion

Ahmadiyya Muslims have long faced persecution, discrimination, and hostility in a range of countries based on laws and policies that violate their fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief. For example, state authorities in Pakistan, Algeria, and Malaysia have declared or are in the process of legally declaring Ahmadiyya Muslims to be non-Muslim, restricted their ability to worship, prosecuted them for practicing their faith, and tolerated attacks against them by societal actors.

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