

# HATEFUL PLACES

## [ LEARNING BRIEF ]

Punjab, the epicentre of hate speech in Pakistan –  
a geospatial analysis of Twitter conversations



Bytes for All in partnership with Minority Rights Group International

Hateful places:

Punjab, the epicentre of hate speech in Pakistan – a geospatial  
analysis of Twitter conversations

Author: Haroon Baloch  
Bytes for All, Pakistan

Reviewer: Claire Thomas & Naumana Suleman  
Minority Rights Group International

## Introduction

The annual online hate speech report 2020, produced under the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) initiative, discovered through its social media monitoring and analysis of Twitter conversations that Rawalpindi, a major city in the province of Punjab, was a significant originator of religious hate speech. This finding was interesting in several ways; however, at that time, for reasons of both timely publication and space, the monitors could not dig deeper.

Subsequently, resources were dedicated to the issue, and the team made a focused effort to further understand hate speech trends in terms of Pakistan's major cities and regions using a geospatial lens.

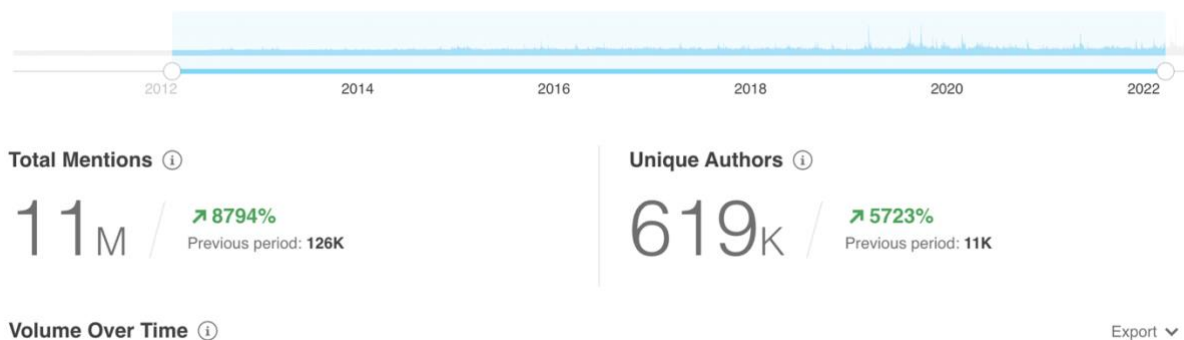
## Methodology

A social media listening software tool was employed for this purpose. A search query was constructed containing common hate speech terms targeting different sects and religions. The query is as follows:

### Figure 1: Query text

country: 'PAK'

('blasphemy' OR 'blasphemic' OR 'ghustakh' OR 'gustakhi' OR 'blasphemer' OR 'christianity' OR 'christian' OR 'esai' OR 'maseehi' OR 'ahmadi' OR 'ahmadiya' OR 'qadiani' OR 'qadiyani' OR 'qadian' OR 'mirza ghulam ahmad' OR 'kafir' OR 'infidel' OR 'takfiri' OR 'kufr' OR 'hindu' OR 'hinduism' OR 'bhagwan' OR 'sikh' OR 'gurdawara' OR 'wajib ul qatal' OR 'wajibul qatal' OR 'wajib ul qat' OR 'lynching' OR 'rabwah' OR 'dr abdul salam' OR 'khatm e nabuwat' OR 'khatum i nabuwat' OR 'khatum i risalat' OR 'islam' OR 'muslim' OR 'yasu masih' OR 'yahudi' OR 'choora' OR 'chura' OR 'chooray' OR 'churay' OR 'ahmedi' OR 'ahmadya' OR 'shia' OR 'zindeeq' OR 'khatmal' OR 'zindiq' OR 'sahaba ka munkar' OR 'sahaba ka munkir' OR 'yazidi' OR 'yazidiat' OR 'abu bakar' OR 'umar kutta' OR 'usman kutta' OR 'siddiq kutta')



Using this query, the team was able to collect over 11 million conversations that took place between 12 February 2012 and 23 March 2022, with a gradual rise in hate speech culminating in a level which was over 87.3 times higher than in February 2012, with unique users over the period multiplied by a factor of 56.27.

To further understand the data, a 'volume over time' tool was used with the aim of breaking down the data generated from different regions and cities of Pakistan. Different hate terminologies were searched on the entire volume, including *Ahmadi kafir* ('Ahmadi infidel'), *Qadiyani kafir* ('Qadiyani infidel'), *Shi'a kafir* ('Shi'a infidel'), *Wajib ul Qatal* ('deserving to be killed') and *choora* (a derogatory term frequently used for Christians in Pakistan).

It is, of course, clearly important to understand the population of the cities concerned when comparing volumes of hate speech generated; the official 2017 census figures from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics were consulted. However, cities and regions of Pakistan also vary in terms of

their internet and mobile connectivity. We have therefore adjusted the population figures to reflect the total number of internet users with figures from the OpenSignal<sup>1</sup> maps. This data (shown on the maps in Figures 2–5) suggests that the highest number of internet users consuming data are concentrated in cities along the motorways (M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M11 and M14) and national highways (N5, N11, N20, N35, N90 and N95), including Lahore, Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Peshawar, Nowshera, Swabi, Swat, Gujrat, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Multan, Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Sukkur, Larkana, Shikarpur, Hyderabad and Karachi. However, it is also clear from this map that the majority of internet users are concentrated in the north-eastern regions. Most of Punjab province, between the Bahawalpur, Multan, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Lahore and Rawalpindi divisions, is well covered by internet services.

Table 1 provides the details of these districts population figures used from 2017 census for following cases, findings, and analyses.

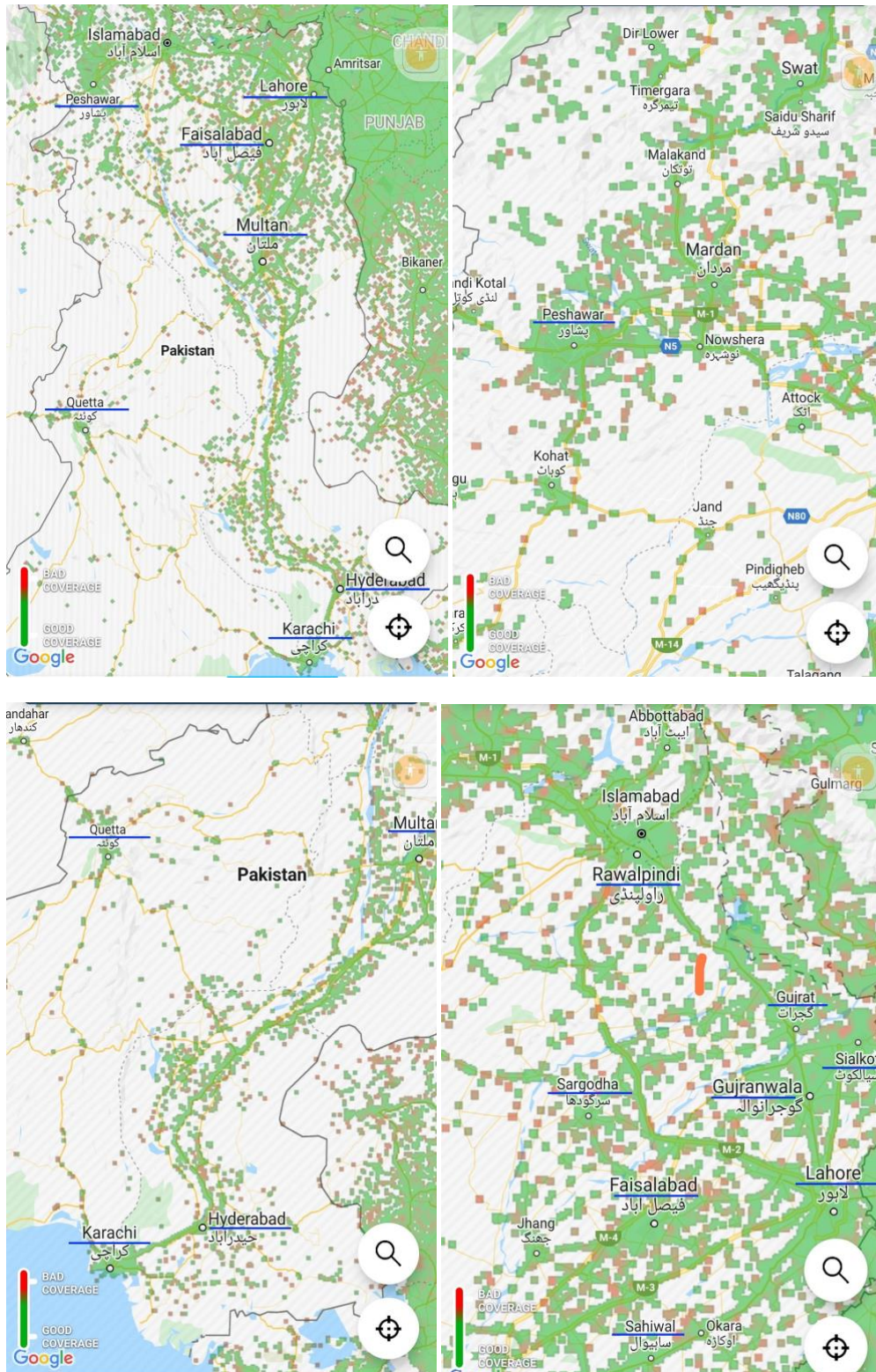
**Table 1:** Population of 14 districts

Sr. No.	Districts	Population (millions)
1	Karachi, Sindh	16.02
2	Lahore, Punjab	11.11
3	Rawalpindi, Punjab	5.42
4	Faisalabad, Punjab	7.88
5	Multan, Punjab	4.74
6	Gujranwala, Punjab	5.01
7	Hyderabad, Sindh	2.19
8	Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	4.26
9	Quetta, Balochistan	2.26
10	Sialkot, Punjab	3.89
11	Gujrat, Punjab	2.75
12	Sahiwal, Punjab	2.51
13	Sargodha, Punjab	3.69
14	Bahawalpur, Punjab	2.97

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<sup>1</sup> OpenSignal is an internet company that generates internet signal maps using crowdsourced signals across the world.

**Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5:** Pakistan's network maps show coverage is concentrated mostly in the north-eastern and south-eastern regions of the country



## Cases and findings

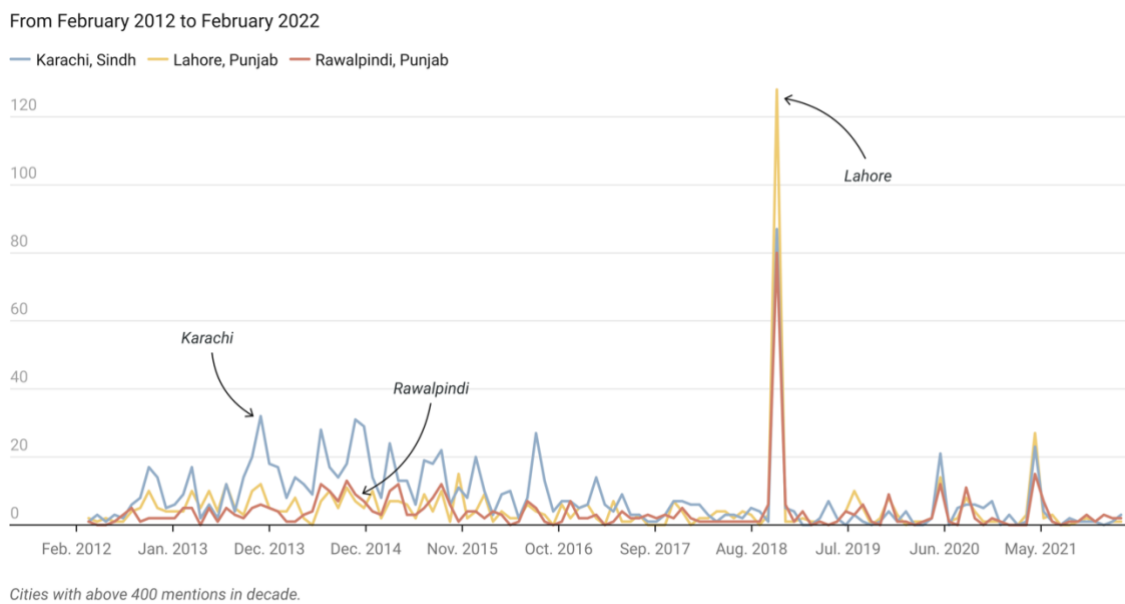
Use of term 'Wajib ul Qatal'



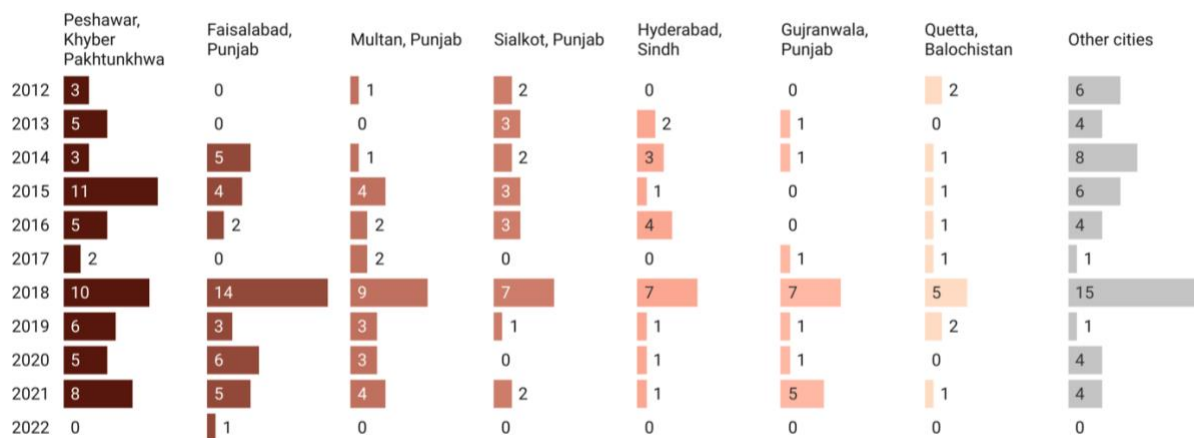
The term 'Wajib ul Qatal' has a literal meaning of 'deserving to be killed', and in Pakistan it is frequently used around instances of alleged blasphemy or by members of the mainstream Sunni Muslim majority to designate a non-Muslim or a member of a different denomination within Islam (such as Shi'a or Ahmadi) as an infidel or apostate. At least three different variations of the term were used to dig out data, including 'Wajib ul Qatal', 'Wajibul Qatal' and واجب القتل.

Region-wise analysis of the data gathered using the query showed that the frequency of recorded use of this term among internet users in Punjab and Sindh provinces has been roughly equal, with Punjab at 46.7% and Sindh 41.4%, followed by Federal Capital Territory (7.8%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (3.1%) and Balochistan (0.72%).

**Figure 6:** Frequency of use of 'Wajib ul Qatal' in cities with a high number of mentions



**Figure 7:** 'Wajib ul Qatal' term in cities with a low number of mentions

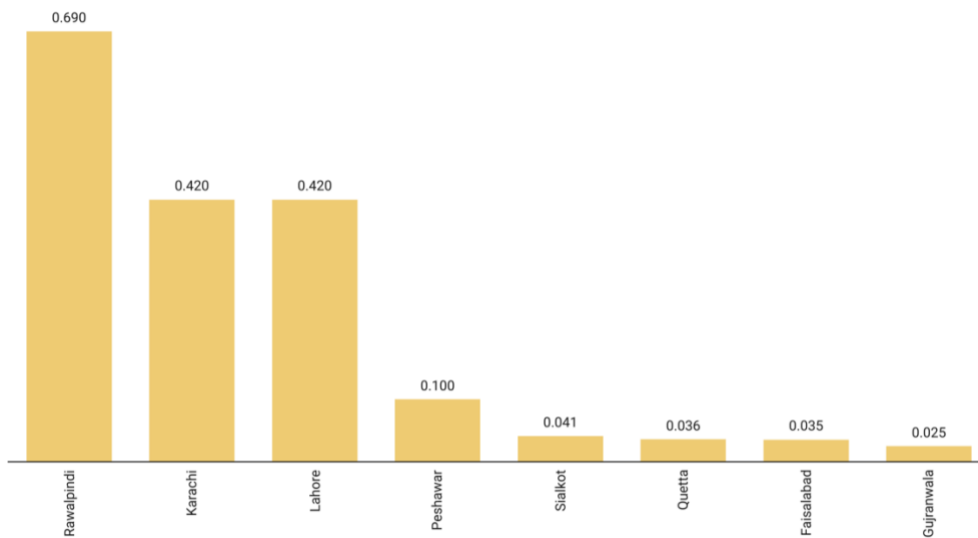


*'Other cities' includes those with seven or fewer mentions in a decade: Okara, Punjab; Abbottabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Larkana, Sindh; Bahawalpur, Punjab; Sahiwal, Punjab; Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab; Saidu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab; Kundian, Punjab; Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.*

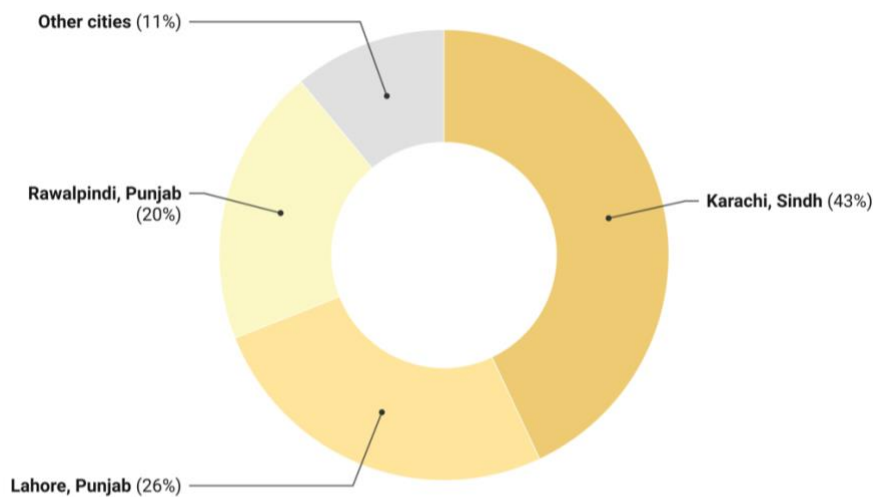
In terms of cities, three cities together generated a very high proportion of mentions (over 90.5%): Karachi generated 741 (42.2% of all mentions), Lahore 474 (27%) and Rawalpindi 374 (21.31%), with a sharp drop thereafter. The other named cities shared the remaining 11% of mentions between them: Peshawar 43 (2.45%), Faisalabad 28 (1.6%), Sialkot 16 (0.91%), Hyderabad 14 (0.79%), Gujranwala 13 (0.74%) and Quetta 12 (0.68%).

When looked at in terms of the level of hate speech generated in relation to the population of the city in question, we see that now Rawalpindi tops the table with 0.69 mentions per 10,000 population, Karachi follows with 0.42 per 10,000 and then Lahore at 0.42 per 10,000. From there, the level drops considerably: Peshawar (0.1), Hyderabad (0.06), Sialkot (0.041), Quetta (0.036), Faisalabad (0.035) and Gujranwala (0.025).

**Figure 8:** ‘Wajib ul Qatal’ mentions per 10,000 population.



**Figure 9:** ‘Wajib ul Qatal’ total mentions by cities



*'Other cities' includes those with three or fewer per cents: Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Faisalabad, Punjab; Multan, Punjab; Sialkot, Punjab; Hyderabad, Sindh; Gujranwala, Panjab; Quetta, Balochistan; Okara, Punjab; Abbottabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Larkana, Sindh; Bahawalpur, Punjab; Sahiwal, Punjab; Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab; Saidu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab; Kundian, Punjab; Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.*

### 1. Hate speech against Ahmadis

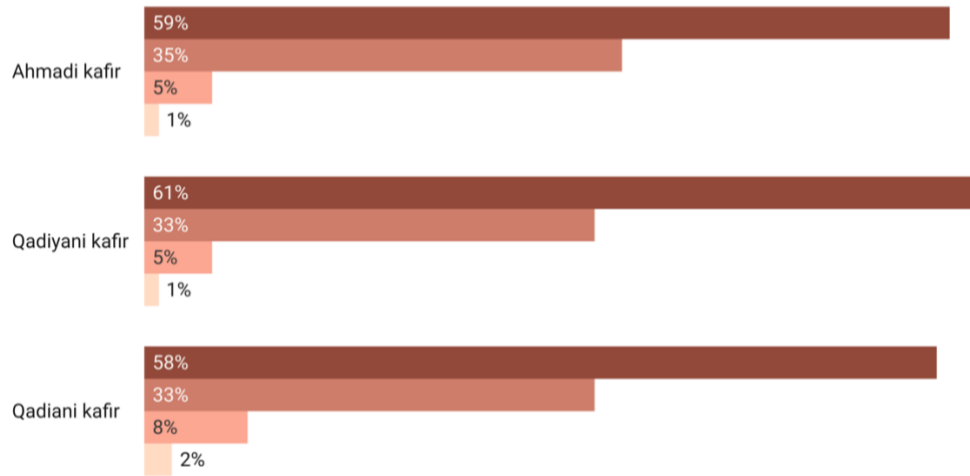
Region-wise, Punjab created more than half (61%) of all hate conversations against Ahmadis, followed by Sindh (27%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (6%) and Federal Capital Territory (3%).

At least four different variations of the term ‘Ahmadi’ were used, including ‘Ahmadi’, ‘Qadiyani’, ‘Qadiani’ and قاديانی.

**Figure 10: Hate speech against Ahmadis in different terms**

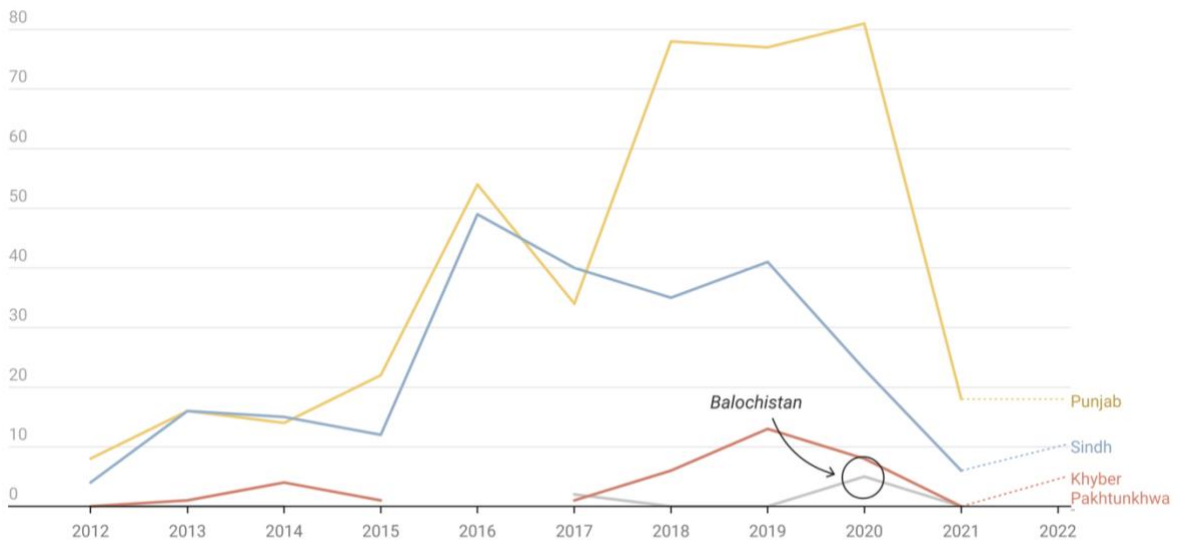
Total mentions by regions

■ Punjab ■ Sindh ■ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ■ Balochistan



**Figure 11: Hate speech against Ahmadis ('Ahmadi kafir' term)**

Number of mentions, years: 2012–2022

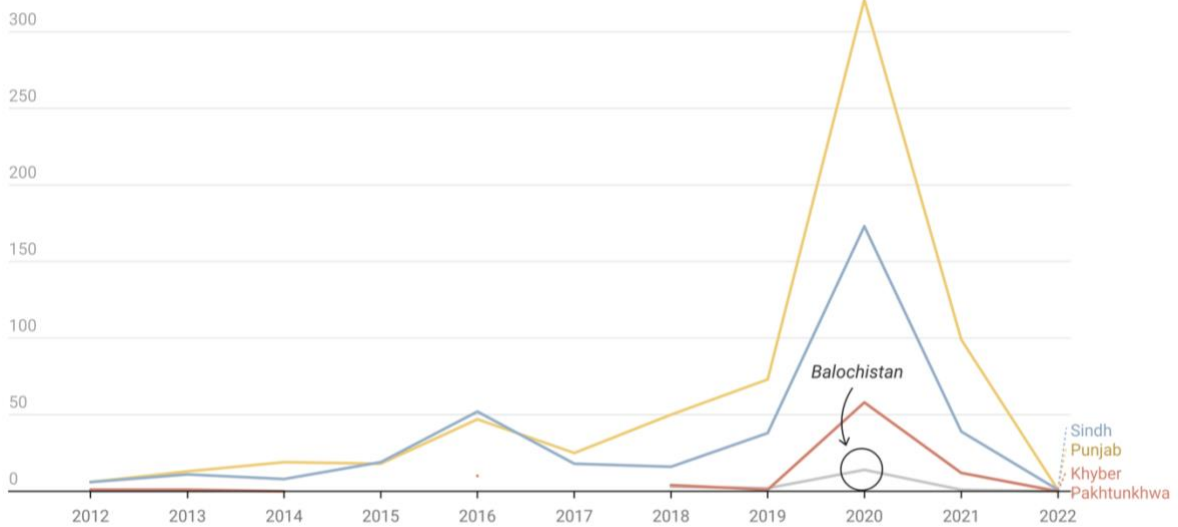


Data for 2022 shows no mentions (data available up to 30 March 2022).



**Figure 12: Hate speech against Ahmadis ('Qadiani kafir' term)**

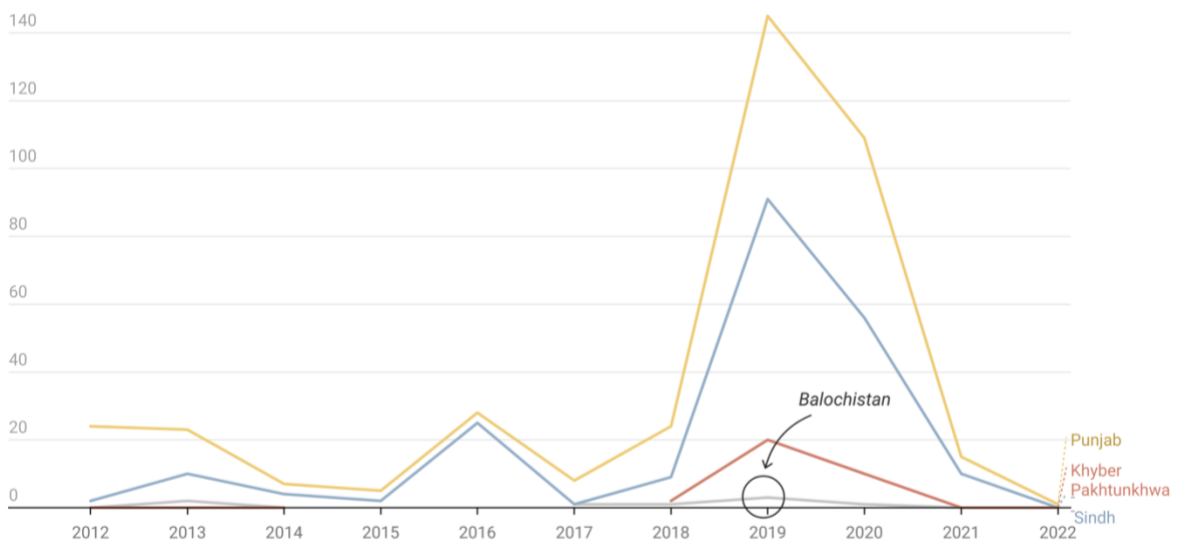
Number of mentions, years: 2012–2022



Data available up to 30 March 2022.

**Figure 13: Hate speech against Ahmadis ('Qadiyani kafir' term)**

Number of mentions, years: 2012–2022



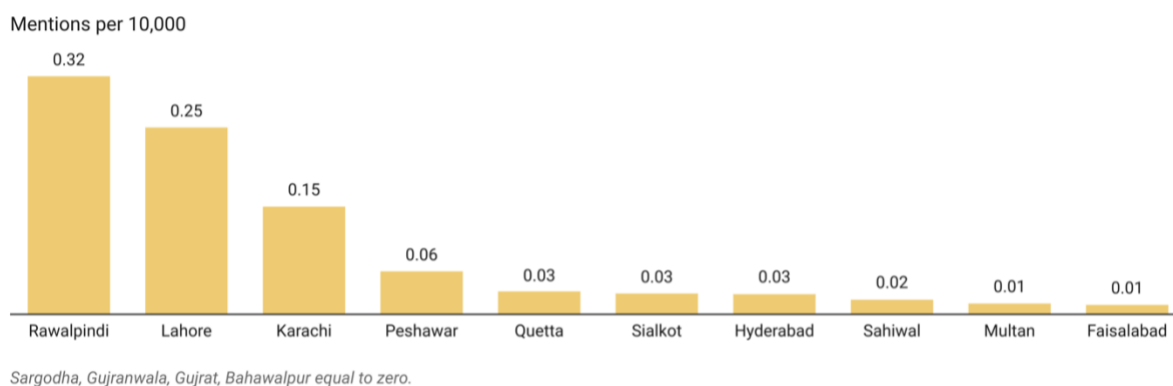
Data available up to 30 March 2022.

District-wise, Karachi (the capital of Sindh) was the highest in terms of the use of the term 'Ahmadi kafir', producing 235 (34.3%) mentions, followed by Lahore with 183 (26.7%), Rawalpindi 176 (25.5%), Peshawar 25 (3.7%), Sialkot 11 (1.6%), Faisalabad 10 (1.46%), Multan 7 (1%), Quetta 7 (1%), Hyderabad 6 (0.87%) and Sahiwal 5 (0.73%).

Similarly, measured per capita, this kind of hate speech was also more prevalent in Rawalpindi with 0.32 posts or mentions per 10,000 population, followed by Lahore which had significantly less at

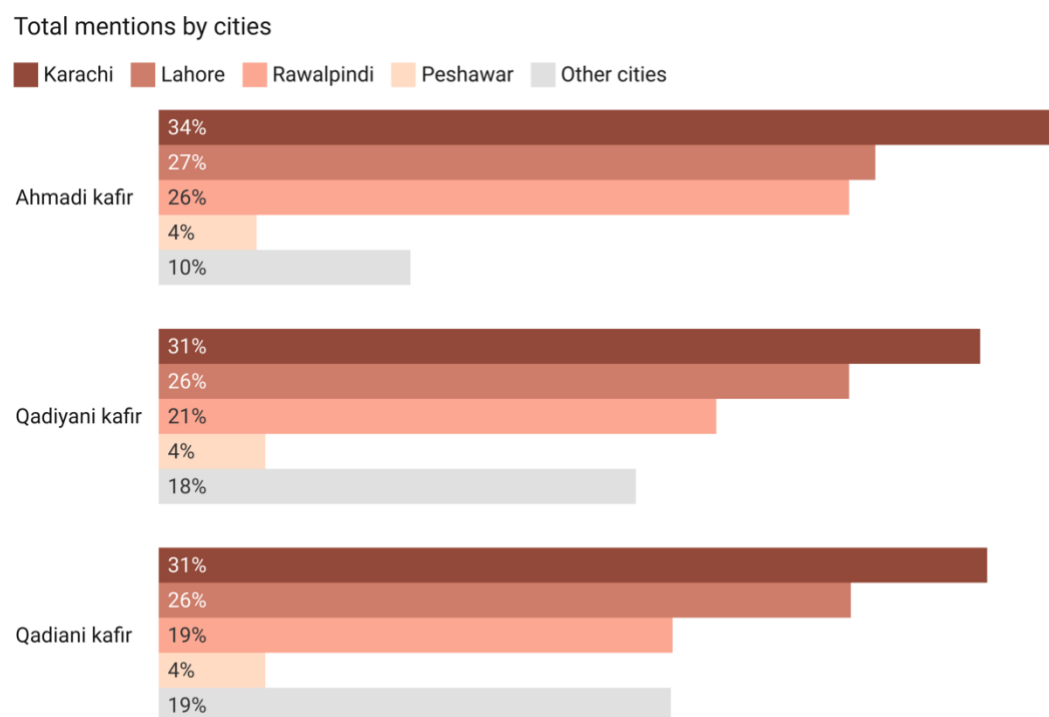
0.25 and then Karachi at 0.14 per 10,000, followed by Peshawar 0.06, Sialkot 0.028, Faisalabad 0.012, Multan 0.014, Quetta 0.03, Hyderabad 0.03, and Sahiwal 0.019.

**Figure 14:** ‘Ahmadi kafir’ mentions per 10,000 population head counts



Nonetheless, Lahore and Rawalpindi, both large cities situated in Punjab, between them overshadow the rest of the country, together generating 53.8% of hate speech using this term.

**Figure 15:** Hate speech against Ahmadis in cities

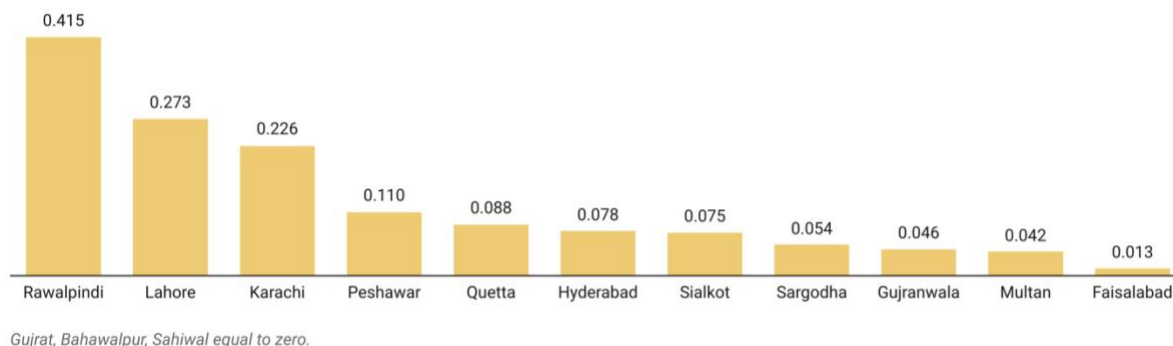


*'Other cities' includes those with three or fewer per cents: Abbottabad, Dera Ghazi Khan, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Hyderabad, Kohat, Mardan, Multan, Quetta, Sahiwal, Saidu, Sargodha, Sialkot.*

For the term ‘Qadiani kafir’, Karachi once again produced most of the mentions with 362 (31.2%), followed by Lahore 303 (26.1%), Rawalpindi 225 (19.3%), Peshawar 47 (4%), Quetta 20 (1.72%), Sialkot 29 (2.5%), Gujranwala 23 (1.98%), Sargodha 20 (1.72%), Multan 20 (1.72%) and Hyderabad 17 (1.46%).

By head count, this hate speech term was also used more frequently in Rawalpindi (0.41 per 10,000 population), followed by Lahore (0.28), Karachi (0.22), Peshawar (0.11), Quetta (0.08), Sialkot (0.07), Gujranwala (0.04), Sargodha 0.05, Multan 0.04, and Hyderabad 0.07.

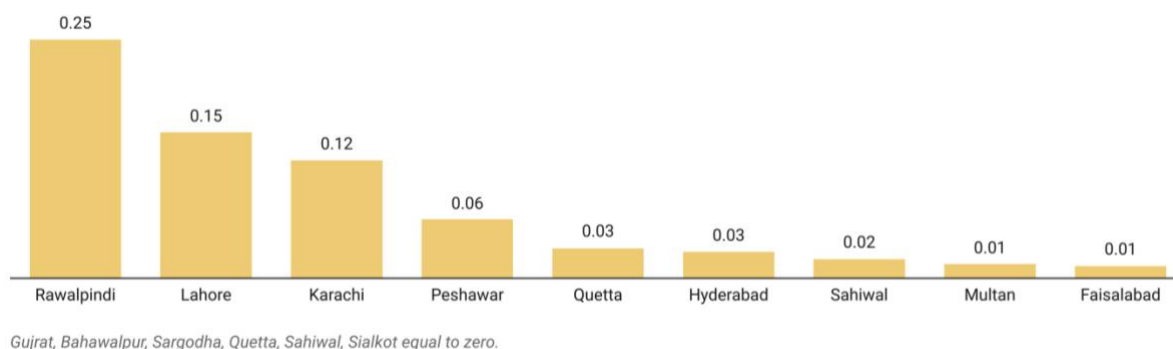
**Figure 16:** ‘Qadiani kafir’ mentions per 10,000 population head counts



Similarly for the term ‘Qadiyani kafir’, Karachi generated 196 mentions (30.7%), followed by Lahore 168 (26.3%), Rawalpindi 134 (20.9%), Peshawar 26 (4%), Multan 18 (2.8%), Faisalabad, Hyderabad, and Gujranwala 13 (2%) each and Sialkot 11 (1.7%).

Per capita, the incidence was significantly higher in Rawalpindi (0.25 per 10,000) than Lahore (0.15) and Karachi (0.12), followed by Peshawar (0.061), Hyderabad (0.060), Multan (0.037), Sialkot (0.028), Gujranwala (0.025) and Faisalabad (0.016).

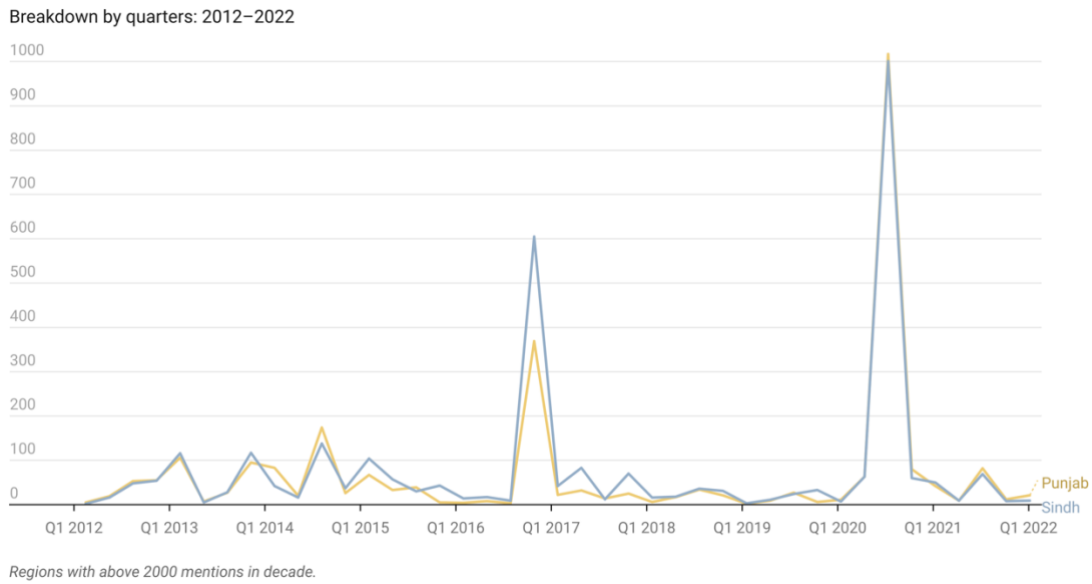
**Figure 17:** ‘Qadiyani kafir’ mentions per 10,000 head counts



## 2. Hate speech against Shi’a

Hate speech against Shi’a Muslims varies from the above picture in that Sindh province is ahead of Punjab province. Surprisingly, Karachi, the provincial capital of Sindh – a city not known for its Shi’a population specifically, but rather for its large and religiously, ethnically and linguistically diverse composition generally – dominates over other cities. In other cases, cities in Punjab dominated in terms of the volume of hate speech; however, in the case of hate speech against Shi’a Muslims, the pattern is different. Over the period in question, Sindh produced 47% of total hate speech against Shi’a in Pakistan, whereas Punjab produced 42.7%, followed by Federal Capital Territory (5.6%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (2.3%) and Balochistan (2%).

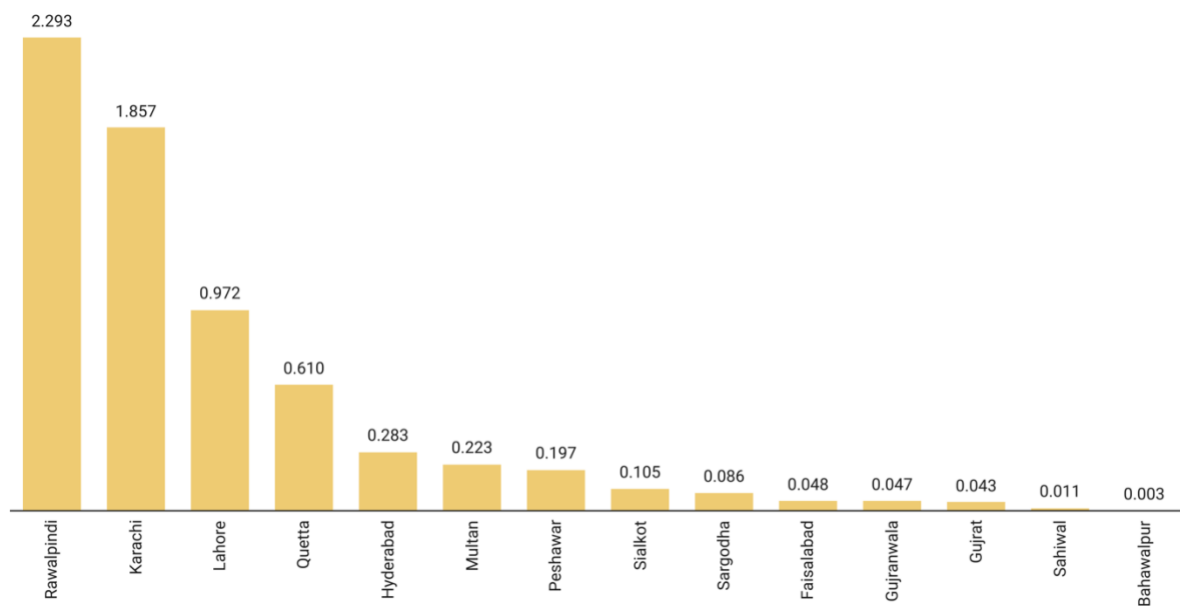
**Figure 18: Hate speech against Shi'a in regions with a high number of mentions**



In terms of cities, Karachi topped the list once again with 4,581 (50% of the total) mentions, followed by Rawalpindi 2,070 (21%), Lahore 1,880 (18%), Quetta 200 (2%), Multan 178 (1.85%), Peshawar 164 (1.7%), Sialkot 100 (1%), Hyderabad 95 (0.98%), Faisalabad 70 (0.72%), and Gujranwala 44 (0.45%).

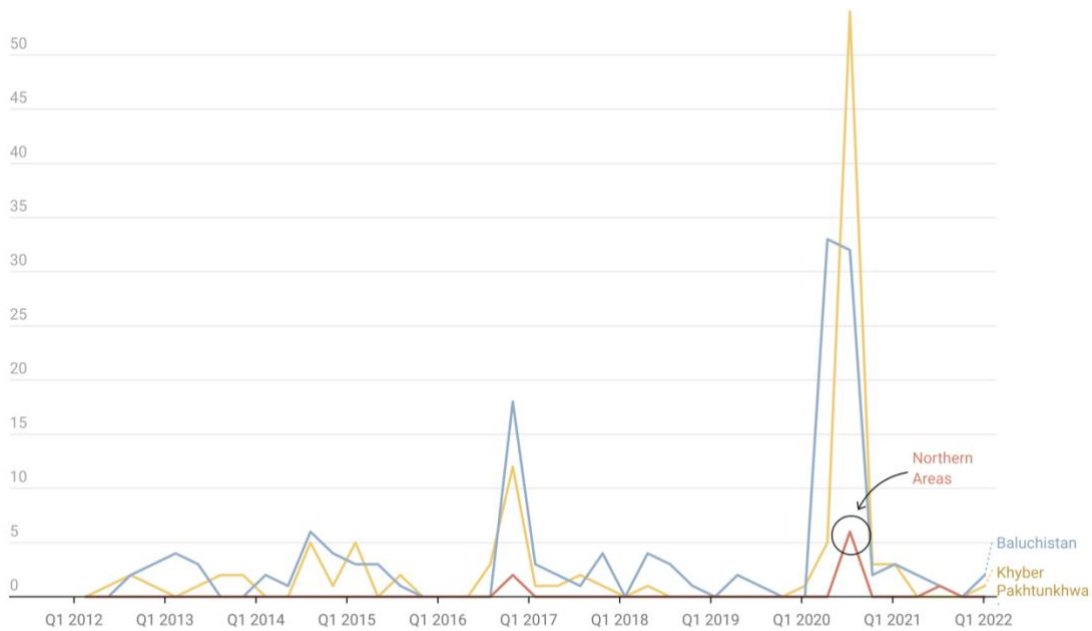
Here again by population, anti-Shi'a hate was also found most frequently in Rawalpindi (2.29 per 10,000), followed by Karachi (1.85) and Lahore (0.98). Interestingly, as it is a major centre for Hazara Shi'a, Quetta records a higher ranking by population of hate speech for anti-Shi'a content than for other forms of hate speech.

**Figure 19: Shi'a hate mentions per 10,000 population head counts**



**Figure 20: Hate speech against Shi'a in regions with a low number of mentions**

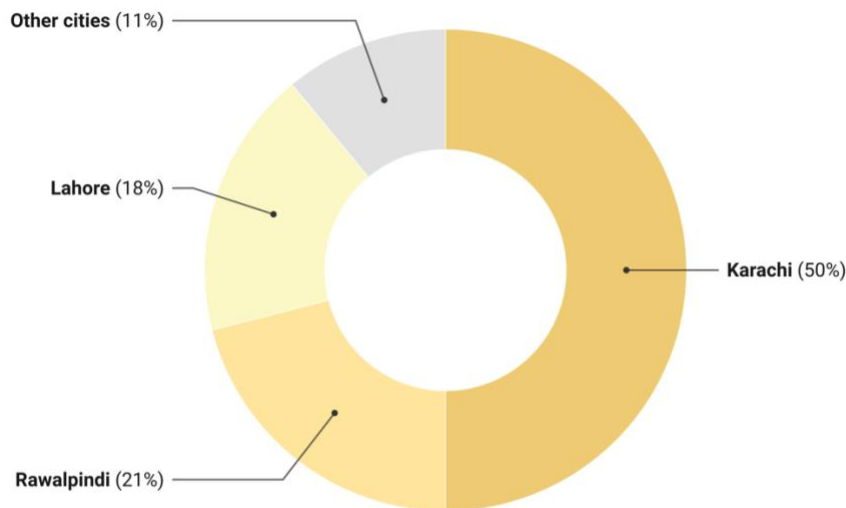
Breakdown by quarters: 2012–2022



Regions with below 200 mentions in a decade.

**Figure 21: Hate speech against Shi'a – total mentions**

Total mention by cities



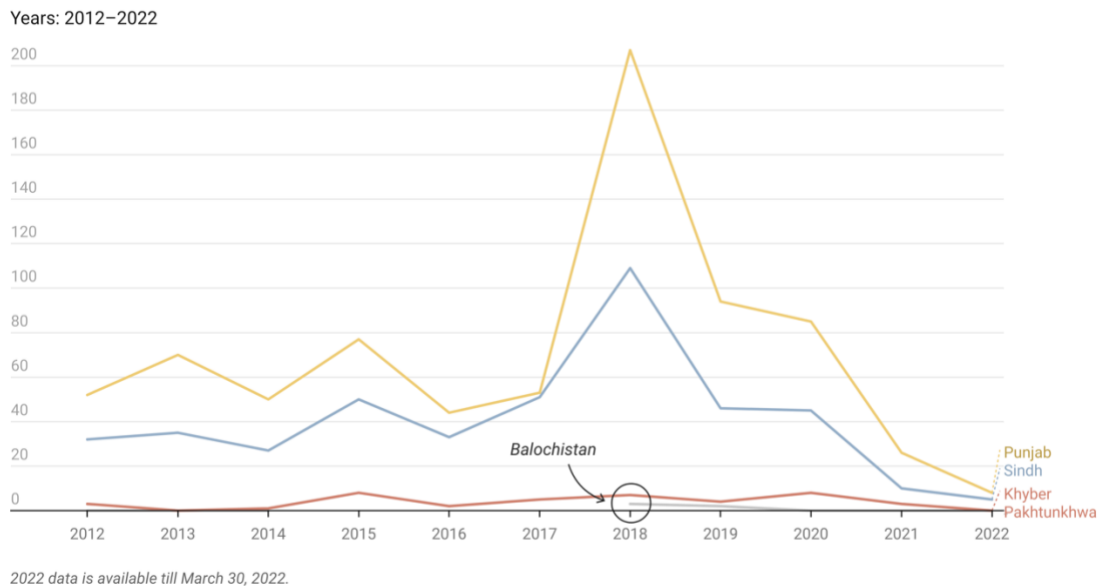
'Other cities' includes those with two or fewer per cents: Quetta, Multan, Peshawar, Hyderabad, Sialkot, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Okara, Mardan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Gujrat, Gilgit, Bahawalpur, Jhang, Larkana, Abbottabad, Sahiwal, Saidu, Sheikhupura, Pura, Mirpur, Khas, Sukkur, Kohat.

### 3. Hate speech against Christians

Christians in Pakistan are frequently referred to as *choora* (چوڑا) and *bhingi* (بھنگی) to express hatred towards them. These two terms were used to collect data from Twitter. In terms of different regions, people in Punjab province were using these terms more frequently. Punjab

was the area with the largest proportion of hate speech against Christians among the population with 832 mentions (57.6%), followed by Sindh 463 (32%), Federal Capital Territory 90 (6.2%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 46 (3.1%) and Balochistan 13 (0.9%) provinces.

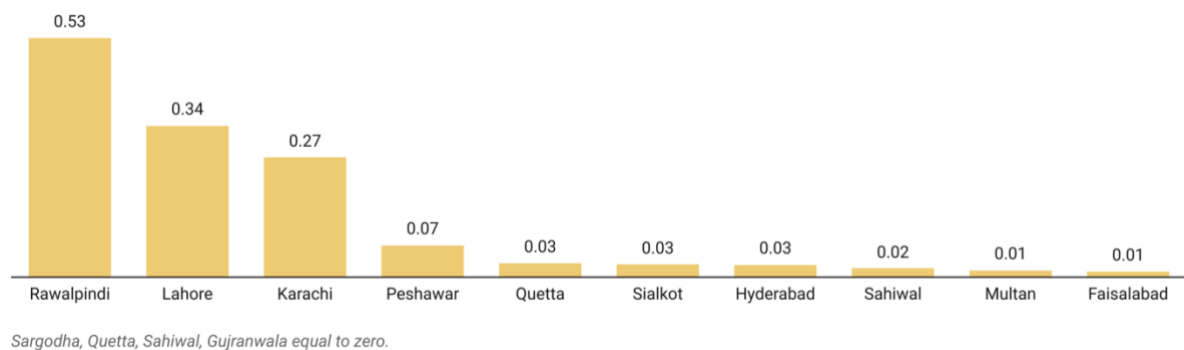
**Figure 22:** Hate speech against Christians by region



In contrast, in terms of cities, people in Karachi (which is in Sindh and not Punjab) used these hate expressions most at 427 (34.6%), followed by the Punjab cities of Lahore 373 (30.3%) and Rawalpindi 288 (23.3%), with much lower levels in other cities across the nation: Peshawar 30 (2.43%), Faisalabad 21 (1.70%), Sialkot 18 (1.46%), Multan 15 (1.21%), Hyderabad and Gujrat on 10 each (0.81%) and Bahawalpur 9 (0.73%).

But again, when the population figures are taken into consideration, Rawalpindi has the highest rates at 0.53 per 10,000, followed by Lahore at 0.34 and Karachi at 0.27.

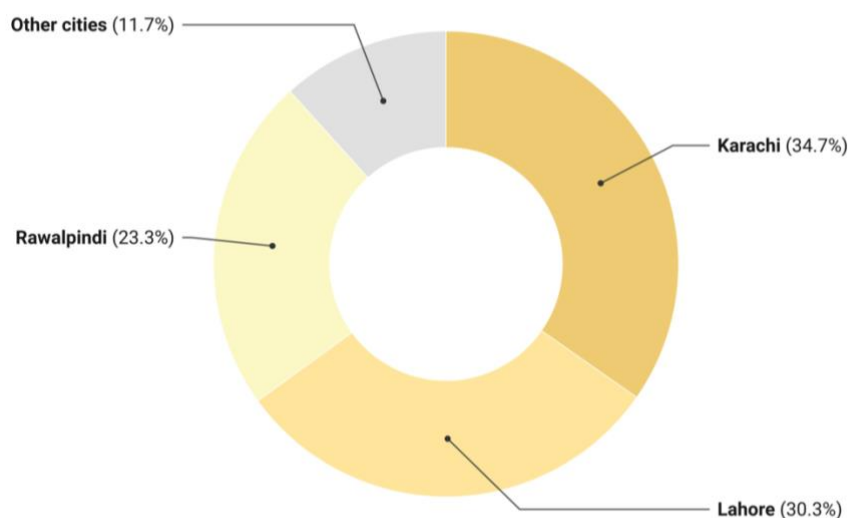
**Figure 23:** Hate mentions against Christians per 10,000 population





**Figure 24: Hate speech against Christians – total mentions**

Total mention by cities



*'Other cities' includes those with three or fewer per cents: Peshawar, Faisalabad, Sialkot, Multan, Gujrat, Hyderabad, Bahawalpur, Abbottabad, Gujranwala, Sargodha, Quetta, Sahiwal, Okara, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rahim Yar Khan, Saidu.*

## I. Analysis and conclusion

The geospatial data collected reveals several important trends and unearths some of the realities about the source cities of hate speech in Pakistan.

One important finding is that the major volume of hate speech in Pakistan occurs in three cities: Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi. In most cases, Lahore and Rawalpindi, the two large cities in Punjab province, together have contributed around 45–50% of the entire hate speech output. Moreover, if the volume of hate speech originating from other smaller cities of Punjab, including Sialkot, Multan, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Gujrat and Bahawalpur are also factored in, it reaches up to 60% in some cases. On the other hand, Karachi, which is the largest city of Pakistan, also generates a huge amount of hate speech, especially targeted at the Shi'a community.

In the case of the Christian minority, whose population is mainly concentrated in Punjab province, the major chunk of hate speech against them also originates from Punjab – up to 57.6%. Lahore and Rawalpindi are the two main cities for this, followed by Faisalabad, Sialkot and Multan, among others.

The data indicates that the majority of hate speech is recorded against Shi'a, who comprise the second largest group within Islam after the Sunni majority population.

Ahmadis, who identify themselves with Islam but have been declared non-Muslim by the Constitution of Pakistan, are the second most targeted group in terms of hate speech, most of it originating from Punjab province, especially from the cities of Lahore and Rawalpindi.

In comparison with Punjab and Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces generate a much lower volume of hate speech. This is interesting because, with the exception of the Shi'a Muslim population, they are acknowledged to have a less diverse population in terms of religion than either Punjab or Sindh.

The case of Rawalpindi is striking in these geospatial analyses for the reason that it generates a considerable amount of hate speech, far higher in relation to population than other locations.

Rawalpindi is the second highest city in terms of hate speech in Punjab province and the third highest in the entire country. Rawalpindi has an official population of 5.42 million, which is similar to at least five other cities in Pakistan including Faisalabad, Peshawar, Multan, Quetta and Gujranwala. In comparison to these cities, however, the amount of hate speech generated by Rawalpindi is significantly higher.

It is not surprising that both Karachi and Lahore are the cities producing the most hate speech, because they are also the two largest cities, and provincial capitals with the two largest populations – 16.02 million and 11.11 million respectively. However, Rawalpindi, in comparison to Karachi and Lahore, is a smaller city with population of 5.42 million.<sup>2</sup> Despite having a population less than half the size of Lahore’s and less than a third of Karachi’s, Rawalpindi produced hate speech at a similar rate to these significantly larger cities. Rawalpindi is smaller than Faisalabad and of a similar size to Multan and Peshawar, but generates around 10 times the hate speech as each of these cities.

Rawalpindi, the twin city to Islamabad, has the benefit of good internet connectivity and a higher literacy rate. Besides, the city also has long-standing political significance due to its proximity with Islamabad (the country’s capital).

The ratio of hate speech originating from Rawalpindi being high in proportion to its population leads to some questions whether there is a link between the power corridors and the hate speech being generated. Whilst it is possible that government and state personnel directly acting in a private capacity in their own time are more likely to be the spreaders of hate (in itself a worrying possibility, given the states duty to act impartially between those of different faiths in all of its actions, including keeping the peace). Is any part of Rawalpindi’s high hate speech targeting religious minorities, a deliberate effort? Asking such questions is warranted given the finding of this study.

The trends detected and analysed in this briefing show that Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi respectively are the three main hubs of hate speech, with other cities – including Peshawar, Sialkot, Multan, Gujranwala, Hyderabad and Quetta – supplementing them. Most hate speech targeting religious minorities primarily has been coming from cities in Punjab province or Karachi, the provincial capital of Sindh province. The role of Rawalpindi in this entire landscape is clear, although the reasons behind its prominence remain a mystery and a critically important one, which needs to be explored by means of in-depth forensic analyses during current and future hate campaigns on different social media platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and others.

**Figure 25:** Total mentions of hate speech against various religious minorities across regions

	Shi'a kafir	Wajib ul Qatal	Choorah or bhangi	Qadiani kafir	Ahmadi kafir	Qadiyani kafir
Sindh	3,037	1,001	437	379	241	209
Punjab	2,589	1,203	734	630	492	357
Balochistan	138	14	0	20	7	0
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	84	67	30	47	25	26

<sup>2</sup> Census 2017. [www.pbs.gov.pk](http://www.pbs.gov.pk)

