



Written by [James Heiser](#) on January 28, 2011

Search for “Blasphemers” Continues in Pakistan

In the three weeks that have passed since the governor of Punjab was assassinated, it has become clear that Islamic extremists are gaining influence in Pakistan. Governor Salman Taseer was murdered on January 4 by one of his own bodyguards because he had voiced his opposition to the imposition of the death penalty in blasphemy cases, and had called for a presidential pardon for Asia Bibi, a Christian who had been unjustly convicted and sentenced to death for blasphemy.



In the immediate aftermath of Taseer’s assassination, [500 “moderate” Muslim scholars and clerics](#) endorsed the assassination, and [1,000 Pakistani attorneys signed a petition](#), pledging their aid in the defense of the assassin.

Now, a report from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) sets such Islamic extremism in the context of a trend in Pakistan: Rather than being ashamed of fanatics who are now turning Muslim against Muslim to support of one of the harshest diktats of Sharia law, Pakistanis are now expanding the hunt for “blasphemers” to include at least one highly-placed member of the government. The RFE/RL story (“[Pakistani Extremists Step Up ‘Blasphemy’ Attacks](#)”) by Charles Recknagel and Majeed Babar explains that proposing punishing those who make a false accusation of blasphemy may be enough to make a politician a target for prosecution:

A summons filed recently in a court in Multan, in southern Punjab, accuses Sherry Rehman of insulting the Prophet Muhammad in a recent television interview. Rehman, a parliament deputy who is also a former cabinet member and senior member of the Pakistan People’s Party, denies the charges. ...

The liberal legislator is a particularly high-profile target because she has refused to withdraw a proposed bill that would criminalize those who make false accusations of blasphemy — a crime that carries the death penalty. That puts her on the same front line where Taseer — who adamantly opposed the misuse of the blasphemy law — stood and fell.

Pakistan appears to be headed down a path which is becoming increasingly familiar in the Islamic world: Beginning with Iran in the 1970s, [Indonesia](#) over the past several decades, down to the current turmoil in [Iraq](#), [Egypt](#) and [Turkey](#), “moderate Muslims” find it virtually impossible to resist the drive toward extremism. In fact, the effort to bloodlust of the Jihadists only seems to drive their radicalism.

For every prominent “moderate” such as Taseer or Rehman who faces death or persecution, it is hard to calculate how many others face such troubles without word of their plight ever reaching the press. As Recknagel and Babar write:

Rehman is hardly the only person to have been tagged with blasphemy in recent weeks. A mullah



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in Punjab was jailed recently after he pulled down a poster that Islamic activists had placed on the mosque premises despite his ban on pamphleteering. The activists accused him of disrespect for the religious message on the poster and the judge sentenced him to 10 years.

When the mullahs cannot even attempt to blunt the expression of extremism within the walls of their own mosques, the character of the Jihadist mind—and a legal system under its sway — is manifest. With a governor assassinated and a deputy of the parliament facing possible prosecution, one prominent imam — Movlana Yousaf Quraishi — has taken the step of actually offering a bounty on Bibi's head: If the Pakistani government does not murder her, he wants to make certain that someone will.

Photo: Pakistani students chant slogans during a rally to protest against any attempts to modify blasphemy laws, in Karachi, Pakistan, Thursday, Jan. 20, 2011: AP Images



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