

INVESTIGATING ATHEISTIC TENDENCIES AND RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION AMONG PAKISTANI YOUTH: A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY STUDY

Maryam Nadeem

M.Phil Scholar, Szic, PU

Email: maryamnadeem2001f@gmail.com

Hafiz Abdul Basit Khan

Professor, SZIC, PU

Email: basit.szic@pu.edu.pk

Abstract

In recent years, Pakistani youth have exhibited notable shifts in their religious orientations amid increasing exposure to globalization, digital media, and modern education. This study explores the rise of atheistic trends and changing patterns of religious affiliation among young people in Pakistan, aiming to understand the social and intellectual factors driving these transformations. The central research question asks: What factors contribute to the emergence of atheistic or secular tendencies among Pakistani youth, and how do these trends relate to their religious affiliation and practices? Employing a survey-based methodology, data were collected from university students across various academic fields to assess their beliefs, practices, and attitudes toward religion. The findings reveal that while most respondents still identify as religious, a growing minority express doubt, selective religiosity, or disengagement from traditional practices. Education, peer influence, and social media emerged as key factors shaping these views. Although atheistic tendencies remain limited, their increasing visibility highlights a gradual transformation in belief systems among Pakistani youth. The study underscores the need for meaningful dialogue and educational efforts to address the intellectual and spiritual concerns of the younger generation.

Understanding Atheism

Atheism linguistically means 'not a theist' or in other words, not a believer in the existence of a God or gods. The prefix a means none or not, and theism, coming from the word theos, denotes a "belief in the existence of an intervening God or gods". 'Atheism' in most dictionaries is defined as belief that there is no God.¹

Atheism in Arabic word is **al-Ilhād**. According to Ibn Faris, the alphabet lam, hā' and dal (L-H-D) refer to "digress from the straight path". It is said: The man has digressed from the straight path if he deviates from the path of truth and faith.² Al-lahd is a trench (al-shaqq) on the side of a grave at the ground; because it inclines from the middle to the side.³ While Ilhād technically means "inclination and renunciation from the straight path, religion, or truth" as **Ibn Taymiyyah** said:

"Al-Ilhād implies a deviation from something to something in void."⁴

Classical Islamic Worldview

Ilhād in the classical Islamic worldview is in the broadest sense of an absence or lack of belief in the six fundamental beliefs (al-arkān al-sittah). Besides, those who believed in the eternity of the cosmos, no resurrection of the dead, materialists, and naturalists technically also may be considered **Mulhid**

¹ Gordon Stein, "The Meaning of Atheism and Agnosticism," in *An Anthology of Atheism and Rationalism*, ed. Gordon Stein I (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1980), 3.

² *Abi al-Husayn Ahmad Zakariyyā, Mu'jam Maqayis al-Lughah* (Cairo: Dar Hayā', 1949)5/236.

³ *Muhammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manzūr, Lisān al-Arab* (Cairo: Dar Ṣadir, 1955), 3:388-389.

⁴ *Ibn Taymiyyah, Majmū al-Fatāwā* (Medina: Majma al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 12:124.

According to Qur'anic usage of the term, *Ilhād* means to be inclined to something negative or blasphemy, to deviate from something good, or to tend to something negative or blasphemy and such basic meaning occurs in various Qur'anic contexts such as

وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا ۖ وَذُرُوا الْآئِينَ يُلْحِنُونَ فِي أَسْمَائِهِ سَيُجْزَوْنَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ⁵

Translation: "Allah's are the fairest names. Invoke Him by them. And leave the company of those who blaspheme His names. They will be requited for what they do."⁶

Modern Understanding of Atheism

It is a must to distinguish between the modern understanding of atheism, atheism in the worldview of the Qur'an as well as the Right Predecessors, and disbelief based on the way in which the latter is perceived and understood within *aqidah*. Disbelief denotes the personal denial or rejection of any of the six fundamental beliefs (*al-arkān al-sittah*) that are belief in God and His oneness, in angels, in the holy Books, in Prophets, in the Day of Judgement, and in Predestination.

It is stated in the Hadith narrated by Umar when Jibril asks Prophet Muhammad on faith (*īmān*),

قَالَ: فَأَخْبِرْنِي عَنِ الْإِيمَانِ. قَالَ: أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ، وَتُؤْمِنَ بِالْقَدَرِ خَيْرِهِ وَشَرِّهِ⁷

"Inform me about *īmān* (faith)." He (the Messenger of Allah) answered, It is that you believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and in the Last Day, and in fate (*qadar*), both in its good and in its evil aspects."

The rejection of any or all of these would bring one outside the fold of Islam. This is referred to as *kufr* in Arabic, whereas atheism in a broader sense is known as *ilhād* and is a subcategory of *kufr*. Thus, all atheists are considered disbelievers, but not all disbelievers are atheists.

New Atheism

The pejorative term 'New Atheism' emerged between late summer and autumn (August) of 2006 when the three individual authors **Dawkins, Dennett, and Harris** (Hitchens came later) were grouped together.⁸ There are five common features discursively ascribed to New Atheism; newness, aggressive criticism towards religion, promoting scientism and rationalism, promoting secularism and comprehensive media coverage.⁹

The "newness" of new atheism does not lie in their arguments. They have come up with nothing new. Their arguments are the age-old eighteenth century philosophical empiricism, nineteenth century evolutionary biology and twentieth century logical and scientific positivism. The newness is in their agenda which is the fierce hostility against Islam. Ridiculing, jeering and making people sweeping statements by quoting the Quran and Hadith out of context.

Today more than 60% of Europeans consider themselves atheists and now it has become a key feature of the modern world. There is no doubt about the fact that in Muslim World, Atheism is established and widespread due to social media. In many Major cities of the Muslim world especially among the educated segments of society, Atheism is very common. Although, the number of atheists in the Muslim World is too small but it is increasing at an alarming rate. There are many factors that contributed to the rise of atheism in Europe and the same factors are now causing Atheism in the Muslim world.¹⁰

⁵ Al-Araf 7:180

⁶ Pickthall, M. M. (1930). The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an. Surah Al-A'raf, 7:180.

⁷ Collections of Forty » Forty Hadith of an-Nawawi » Hadith 2

⁸ Thomas Zenk, "New Atheism," in The Oxford Handbook of Atheism, 251. 19

⁹ Mohamad Razif et al., "Readings on the Definition and Arguments Towards Atheism," Afkar Vol. 24 Issue 1 (2022): 343-380

¹⁰ Rashid, Dr. (2024). Factors of Atheism as a Challenge to Effective Da'wah: An Analysis and Strategies for their Solution in Contemporary Era.

Atheistic Trends

In today's globalized and cosmopolitan world, Muslim youth display diverse tendencies, some aligned with Islam, others diverging from it. The growing neglect of obligatory practices such as prayer, fasting, mosque attendance, and pilgrimage reflects a growing heedlessness toward the fundamental rituals of Islam. Many even trivialize or mock these acts, viewing them as outdated or insincere.

A prominent trend is the **admiration of Western culture**, which has led many to question and reject anything that contradicts their rational or liberal ideals. They seek unrestricted personal freedom and perceive Western societies as symbols of progress, often disregarding their own religious and cultural values. This mindset, reinforced by secular education, has contributed to the intellectual devaluation of religious scholars and a detachment from Islamic heritage, despite the historical grandeur of Muslim civilization.

Superstitions such as horoscopes, fortune-telling, and astrology have also gained traction among youth, partly glamorized through popular culture like the *Harry Potter* series. Similarly, the pervasive **influence of music, movies, and television**, marked by themes of obscenity and immorality, has normalized behaviours once seen as sinful, such as alcohol consumption and adultery.

Most critically, many young Muslims have distanced themselves from the **Qur'an as a practical guide for life**. Though they revere it as divine revelation, they hesitate to adopt its teachings as their code of conduct. This neglect lies at the root of many **misconceptions about Islam, life, and God**.¹¹

Having discussed some of the existing trends among Muslim Youth, it is required to differentiate among the tendencies leaning towards atheism, and those that are not atheistic in nature, although they might not be in compliance with Islam. **“The tendencies leaning towards Atheism is called Atheistic Trends in this study.”**

As in Hadith the **Prophet ﷺ** said that if a shepherd grazes his herd in between his pasture there is no chance of moving over to another man's land, but if he gazes his sheep on the boundaries it is very likely that his herd will cross the boundaries:

الْحَلَالُ بَيِّنٌ وَالْحَرَامُ بَيِّنٌ، وَبَيْنَهُمَا مُشَبَّهَاتٌ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا كَثِيرٌ مِّنَ النَّاسِ، فَمَنْ اتَّقَى الْمُمْتَبِهَاتِ اسْتَبْرَأَ لِدِينِهِ وَعَرْضِهِ، وَمَنْ وَقَعَ فِي الشُّبُهَاتِ كَرَّاعٍ يَرْعَى حَوْلَ الْحَمَى، يُوْشِكُ أَنْ يُوَاقِعَهُ. أَلَا وَإِنَّ لِكُلِّ مَلِكٍ حَمَى، أَلَا إِنَّ حَمَى اللَّهِ فِي أَرْضِهِ مَحَارِمُهُ، أَلَا وَإِنَّ فِي الْجَسَدِ مُضْغَةً إِذَا صَلَحَتْ صَلَحَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ، وَإِذَا فَسَدَتْ فَسَدَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ. أَلَا وَهِيَ الْقَلْبُ¹²

“That which is lawful is clear and that which is unlawful is clear. Between the two are doubtful matters that a few people have knowledge about. Whoever avoids these doubtful matters absolves himself of blame with respect to his religion and his honour. whoever falls into doubtful things will fall into that which is unlawful, just like a shepherd who grazes his flock too close to a private pasture is liable to have some of his flock stray into it. Every king has a private pasture and Allah's private pasture is what he has prohibited. Verily in the body is a small piece of flesh, that if it is healthy the whole body is healthy, and if it is sick the whole body is sick. That small piece of flesh is the heart”

Likewise atheistic trends lean towards crossing the boundaries and limits placed by Allah, and might result in the total corruption of the heart and rejection of God's existence.

There is a **major kufr** (infidelity) and a **minor kufr**. As Imam Bukhari has said in his Sahih.

¹¹ Survey “ **Augmentation of Atheistic Trends in Youth**” 20-June-2024

¹² Sahih Bukhari, The Book of Belief, Chapter: The superiority of that person who leaves all doubtful (unclear) things for the sake of his religion: 52

أَرَيْتُ النَّارَ فَإِذَا أَكْثَرُ أَهْلِهَا النَّسَاءُ يَكْفُرْنَ " قِيلَ لَيْكْفُرْنَ بِاللَّهِ قَالَ " يَكْفُرْنَ الْعَشِيرَ، وَيَكْفُرْنَ الْإِحْسَانَ، لَوْ أَحْسَنْتَ إِلَى إِحْدَاهُنَّ الدَّهْرَ ثُمَّ رَأَتْ مِنْكَ شَيْئًا قَالَتْ مَا رَأَيْتُ مِنْكَ خَيْرًا قَطُّ¹³

Kufrin doona kufrin (minor infidelity other than major infidelity) the difference between the two is that major shirk and kufr throw the person out of the fold of Islam whereas the minor does not. There is atheism and atheistic trends in the society. Atheism takes one out of the fold of Islam. But Atheistic trends keep the doer of those actions within the fold of Islam. So

Atheistic Trends could be defined as

1. All the actions for which God or the Prophet have used the word shirk or kufr.
2. Actions for which the doer does not remain a Momin (A believer) at the time of committing them.
3. Not observing the five pillars of Islam.

Atheistic Trends mentioned in Quran and Sunnah:

The Quran and Sunnah seem to be very clear on the trends that were to prevail in the coming times. Therefore they are mentioned clearly in the divine text. Whereas Islam does not throw people out of its folds even on certain major sins, but it does see certain sins similar to kufr. They are being called the atheistic trends in this study. Since they lead one of the major kufr which results in taking one out of the folds of Islam. These actions committed, basically corrupts the heart, and according to hadith **if the heart is corrupted the whole body is corrupted.**¹⁴

Some of the actions that are prevalent among the youth today are mentioned in Quran and Sunnah as minor kufr (infidelity). They are briefly mentioned below

1. Taking Vain Desire as God: The Nafs Ammara

Nafs Ammara is the voice from within that keeps stirring up human desires and goads a person into them, making him do as he wishes even when the religious or social requirements are on the contrary.¹⁵ For Example, Keep sleeping when it's time to wake up for dawn prayer, eat the unlawful meat when fruits and vegetables are readily available.

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ أَفَأَنْتَ تَكُونُ عَلَيْهِ وَكِيلاً

Have you seen him who has taken as his God his own vain desire? Would you then be a watcher over him?¹⁶

2. Magic:

According to Imam Raghbi Isphanai, magic has two meanings:

- 1) Deception and Imaginations, which are devoid of reality- like sleight of hand
- 2) Attracting the Satans by special means and seeking assistance from them.¹⁷

The Quran calls it kufr (infidelity) by declaring that,

وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكٍ سُلَيْمَانَ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَٰكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا يُعَلِّمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ.....وَلَيْسَ مَا شَرَوْا بِهِ أَنفُسَهُمْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ¹⁸

“They followed what the devils gave out in the lifetime of Sulaiman. Sulaiman did not disbelieve, but the devil disbelieved, teaching men magic...”

¹³ Sahih Bukhari, The Book of Belief, Chapter : To be ungrateful to one's husband. And disbelief is of (different grades) lesser (or greater) degrees :29

¹⁴ Mishkat-al- Masabih, The book of basic transactions , Chapter: Earning, and Seeking what is Lawful - Section 1,2762 «وَأَنَّ فِي الْجَسَدِ مُضْغَةً إِذَا صَلَحَتْ صَلَحَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ وَإِذَا فَسَدَتْ فَسَدَ الْجَسَدُ كُلُّهُ أَلَا وَهِيَ الْقَلْبُ

¹⁵ Al-Ghazali, **Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship**,(The Islamic Foundation, Mark feild Conference Center ,1983), p54

¹⁶ The Qur'an : 25:43

¹⁷ Isphani, R.I., **Mufridat ul Qur'an**, (trans: Feroz Puri,A.), (Islamic Academy), p489

¹⁸ The Qur'an,2:102

3. Astrology and Fortune Telling:

Fortune telling is prohibited in Islam, the prohibition of fortune-telling in Islam is based on preserving the pure monotheistic belief in Allah's sovereignty and avoiding practices that lead to superstition, deception, and deviation from Islamic teachings,

مَنْ أَتَى حَائِضًا أَوْ امْرَأَةً فِي نُبْرَاهَا أَوْ كَاهِنًا فَصَتَفَهُ بِمَا يَقُولُ فَقَدْ كَفَرَ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ¹⁹

“Whoever goes to a fortune teller, and certifies what he says, has disbelieved in what is revealed on Muhammad ﷺ”

4. Heedlessness in paying Zakah:

Zakah is an obligatory charity due on every Muslim who comes up to the level of Nisaab (the cut off amount from where zakah becomes due).²⁰

الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ كَافِرُونَ²¹

“And woe to the disbelievers, those who give not zakah and they are disbelievers in hereafter”

5. Riya (Show Off):

The general rule given by Islam is to perform good deeds secretly, only for the sake of Allah. Showing off ones good deeds is a form of Shirk (sharing Allah's rights). The action that was supposed to be done for the pleasure of Allah alone is done to gain praises from friends, family and society. “It is narrated in the Musnad of Imam Ahmed and At-Tabarani that the messenger Muhammad ﷺ said:

إِنَّ أَخْوَفَ مَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ الشِّرْكَ الْأَصْغَرَ: الرِّيَاءَ²²

The thing I fear most for my Ummah is *ash-shirk al-khafi* (the hidden shirk). The Sahaba then asked him: What is the hidden Shirk? He said: Ar-Riyaa (showing off)”.

6. Missing Fardh Salah (The Obligatory Prayer):

Allah has ordained five daily prayers upon Muslims and whoever misses them becomes an infidel according to Hadith. Prophet ﷺ said:

الْعَهْدُ الَّذِي بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمُ الصَّلَاةُ فَمَنْ تَرَكَهَا فَقَدْ كَفَرَ²³

“The difference between us (Muslims) and them (the infidels) is Salah (the prayer). whoever leaves it has definitely committed kufr”.

7. The Pillars of Islam

There are the five basic rituals of Islam, which differentiate a Muslim from a non-Muslim.

" بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى خَمْسٍ شَهَادَةِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ، وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ، وَالْحَجِّ، وَصَوْمِ رَمَضَانَ " ²⁴

“Islam is based on five things ; declaring that there is no God but ALLAH and that Muhammad ﷺ is the messenger of ALLAH, the establishment of Salah, the payment of Zakah, the Hajj and Saum(fasting) in the month of Ramadan”

Umer once said that I intend to send some people to all Islamic areas and check those people upon whom Hajj has become obligatory and they still have not performed it. I want to impose Jiziyah (tax for Non-Muslims) upon them because they are **not Muslims**.²⁵

¹⁹ Sunan Ibn Maja, The Book of Purification and its Sunnah, Chapter: Prohibition of sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman : 639 "

²⁰ **Taleem ul Haq (Teachings of Islam)**, An Authentic Compilation of the five Fundamentals of Islam, p 10 www.islamicbulletin.com

²¹ The Qur'an : 41:7

²² **Bulugh-Al-Maraam** , The Comprehensive Book, 1527

²³ Tirmidhi, Kitab-ul- Iman, baab ma jaa'a fee tarkis salah: 2621

²⁴ Sahih Bukhari , The Book of Iman, Chapter, baab bunyal islamu ala khams#8

²⁵ Zahbi, Ahmed Bin Usman, **Tareekh ul Islam wa wafiyat ul Mshaheer wl A'laam**, (Berut: Lebnan Dar ul Maghrib al Islami,2003), p 94

If someone is not accepting these pillars of Islam denying them completely or not following them it means that they are either non-Muslims or near to be non-Muslims

8. Adultery, Theft, Alcohol

All the three traits mentioned above are a negation of Iman (faith). The Prophet is reported to have said:

لَا يَزْنِي الزَّانِي حِينَ يَزْنِي وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ وَلَا يَسْرِقُ السَّارِقُ حِينَ يَسْرِقُ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ وَلَا يَشْرَبُ الْخَمْرَ حِينَ يَشْرَبُهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ وَلَا يَنْتَهَبُ نَهْبَةً دَاتٍ شَرَفٍ يَرْفَعُ النَّاسُ إِلَيْهَا أَبْصَارَهُمْ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ²⁶

“A fornicator is not a believer at the time of fornication, a thief is not a believer at the time of theft, A drinker is not a believer at the time of drinking”

Atheistic Trends and Religious Affiliation among Pakistani Youth: Current Insights

Understanding atheistic trends and religious affiliation among Pakistani youth requires examining the interplay of tradition, education, social change, and minority experiences. While Pakistan remains a deeply religious society, recent research highlights nuanced shifts in youth perspectives, the influence of secular and liberal ideas, and the challenges faced by religious minorities.

Patterns of Religious Affiliation and Identity

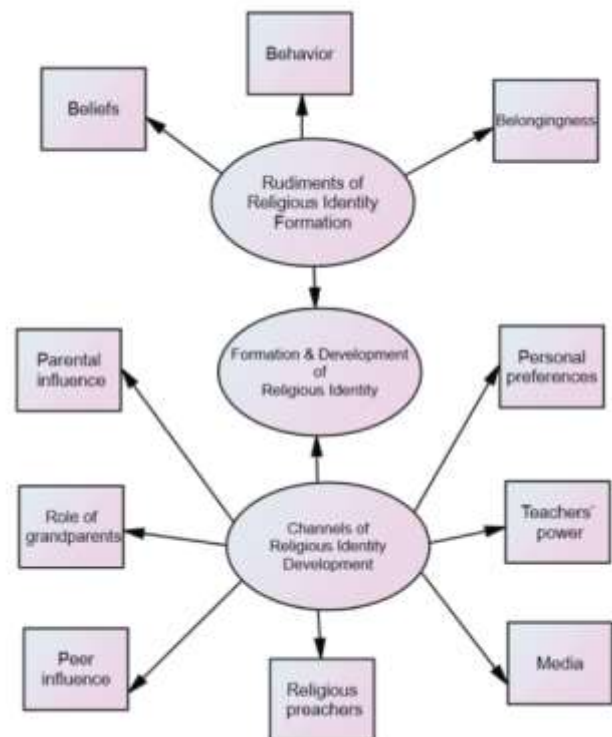
Religious identity remains a dominant marker among Pakistani youth, often surpassing ethnic or national identity in significance. Most adolescents and young adults form their religious identity through family, peers, religious leaders, and media, with a strong tendency toward traditional beliefs and practices.

A relevant study conducted in 2021 explored the formation and development of religious identity among Pakistani adolescents aged 15–17 years. Using qualitative interviews, the researchers found that adolescent religious identity was primarily shaped by belief, behaviour, and belongingness, and strongly influenced by parents, grandparents, peers, religious preachers, teachers, and media. Most participants were found to be in the foreclosure state of religious identity, meaning they had adopted religious beliefs without personal exploration or questioning. This suggests that during early adolescence, religiosity is largely inherited and socially reinforced rather than critically examined.²⁷

However, as individuals transition into adulthood and enter university environments, exposure to diverse perspectives, rationalist ideas, and secular spaces often encourages questioning and re-evaluation of previously held beliefs.

Atheism, Secularism, and Liberal Religious Trends

While atheism is still rare and often stigmatized, there is evidence of its growing presence, particularly among university students in urban centres. Social media and digital platforms are



²⁶ Sunan-an-Nisai, The Book of Cutting off the Hand of the Thief, Chapter: The Seriousness of Theft: 4870

²⁷ Batool, S., & Ghayas, S. (2021). Religious Identity Formation and Development in Adolescents of Pakistan. *Foundation University Journal of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.33897/fujp.v5i1.216>.

key channels for the spread of atheistic and secular ideas, though these trends are often met with resistance and concern from religious and educational authorities.

Atheism has now become a serious ideological and moral challenge for Muslim societies. We live in a rapidly changing society, where protecting Islamic beliefs is particularly challenging for the new young generation and the modern educated class. Atheists use all possible and available means and tools, such as print, electronic, and most notably social media, to propagate their ideas and beliefs. Using these resources, they are targeting the youth to alienate them from Islam and its teachings. Since those affected are mostly university students.²⁸ Previous studies have indicated that Pakistani youth are not inherently inclined toward radical or purely secular ideologies. One study found that when given a choice among radical religious, Western secular, and liberal religious ideas, young people preferred the latter, suggesting a growing desire for a more flexible and inclusive interpretation of faith. This preference highlights that the shift among youth is not necessarily a direct movement toward atheism but a search for meaning within a more rational, humanistic framework of religion. The studies reflect many university students express critical attitudes toward traditional religious authority while still valuing spiritual or ethical principles.²⁹ As religiosity declines and youth drift toward secular or atheistic orientations, they may lose a key source of emotional balance, community, and coping mechanisms. This could increase vulnerability to stress, anxiety, and existential confusion. Therefore, the rise of atheistic or non-religious attitudes isn't just a sociological or ideological trend it also has psychological implications.³⁰

A Case Study of Pakistan Youth

A survey was conducted to investigate the evolving patterns of religiosity and the emergence of atheistic tendencies among Pakistani youth, examining the social, educational, and ideological factors contributing to this shift. This study is important, firstly to understand the religious affiliation of youth and to explore the factors that are alienating youth from their religion, and secondly to initiate a way forward to counter the arguments so the people of Pakistan remained intact to their inherited religion Islam. It doesn't directly measure "atheism" but it maps the decline in religious commitment and rise in secular/individualist attitudes that can lead toward atheism or religious skepticism.

Research Methodology:

The tool employed for generating responses was a questionnaire filled in through **google form** based on Survey of **young candidates** who are students of different educational institutes. All the questions created are **multiple choices answers**. The link of questionnaires is then being spread through WhatsApp and other social media platforms to be filled by the respondents as shown in Figure 1.

²⁸ Muhammad, S., Qureshi, J., Ul, A., Altaf, H., & Rajput, S. (2024). Reasons for Promotion of Atheism in Pakistani Universities and their Remedy (A Special Study of Islamabad Universities). *AL-HIDAYAH*. <https://doi.org/10.52700/alhidayah.v6i1.88>.

²⁹ Sajjad, F., Christie, D., & Taylor, L. (2017). De-radicalizing Pakistani society: the receptivity of youth to a liberal religious worldview. *Journal of Peace Education*, 14, 195 - 214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400201.2017.1304901>.

³⁰ Nadeem, M., Ali, A., & Buzdar, M. (2017). The Association Between Muslim Religiosity and Young Adult College Students' Depression, Anxiety, and Stress. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 56, 1170-1179. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-016-0338-0>.

Augmentation of Atheistic Trends in Youth.

I am Maryam Nadeem, currently pursuing a Bachelor's in Islamic Studies at Sheikh Zayed Islamic Center, Punjab

docs.google.com

Assalamualaikum!
I hope to find you well

Kindly Fill out my research questionnaire and share it with others. Your honest responses are greatly appreciated.

Link to questionnaire:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSccJhZB1CemEqa-05TAJBxf4-E3J0FHIAgAUHm-9hKNUbL5vQ/viewform>

Thank You .

Regards, Maryam Nadeem

11:24 am

Fig: 3.1The Link of Questionnaire

Research Design:

The study employed a quantitative survey design to examine atheistic trends and religious affiliations among Pakistani youth. The sample comprised young male and female students enrolled in government, semi-government, and private universities across various regions of Pakistan, including the University of the Punjab (Lahore), University of Gujrat, Beaconhouse National University, and FAST University Islamabad. A total of **205 respondents** participated in the study, selected on a random basis.

The demographic profile indicates that the majority of respondents (92.7%) belonged to the **18–24** age group, followed by 5.9% aged **23–30** and 1.5% aged **above 30 years**. **Female participants** represented **66.3%** of the sample, while **male participants** comprised **33.7%**. Most respondents were enrolled in **bachelor's degree programs**, and the majority came from **government universities** and **middle-class families**.

Sections:

The questionnaire was divided into **Six main sections** to examine different aspects of religiosity and atheistic trends among Pakistani youth. The first section covered demographic factors. The second section explored the importance of religion. The third section assessed basic religious beliefs. The fourth section evaluated core religious practices like prayer, fasting, zakat, Hajj, and Qur'an recitation. The fifth section analyzed atheistic attitudes and influencing factors, including views on music, astrology, hijab, personal freedom, LGBTQ+ rights, and secular societies, The Sixth section analyze the impact of home, education, peers, and social media.

Objectives of Survey

- To understand the Religious Affiliation of Muslim youth.
- To gauge the rise of Atheistic Trends among Youth.
- To explore the factors that are shaping youth mind towards Atheism.

Data Collection:

The data collection was involved into three phases. First, **brainstorming, creating questions** and its suitable possible answer for the questionnaire. Following this, I tested the questionnaire by sending it to a random **test group** of approximately 10 students. Once finalized, I distributed the questionnaire link through WhatsApp and other social media platforms to respondents. Each participant was expected to complete the questionnaire in 5 to 7 minutes. Finally, **reviewing and analyzing** the data collected, Data collection begins upon receiving the first response and concludes upon reaching 205 participants, it comes out with the conclusion. The target is to gain 205 responses from youth adults without discrimination of males and females. The time spent to spread the questionnaire to the respondents is about 1 week.

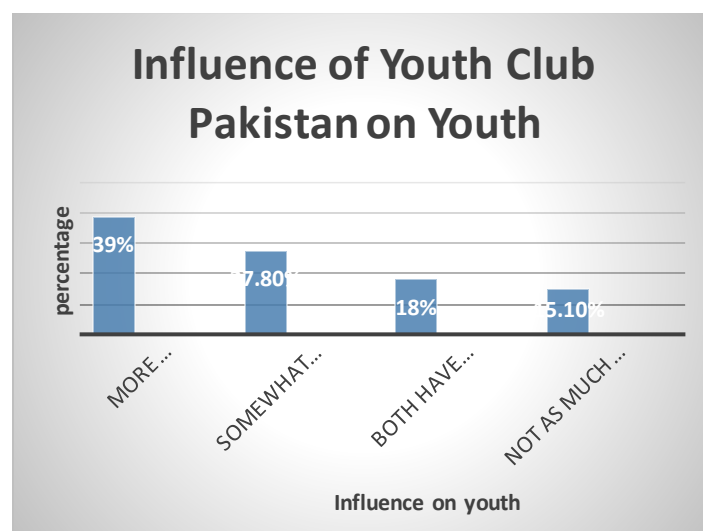
Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Importance of Religion in Youth

The questionnaire sought to evaluate the **significance of religion** in the lives of Pakistani Muslim youth, who were expected to regard religion as a central element of life due to their upbringing in a predominantly Muslim society. The results, however, presented a more nuanced perspective. While the vast majority of respondents (93.2%) considered religion *very important*, 4.9% viewed it as *moderately important*, and a small proportion (0.5%) regarded it as *not very important*. This variation suggests that although religion continues to hold a dominant position in youth identity, its influence is gradually diminishing among a minority segment. Such a shift may be linked to changing social values, exposure to secular ideas, and a perceived disconnection between religious teachings and modern life.

When asked about **seeking guidance from religious figures**, 67.3% of respondents stated that they had done so, while 21% reported rarely consulting religious authorities, and 11.7% said they never sought such guidance. Regarding satisfaction with religious responses, 54.1% expressed satisfaction, 33.2% indicated infrequent satisfaction, 9.3% were dissatisfied, and 3.4% had never consulted any scholar. These figures highlight a growing gap between the religious institutions and the intellectual or spiritual needs of modern youth.

A significant finding emerged concerning the **choice of religious authorities**. When presented with the comparison between traditional scholars and contemporary preachers, 39% of respondents preferred the guidance of **modern religious groups** such as *Youth Club Pakistan*, and 27% reported finding them relatively more relatable and engaging than traditional clerics.



This trend reflects a generational shift toward scholars who contextualize Islamic teachings to modern realities and communicate in a language accessible to youth. The declining interest in traditional clergy and the moderate religious engagement observed among some respondents collectively indicate a broader transformation in how religion is perceived—transitioning from rigid adherence to a more personalized, context-driven understanding of faith.

Basic Religious Beliefs of Muslim Youth

Youth's engagement with religious practices holds paramount significance as it shapes their personal development, ethical values, and social interactions. Religious practices provide a framework for young individuals to connect with their spirituality, cultivate a sense of purpose, and navigate the challenges of modern life while upholding moral integrity. These practices often encompass rituals, prayers, ethical guidelines, and community engagement, offering a holistic approach to well-being. Religious practices empower youth to make ethical decisions, promoting empathy, kindness, and altruism in their interactions with others³¹. New technologies of social media, mobile phones and mobile internet interact with public discourse and everyday practice to shape religious identity.³²

The survey aimed to evaluate the **fundamental religious beliefs of Pakistani Muslim students**, revealing notable variations in conviction despite unanimous identification as Muslims. While the majority affirmed traditional beliefs, a small but significant proportion expressed uncertainty or disbelief regarding key tenets of Islam.

Regarding **belief in a divine being** (Allah), 93.2% affirmed their faith, 4.9% were unsure, and 2% denied the existence of a Creator. Similarly, 77.6% acknowledged the need for a divine being, while 21% reported never contemplating the concept, and 1.5% denied such necessity altogether. These responses suggest that some individuals may associate with Islam culturally rather than through firm theological conviction.

Nearly 97% of participants believed in a divine creator of the universe, though 1.5% considered scientific or alternative explanations, and 1% remained undecided. Concerning belief in the afterlife, 93.2% affirmed faith in life after death, 4.4% were uncertain, and 2.4% denied it outright—an alarming finding given the centrality of this belief in Islam.

The Qur'an emphasizes the inevitability of death and accountability in the hereafter:

“Every soul will taste death, and you will only be given your [full] compensation on the Day of Resurrection...”³³

These results highlight a gradual weakening of traditional religious convictions among segments of Muslim youth. Although most continue to identify as Muslims, their uncertainty regarding core doctrines points toward a shift in belief structures influenced by cultural, intellectual, and global factors.

Basic Religious Practices

This section examines the extent to which young Muslims in Pakistan observe essential religious practices, including prayer, fasting, zakat (charity), Hajj, and Quran recitation. The findings reveal varying degrees of adherence, suggesting a gradual shift in the religious behavior of contemporary Muslim youth.

Prayer(Salah):

Only 31.7% of respondents reported performing the five daily prayers regularly, 38.5% prayed

³¹ Farooq, Yasir, and Inamullah Wattu. “The Socioeconomic Sphere of Muslim Women-A Critical Study on John L. Esposito’s Views.” *Journal of Religious Studies*2, no. 1 (2018): 58–69. <https://jrs.uoch.edu.pk/index.php/journal3/article/view/97>.

³² Schoemaker, E. (2016). Digital faith: social media and the enactment of religious identity in Pakistan. . <https://doi.org/10.21953/lse.66aarylh6lqi>.

³³ (Qur'an, 3:185)

most of the time, 22.4% prayed rarely, and 7.3% did not pray at all. This decline in regular observance of Salah, despite its central role in Islam, reflects a weakening sense of religious discipline. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ warned, *“There is nothing between a person and disbelief except abandoning Salah.”* Such neglect underscores a growing trend of secular attitudes among youth in an otherwise religious society.

Fasting(Sawm):

A large majority (88.3%) of respondents observed fasting during Ramadan consistently, while 10.7% fasted occasionally and 1% rarely. Although fasting remains widely practiced, partial observance indicates a variance in religious commitment and spiritual discipline among young Muslims.

Zakat(Charity):

Most participants (85.9%) confirmed that they would give zakat when financially eligible, 8.8% responded “probably yes,” 4.9% were uncertain, and 0.5% stated they would not. Despite strong compliance overall, uncertainty and reluctance among a minority reflect a casual attitude toward one of Islam’s five pillars.

Hajj(Pilgrimage):

An overwhelming 93.7% expressed a definite desire to perform Hajj if given the means, 3.7% said “probably yes,” 1.5% were unsure, and 1% denied the intention entirely. The Prophet ﷺ emphasized the obligation of Hajj for those who can afford it, warning of its neglect. Although enthusiasm remains high, even a small percentage of disinterest is notable in a Muslim-majority society.

QuranRecitation:

Only 26.8% of respondents had recited the Quran on the day of the survey, 43.9% within the past week, 13.2% occasionally, and 15.6% could not recall the last time they read it. These figures highlight a diminishing spiritual engagement and weakened connection with the Quran among a segment of the youth.

Overall, while most Pakistani youth continue to identify with Islam and uphold certain practices, there is a discernible decline in consistent observance of fundamental religious duties. Many appear to engage in rituals more as cultural traditions than acts of faith. As Abdullah bin Abbas (رضي الله عنه) stated, *“Islam is based on three pillars: Tawheed, Prayer, and Fasting in Ramadan; whoever abandons any one of them becomes a disbeliever.”* The findings thus reflect a broader shift toward secularism and a waning sense of spiritual accountability among young Muslims, influenced by changing social values and global exposure.

Atheistic Trends in Muslim Youth

The findings reveal a gradual emergence of atheistic and secular tendencies among Muslim youth in Pakistani universities. Many young people increasingly prioritize personal freedom and modern social values over traditional Islamic teachings. This is evident in behaviors such as listening to music, neglecting hijab, adopting slogans like *“my body, my choice,”* showing tolerance toward LGBTQ+ rights, and believing in horoscopes and astrology. Such trends indicate a shift where religion is often regarded as a personal matter rather than a social obligation, with secular ideals seen as synonymous with progress and modernity.

Listening to Music

A significant proportion of youth (32.2%) frequently listen to music, while 35.7% do so occasionally. In conservative Islamic interpretations, music is often discouraged for diverting attention from spiritual pursuits. However, among young Muslims, it has become a medium of self-expression and social connection, reflecting a desire to align with modern cultural norms rather than traditional religious restrictions.

Belief in Horoscope and Superstitions

While 65.4% of respondents rejected astrology and related practices, 16.1% expressed occasional belief, and 13.7% affirmed such superstitions. This indicates a departure from Islamic monotheism, which strictly prohibits attributing divine influence to celestial bodies or charms. The growing acceptance of astrology and amulets signifies a weakening grasp of core theological principles.

Hijaab and Pardah

Most respondents (85.4%) acknowledged hijab as a form of protection for women, yet 10.7% viewed it as a personal choice rather than a religious duty. A small minority (3.9%) considered it discriminatory or outdated. Such perceptions, particularly among students in private universities and elite circles, reflect the influence of Western fashion ideals and the increasing view of hijab as a cultural rather than religious practice.

My Body, My Choice Narrative

Approximately 7.3% of students fully agreed with the statement “*My body, my choice,*” while 19% remained neutral. This slogan emphasizes individual autonomy, contrasting sharply with Islamic teachings that regard the human body as a trust from Allah. The acceptance of this notion reflects the internalization of secular and feminist discourses prioritizing self-ownership over divine authority.

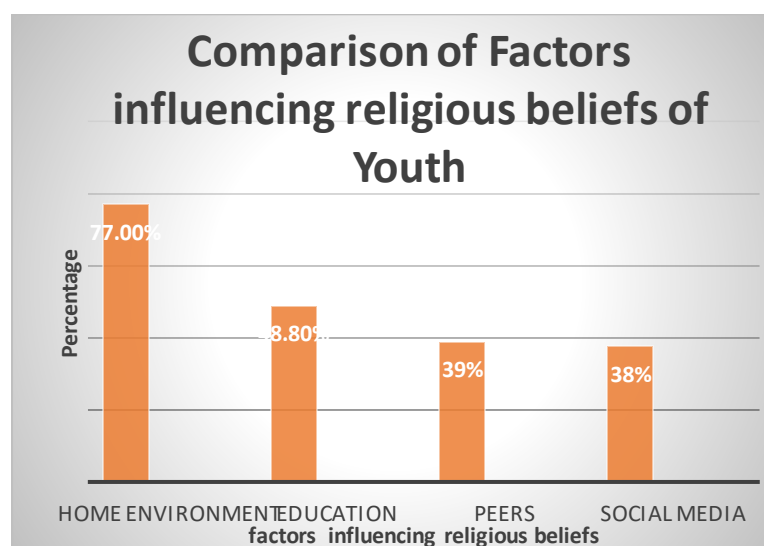
LGBTQ + Rights

Around 26.8% of youth either support or remain neutral toward LGBTQ+ rights—positions that conflict with Islamic moral teachings. This reflects a growing alignment with global secular values emphasizing tolerance and personal freedom. Exposure to Western media and liberal education appears to normalize such views among Pakistani youth, leading to ideological dissonance between faith and social beliefs.

Admiration of Non-Religious Societies

Roughly 20% of respondents expressed admiration for societies without religious boundaries, perceiving them as more peaceful, stable, and prosperous. This outlook suggests that many young Muslims equate secular governance and moral relativism with societal success, contributing to a gradual ideological drift from traditional Islamic frameworks.

Factors Influencing Religious Beliefs of Youth



Religious beliefs among youth are shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including parental upbringing, home environment, education, peer influence, social media exposure, and societal

norms. When these influences align with Islamic values, they foster a strong sense of religiosity; however, when distant from religion, they may encourage secular or irreligious tendencies. This section explores four key factors identified through the survey.

Home Environment

The majority of respondents (77.6%) reported that the home environment plays a major role in shaping their religious orientation, while 18% viewed it as moderately influential. These findings underscore the home's critical role in nurturing or diminishing religious identity. The Prophet ﷺ said, *"Every child is born on the Fitrah; it is his parents who make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian."* Thus, a religiously nurturing home, guided by parental example and consistent practice, strengthens a youth's attachment to Islamic teachings, whereas a secular home atmosphere may lead to detachment from faith.

Education

Nearly half of the respondents (48.8%) identified education as a major influence on their religious beliefs, with 26.8% viewing it as moderately important. Educational institutions play a dual role: they can reinforce religious values through balanced curricula or, conversely, promote secularism when religion is sidelined. Integrating Islamic teachings with modern education can help students harmonize faith with intellectual development.

Peer Influence

Peers and companions also emerged as significant factors, with 39% rating them as having a major role and 35.1% as moderate. Peer interactions in universities expose students to diverse ideas that can either strengthen or weaken their religious convictions. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of righteous companionship: *"Be with those who are true in words and deeds."* Likewise, the Prophet ﷺ likened good and bad company to a perfume seller and a blacksmith — illustrating how friends can elevate or erode one's faith.

Social Media

Social media has a strong impact on religious orientation, as 37.6% of respondents reported being strongly influenced by it, and 48.8% somewhat influenced. While digital platforms provide access to religious knowledge and guidance, they also facilitate the spread of misinformation, leading to confusion and skepticism among youth. The unregulated nature of online content allows distorted interpretations of religion to circulate freely, challenging traditional sources of religious authority.

A comparative analysis of these four factors shows that the home environment exerts the greatest influence, followed by education, peers, and social media.

Religious Diversity in Pakistan

Findings show that 30.7% of respondents believe religious diversity in Pakistan is adequately represented and respected, while 56.6% think it is only partially accepted. However, 12.7% feel that religious diversity is not accepted at all. This limited acceptance discourages individuals with non-religious or atheistic beliefs from expressing themselves openly. Given Pakistan's socio-religious context—where Islam plays a central role in cultural and legal frameworks—social pressures and blasphemy laws contribute to the concealment of dissenting beliefs.

CONCLUSION OF THE SURVEY

Survey findings reveal a notable **shift in religious adherence among young adults** in Pakistan. While a substantial number of youth continue to hold strong religious beliefs, there is a growing segment expressing **uncertainty or outright disbelief**. This trend is reflected in their religious practices as well; though many young people continue to pray regularly, others have abandoned these practices altogether, including key religious duties such as zakat, Hajj, and fasting.

Despite the country's Islamic foundation, there is a discernible decline in religious observance among the younger generation. Many youths now engage in religious practices more out of cultural tradition than genuine faith. This shift is evident in the waning observance of the Five Pillars of Islam, signaling **a move towards secularism and a growing inclination towards atheism.**

Moreover, cultural practices and **social norms are evolving.** For instance, music consumption has become common, support for LGBTQ+ rights is increasingly visible, and there is a notable decrease in the emphasis placed on traditional Islamic teachings such as the hijab. The sentiment of "my body, my choice" is gaining traction, highlighting a broader desire for personal freedom and autonomy that conflicts with conventional religious constraints.

In Pakistan, some young people increasingly believe that secular societies are more stable and peaceful. **Despite strict blasphemy laws** and governmental control that limit freedom of expression and religious choice, a notable minority of youth openly declare their atheism, highlighting the growing complexity of this trend

In conclusion, while atheistic and secular trends remain a minority, their increasing visibility and acceptance among Muslim youth warrant serious consideration. It is crucial for religious leaders and scholars to address these concerns thoughtfully and promptly. Failure to do so may risk the erosion of traditional values and the transformation of the societal fabric, potentially leading to a more secular society.

Recommendations

- A strong parent and children relationship should be established to monitor and support children's religious development.
- Teachers must be trained to address modern issues such as evolution, feminism, Islamophobia, and LGBTQ+ rights with clarity and from an Islamic perspective.
- Religious leaders should present a compassionate image of Islam, while mosques should function as inclusive community centers that actively engage youth.
- Social and electronic media should be effectively used to promote authentic Islamic teachings through creative and youth-friendly content.