

## UNDER FIRE: THE REALITY OF JOURNALIST SAFETY IN PAKISTAN'S MEDIA LANDSCAPE

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### Abstract

Journalists hold a crucial position in shaping a society that values open dialogue, factual accuracy, and the search for truth, rather than one driven by misinformation, bias, or unchecked authority. Because of this role, they frequently find themselves exposed to serious risks and therefore require specific forms of protection. This study reviews the patterns of lethal attacks on journalists over the past twenty years and evaluates how current legal and policy measures can be strengthened to offer greater security. The persistence of impunity—often linked to the politically sensitive nature of journalistic work—appears to be the primary factor behind continued violence against journalists. The article concludes that an improved protection strategy must involve raising the importance of journalist safety both domestically and internationally, ensuring that accountability and preventive measures are addressed at higher institutional levels.

The safety of journalists refers to the capacity of media workers to gather, produce, and disseminate information without encountering physical harm or moral intimidation. Many journalists face threats and violence simply for exercising their fundamental right to express and report freely.

Based on UNESCO's research priorities concerning journalist safety, the study investigates the perceptions and experiences of Pakistani journalists working in high-risk environments: how they understand security challenges and whether they actively reduce their exposure to danger. The findings indicate that harassment from both governmental and non-governmental actors and psychological stress, including trauma, are the most frequently reported threats. Regions such as Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas were seen as particularly hazardous. Although participants claimed that they take precautions, their reported behaviors suggest that some safety measures are not consistently practiced. The journalists recommended professional safety training, policy development and enforcement, risk evaluation, counseling services, and other initiatives aimed at improving protection mechanisms.

From the journalist's safety perspective, in Islamabad during a workshop, it was emphasized that the phrase 'a dead body cannot file a story' highlights the severe threats faced by journalists in Pakistan, particularly those reporting on crimes and conflicts in contentious areas. Journalists encounter numerous dangers while exercising their fundamental right to freedom of expression, including murder, abduction, violence, hostage taking, and harassment both online and offline, and

threats. Given this context, there is an urgent need to implement protective measures and accountability systems to safeguard the press.

According to the World Press Freedom (WPF) report of 2025, the state of press freedom and the environment for journalism in Pakistan is considered extremely precarious. To mitigate risks during fieldwork, journalists should prioritize their safety by understanding local conditions, traveling with colleagues and support staff, and keeping mobile phones equipped with emergency numbers. Additionally, they should be aware of potential threats and conduct research, travel in teams, utilize tracking devices, and develop emergency plans. It is crucial to inform editors and trusted colleagues about risks, and if necessary, consider temporary or permanent changes in assignments or locations. This study highlights the various dangers faced by journalists in Pakistan and advises them on how to reduce these risks and concerns based on the recommended strategies.

This situation is not only found in Pakistan but also in developed countries. In order to improve the working conditions of journalists, these abuses and crimes have been extensively documented in authoritative reports released by the media, non-governmental organizations, and human rights defenders.

## INTRODUCTION

Globally for the protection of journalists following organization & institutes like UNESCO's Intergovernmental Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), CMDS, Reporters sans frontières(RSF) or Reporters Without Borders, International News Safety Institute (INSI), Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), National Press Photographers Association (NPPA), A global coalition of news organizations (ACOS Alliance), Justice for Journalists Foundation (JFJ), Free Press Unlimited, European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, The Rory Peck Trust, international News Safety Institute, International Press Institute, Index on Censorship, European Federation of Journalists, The Association of European Journalists (AEJ) are working but here the objective of this study is to understand the environment in Pakistan, the measures that have been implemented so far, their outcomes, the extent of improvements in journalist safety, and the roles played by media organizations and the state.

Journalists are pivotal in cultivating a society that prioritizes open dialogue regarding facts and the quest for truth, rather than one founded on speculation, bias, and the unrestrained exertion of authority. Consequently, journalists frequently find themselves in perilous situations and warrant enhanced

protection. This article analyzes the nature of lethal assaults on journalists over the past twenty years and explores how existing legal and policy frameworks can be optimized or reformed to ensure greater protection.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon of impunity, often stemming from the politicized context of journalistic endeavors, is identified as a primary factor contributing to the ongoing violence against journalists. It is concluded that a crucial component of a strategy aimed at enhancing the protection of journalists involves 'elevating' the matter across various dimensions: shifting prevention and accountability from local to central authorities within national jurisdictions, while concurrently increasing international involvement in addressing this issue.<sup>2</sup>

The safety of journalists is vital as it safeguards press freedom, which is fundamental for an informed public dialogue and a healthy democracy. Threats, intimidation, or violence against journalists silence important voices, obstruct transparency, and enable corruption and the misuse of power to continue. By protecting journalists, we ensure that the public receives unbiased information and can hold authorities and institutions responsible.

The protection of journalists and independent journalism is not merely a professional issue; it is a collective responsibility. Journalism profoundly influences society and plays a crucial role in

promoting democracy, human rights, and ensuring accountability among those in power.

Although Pakistan's constitution provides assurances for freedom of speech, expression, and the press, journalists are still frequently restricted by legal and institutional obstacles that hinder their professional responsibilities. Under Article 19 of the Constitution, press freedom is allowed but with "reasonable restrictions imposed by law," especially concerning national security, defense, or religion. These interpretations have resulted in limitations on media content considered offensive to public decency, moral values, or the state religion, Islam.

At the same time, incidents of kidnappings, physical attacks, harassment, unlawful detentions, and even murders of journalists have continued to increase. Moreover, government authorities have intensified their pressure on media organizations and editors in order to suppress critical reporting and silence dissenting voices.

The lack of political will in Pakistan to improve journalist safety, along with insufficient governmental efforts to foster press freedom, indicates that journalists will continue to endure the consequences of diminishing press freedom in the future. It is imperative to tackle the issue of press freedom in conjunction with journalist safety across various platforms to reinforce the democratic framework of Pakistan.

According to the index, published to coincide with World Press Freedom Day, Pakistan now ranks 152 out of 180 countries, compared to its standing at 150 in last year's index.<sup>4</sup>

In its country profile, RSF said that since its founding in 1947, Pakistan has "oscillated between civil society's quest for greater press freedom and a political reality in which the political-military elite retains broad control over the media".<sup>5</sup>

"It is a grim thought that on the world press freedom day today Pakistan, according to the 'Reporters Without Borders' has earned the dubious distinctions of joining the ranks of those 42 countries where either there is no press freedom at all or if there is some semblance of it the profession of journalism has become most dangerous occupation," said Mr. Babar in a statement on the eve of World Press Freedom Day 2025.<sup>6</sup>

Journalists in Pakistan currently encounter numerous safety challenges as part of their professional responsibilities. They are exposed to threats of murder, kidnapping, physical assault, various forms of violence, and persistent intimidation. According to data from a UNESCO observatory report, a total of 90 journalists lost their lives in the country between 2002 and 2022, including five who were killed in the previous year alone.<sup>7</sup>

A culture of fear and self-censorship has become entrenched as a result, limiting coverage of critical issues such as human rights violations, corruption and political repression. The poor state of press freedom in Pakistan presents an urgent need for action to protect and promote the work of journalists and civil society activists. Here's what Pakistani journalists have to say about the risks they face.

Under the leadership of prominent journalist Haroon Rasheed, along with Adnan Rahmat and Iqbal Khattak, the Freedom Network has initiated the establishment of welfare centers for journalists at the press club level across Pakistan. This initiative aims to provide access to journalists affiliated with the profession through the press clubs, offering assistance to protect them from threats and alleviate the challenges they face in fulfilling their duties.

According to statistics regarding incidents against journalists in Pakistan, the highest number of journalist killings over the past sixteen years has occurred in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. To date, approximately thirty journalists or media workers have been murdered in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while twenty-six have been killed in Baluchistan. In light of these statistics, the Freedom Network has established safety centers for journalists at the Peshawar Press Club and the Dera Ismail Khan Press Club by dividing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into two regions, similar to other provinces in the country. Recently, the safety center at the Dera Ismail Khan Press Club has provided secure environments for journalists associated with press clubs and media organizations in the southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Karak, Bannu, and Lakki Marwat, as well as the adjacent Punjab districts of Mianwali, Layyah, and Bhakkar.<sup>8</sup>

This research provides insight into why journalists face such challenges, its answer is In addition to

creating laws and filing cases against them to suppress the truth, restrict the public's right to know, and control media organizations through advertising, journalists encounter various risks and pressures. This paper presents a detailed overview of the difficulties and protections faced by journalists working for press freedom in Pakistan, aiming to strengthen press freedom and the democratic system through accountability.

### Operational Definitions

**Safety** -The concept of safety in this research is discussed in relation to occupational safety and risk management. Maurice et al. define safety as a condition where potential threats that could cause physical, psychological, or material harm are effectively managed to protect individuals or communities.<sup>9</sup> The World Health Organization (1998) recognizes safety as a fundamental human right and an essential resource for achieving well-being. In the context of this study—focused on the journalistic community in Pakistan—safety refers to the physical and psychological risks, threats, and challenges journalists face while performing their duties, often as a result of attempts to control the press. The term is used because it connects safety to human rights, highlights concerns about journalists' professional security, and encompasses both accidental and intentional acts of violence against them. Overall, safety is viewed as a dynamic balance between various protective and risk-related factors.<sup>10</sup>

As per Oxford dictionary Threat mean “A statement of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action on someone in retribution for something done or not done” or “The expression of an intention to harm someone with the object of forcing them to do something”. Journalists, the fourth pillar of State, often face violence and threats because they exercise freedom of expression for the public's fundamental right to know. The range of threats they face therefore includes murder, kidnapping, hostage situations, harassment both offline and online, threats, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, termination, Lack of insurance coverage, economic issues, physical & mental torture like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The Committee to Protect Journalists, in its Journalist Security Guide, identifies a range of threats that

journalists may encounter, such as terrorist explosions, kidnappings for ransom or political leverage, encounters with hostile or unregulated armed groups, and risks emerging from large crowds, including incidents of sexual harassment or assault. The concepts of “safety” and “risk” are closely interconnected. Specialists focusing on journalist safety emphasize that evaluating potential risks enables journalists to reduce their exposure through thoughtful preparation and informed decision-making, thereby enhancing their security while on the job (CPJ, 2012).<sup>11</sup>

In everyday usage, the word “risk” generally refers to the likelihood or chance of an adverse event. However, within the context of risk assessment, it is defined more precisely as the combination of two elements: first, the probability that a particular hazard might take place, and second, the scale or seriousness of the impact that would result if the hazard were to occur (EEA, 2016).<sup>12</sup>

The possibility that the occurrence of an event will adversely affect the achievement of the organization's objectives. Risk refers to the possibility of something going wrong in a conversation about what is expected to happen, what is expected to happen to you, and what is expected to happen to you outside of a natural or extreme event.

### Background

In the contemporary era, where information holds significant influence, the fields of news and journalism have become highly contested spaces. Journalists not only encounter external pressures and censorship over their reporting, but increasingly face direct personal threats. Across the world, journalists and their families confront physical danger, including intimidation, attempted or actual assaults, kidnappings, enforced disappearances, and even murder. When journalists are intentionally attacked, or when perpetrators operate with impunity, media freedom becomes impossible to uphold.

The most severe form of censorship is the killing of a journalist. Taking a journalist's life not only eliminates that individual's voice, but also instills fear in other journalists and the wider public, prompting many to engage in self-censorship—a psychological reaction known as the “chilling effect.” Consequently,

the free flow of information is suppressed and replaced by widespread silence and fear.

One of the most tragic incidents of mass violence against journalists occurred in Maguindanao Province, Philippines, on 23 November 2009, where 32 journalists were killed, and accountability has still not been ensured. Furthermore, the year 2012 is regarded as one of the deadliest years for journalists, with an estimated 70 reported killings worldwide.<sup>13</sup>

This article examines how legal and other protective measures may be used to better protect journalists and those close to them. Freedom of expression and the concomitant right to receive information are "meta rights"-rights upon which the realization of many other rights depend.

They are also corner stones of democracy, good governance, and accountability, as well as preconditions for individuals and society to make informed decisions. In a world where journalists are not safe, decision-making is based on ignorance, superstition, and rumor while actions of the powerful go unchecked. The work of journalists is also essential to ensure accountability for, and thus deterrence of, human rights abuses.

In the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, Pakistan has fallen two positions compared to the previous year, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF).<sup>14</sup>

This decline reflects a broader global trend where conditions for practicing journalism are worsening, with over half of the world's countries facing difficult or very serious situations. The average score of all assessed countries fell below 55, indicating a "difficult" situation for press freedom. RSF notes that despite alternating political power, the military's control over the country and the government's influence over media regulators consistently hinder press freedom. While on World Press Freedom Day, Pakistan has dropped six places on the Global Press Freedom Index 2025, ranking 158 out of 180 countries, according to the latest report by Reporters without Borders (RSF).<sup>15</sup> The freedom of the press is a fundamental commitment of the global organization dedicated to the protection of journalists. This organization collaborates with safety experts to provide training, advice, support, and campaigns aimed at urging international bodies, states, and employers to take necessary measures for the safety of journalists. It advocates for the fight against impunity and strives to

enable journalists to work free from harassment, threats, violence, and other forms of coercion. The organization's fund offers a unique lifeline to journalists facing oppression, danger, or need, ensuring they receive the assistance required to continue their vital work.

The current global landscape of press freedom is characterized as 'challenging.' For over a decade, the Index has indicated a persistent decline in press freedom worldwide. In 2025, a significant low was recorded: the average score across all evaluated nations dropped below 55 points, categorizing the situation as 'challenging.' More than 60% of the countries assessed (112 in total) experienced a decrease in their overall scores within the Index. Notably, for the first time in the Index's history, the conditions for practicing journalism are deemed 'challenging' or 'very serious' in more than half of the countries globally, while satisfactory conditions are present in less than 25% of them. This study have been conducted on the base of above scenario for Pakistanis journalists' safety.<sup>16</sup>

The sanctity and greatness of the profession of journalism cannot be denied. In a changing world where the rate of violence is increasing, precious human lives are being lost at an alarming rate. A large number of people associated with the profession of journalism have lost their lives while performing their professional duties around the world. According to the statistics of the Freedom Network and International Media Support, organizations working for the rights of journalists, Pakistan is among the most dangerous countries in the list of dangerous countries for journalists and journalism. While journalists face many dangers and in the last sixteen years, more than 110 journalists and workers associated with journalistic institutions have been killed across the country, the increasing incidents of violence against journalists are attributed to the lack of awareness of journalists with modern requirements, security and safety training, among many other factors.<sup>17</sup>

Because in most media institutions, attention is paid to the beauty of the equipment and building, but the lack of attention to training the working journalists and support staff who operate this institution, building and equipment and to exposing them to



safety facilities and training has led to the loss of lives of journalists.

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and a basic component of a democratic society. In this respect, independent and pluralistic media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government. They take as their guiding principles that they will safeguard this right.

Journalism plays a crucial role in sustainable development, the safeguarding of human rights, and the strengthening of democratic systems. However, it continues to be a profession marked by significant danger, and far too often, by fatal outcomes. In nearly ninety percent of cases, the killing of a journalist goes unresolved, with the perpetrators never brought to justice. According to data from UNESCO's Observatory of Killed Journalists, more than 1,600 journalists have lost their lives since 1993.<sup>18</sup>

Tim Dawson is the Deputy General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) said that "To fulfill their journalistic duties, it is essential for journalists to be able to perform their work with safety and security. Unfortunately, this is not the case globally. For the past 30 years, the International Federation of Journalists has recorded the number of journalists killed each year, averaging around 88. Additionally, there have been some particularly tragic peak years, such as 2023, when nearly 130 journalists lost their lives."<sup>19</sup>

Over the past four decades, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), and later its successor, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), has developed a series of principles and commitments that establish a framework for journalist safety and media freedom. The significance of these commitments is widely acknowledged within the OSCE's broad and inclusive concept of security. This work has advanced on the understanding that all 57 member States hold equal standing, and that decisions are made collectively through consensus, remaining politically but not legally binding.<sup>20</sup>

In May 2012, a Joint Declaration was issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression of the Organization of American States, and the Special Rapporteur on

Freedom of Expression and Access to Information of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. The declaration stressed that acts such as killings, death threats, enforced disappearances, kidnappings, prosecutions, imprisonment, torture, harassment, and other violations targeting individuals exercising their right to free expression are entirely unacceptable.

As the situation regarding journalist safety continued to worsen, the OSCE organized a conference titled "*Journalists Under Attack: A Threat to Media Freedom*" in Vienna in April 2019. The aim was to support OSCE participating States in implementing the 2018 Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists and to promote secure working environments for media personnel. More than 200 participants from over 30 countries took part, discussing threats faced by journalists and hearing testimonies from journalists who had been attacked, as well as from the families, colleagues, and friends of those who had been killed..<sup>21</sup>

Along with other safety measures, ensuring freedom, independence, and diversity within the modern media environment requires stable and transparent financial conditions. A free press cannot exist without economic autonomy. When media outlets face financial hardship, they are compelled to compete for audience attention at the cost of credible reporting and may become vulnerable to influence from wealthy private interests or government authorities. When journalists themselves are underpaid, they lose the ability to resist forces that oppose independent journalism and promote misinformation and propaganda. It is therefore essential to restore the media economy to a condition that supports professional journalism and enables the production of accurate and reliable information, which is inherently expensive. Viable solutions do exist and must be implemented widely. Financial independence in the media sector is critical for ensuring free and trustworthy information that benefits the public.

According to IPI documentation, state actors were responsible for the overwhelming majority of threats and violations against press freedom, accounting for more than 87% of recorded incidents. Among these state actors, police and state security agencies were most frequently involved. The police were implicated in around 60% of the cases, followed by government

or public officials at 21%, and regulatory authorities at 11%.<sup>22</sup>

In recent years, there has been a noticeable rise in criminal investigations targeting journalists in Pakistan. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), the national cybercrime legislation, along with provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code, are frequently used to suppress critical reporting and undermine independent journalism in the country.

Press freedom in Pakistan is increasingly under pressure. Violence against journalists remains widespread, and many media professionals undertake significant risks simply to carry out their work. Reporters face physical assaults, death threats, online harassment, and legal coercion in the form of arrests and criminal charges. According to IPI documentation, at least 35 press freedom violations occurred between October 2022 and March 2023. More than half of these violations were attributed to state actors, with approximately 57% involving government-linked individuals, 20% carried out by non-state actors, and 23% originating from unidentified sources.<sup>23</sup>

During this period, the government introduced new measures that granted authorities expanded powers to suppress criticism of state policies. Among these steps were new legal amendments aimed at restricting journalists and online expression. The federal cabinet approved a change that authorizes the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to take legal action against anyone accused of spreading “false information or rumors about state institutions” on social media, with penalties including imprisonment for up to seven years. Additionally, the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2023, imposes a maximum sentence of five years in prison and fines on individuals who publish or circulate material intended to “scandalize or ridicule” the military or judiciary.<sup>24</sup>

Long-term progress toward improving journalist safety in Pakistan was notably achieved in 2021, when two progressive laws were enacted to enhance protection for media workers of all genders and address issues of impunity. These developments reflect the broader influence of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. During the same year, domestic stakeholders made significant advances in the struggle for press freedom. In July, the Sindh provincial government passed a law specifically

designed to safeguard journalists within its territory. Soon after, the federal government enacted a landmark national law aimed at ensuring the safety of media professionals and combating impunity for crimes committed against them.

Both laws are of great importance as they recognize the state’s responsibilities and respond directly to the needs of journalists in Pakistan. Muhammad Aftab Alam, Executive Director of the Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA) and a member of the Pakistan Journalists Safety Coalition (PJSC), described their passage as a historic step, highlighting that the laws commit to promoting and protecting the independence, impartiality, and freedom of expression of media workers. He explains that these laws effectively incorporate the “three P” framework recommended under the UN Plan of Action: prevention, protection, and prosecution. Pakistan is currently the only country in Asia that has enacted such legislation. Support for PJSC’s efforts was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>26</sup>

In May 2021, two important bills were introduced in the National Assembly of Pakistan and the Sindh Provincial Assembly, aimed at ensuring the protection of journalists and media professionals. These legislative efforts reflected decades of advocacy by journalists’ unions and press freedom organizations. However, less than a week after these protections were proposed, journalist and YouTube vlogger **Asad Ali Tor** was attacked inside his home in Islamabad by unidentified assailants, leaving him injured. This incident highlighted the urgent need for such laws, as he is far from the only journalist targeted for violence. In Pakistan, assaults, harassment, and even killings of journalists occur with alarming regularity. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, **61 journalists were killed between 1992 and 2019**, demonstrating the long-standing dangers faced by those who work to report the news.<sup>27</sup>

Amnesty International further highlights that Pakistan is among the nations where the profession of journalism is particularly perilous, as perpetrators of violence against journalists often evade punishment, leading to unresolved cases. The report from Amnesty International indicates that Pakistani journalists face harassment and violence from the country’s

intelligence agencies, terrorist organizations, and militant groups. What does this proposed law regarding the protection of journalists state?

The bill for the protection of journalists has been formulated by Federal Minister for Human Rights Dr. Shireen Mazari following consultations with journalists and legal experts. A similar bill was also introduced by the Sindh government in the provincial assembly on May 23, 2021.<sup>28</sup> Both bills provide journalists with immunity from disclosing their sources of information, and Article 19 of the Constitution mandates the state to ensure the protection of journalists' lives and property. According to the bill presented in the National Assembly, the government will ensure that no existing or future laws related to terrorism or national security are used to impede journalists' work or silence them. Under this proposed legislation, a commission will be established with the authority of a civil court. This commission will consist of four representatives, one from each province, appointed by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists. Additionally, one representative will be from the National Press Club, and one from each provincial press club. Furthermore, there will be one representative each from the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Human Rights. The chairperson of this commission will be either a retired judge or an individual with at least 20 years of experience in law and human rights. In the event that a journalist experiences harassment or becomes a victim of violence, the details of the incident must be presented to the commission within 14 days, which will then render a decision within the same timeframe. The commission is empowered to summon any individual during the investigation and request relevant documents or reports from any organization. Furthermore, this proposed legislation mandates that media owners provide personal safety training to every journalist within one year of their employment.

The question arises as to whether the proposed law for the protection of journalists will effectively safeguard them. The answer to this is that in April 2014, journalist Hamid Mir was the target of an assassination attempt in Karachi, resulting in severe injuries. In response to this incident, the then Prime Minister ordered the formation of a commission composed of three Supreme Court judges to

investigate the matter. Hamid Mir asserts that neither the then head of the ISI, Zaheer Islam, who was accused by Mir of orchestrating the attack, nor he himself has received the report from this commission to date. Hamid Mir asserts that if this bill is passed without any amendments, it may instill some hope for the protection of journalists in the country. However, he expresses concern that certain factions may prevent the bill from being enacted in its original form. He notes that the proposed commission within the bill includes a significant number of working journalists. Nevertheless, he fears that the representation of journalists in this commission may be reduced. If journalists hold a majority, they could potentially ensure the successful completion of cases, which may lead some individuals to seek to diminish their numbers within the commission. According to Hamid Mir, the bill presented in the National Assembly is superior to the one introduced in the Sindh Assembly. This is due to the fact that the commission proposed in the Sindh Assembly's bill includes officials from journalist organizations and the bar council, resulting in a lack of majority representation from working journalists within the commission. However, Journalist Mazhar Abbas disagrees with this perspective. He argues that the law presented in the Sindh Assembly is superior to the bill in the National Assembly because it grants the commission the authority to take suo motu notices. Furthermore, the inclusion of representatives from other organizations will enhance its effectiveness. Abbas states that while this law may not eliminate violence against journalists, it could potentially help identify those responsible for such acts.

However, Asad Ali Tor, who was subjected to violence in Islamabad, and journalist Bilal Farooqi, who was arrested for sharing content against the military on social media, remain skeptical about this law. Asad Tor asserts that the violence he experienced shortly after the introduction of this bill demonstrates that those involved in perpetrating violence against journalists disregard such laws. This was the message they intended to convey to the government, which led to their targeting. The bill designates the protection of journalists as a governmental responsibility; however, journalists face significant threats from state institutions.



Thus, will the government provide protection to journalists against these very institutions that are supposed to ensure their safety? Its answer is that Bilal Farooqi asserts that the government enacts laws for the protection of citizens, yet these very laws are utilized against journalists. He notes that the individual who filed the FIR against him has never appeared in court, and the FIR remains unresolved to this day. It is widely understood who is responsible for this situation. Therefore, this bill will not make a difference, as such actions continue to occur with a mere phone call.<sup>29</sup>

Journalists in India and Pakistan have repeatedly protested against attacks on freedom of expression. Organizations advocating for free speech have expressed concern over actions taken against the press and media under allegations such as 'threats to national security' or 'spreading hate speech.' However, a significant number of journalists in both countries seem to agree that there are indeed restrictions on press freedom, albeit under different guises in each nation. The question arises regarding the extent of media freedom in Pakistan and India, and whether journalists engage in self-censorship to avoid major issues, particularly on topics deemed 'sensitive.' In a special Facebook Live session by BBC Urdu, Pakistani journalist and anchor Asma Shirazi remarked that while many journalists were aware of the challenging and bold story that Cyril Almeida was working on, none had the courage to pursue it, indicating the presence of self-censorship. She further noted that if challenging the government's stance on surgical strikes in India is considered taboo, there are similarly numerous topics in Pakistan that journalists are unable to discuss openly.

The journalist Cyril Almeida from the Pakistani newspaper Dawn was placed on the Exit Control List due to a report concerning 'national security.' Although the government has announced his removal from this list, the majority of journalists in Pakistan have condemned this action. Meanwhile, in Indian-administered Kashmir, the newspaper Kashmir Reader faced a ban under allegations of 'inciting violence,' which local journalists have characterized as a restriction on freedom of expression. This situation highlights the ongoing challenges faced by the media in the region.

Sidharth Varadarajan, a prominent journalist from India, highlighted an instance of censorship by referencing a situation involving former Indian Home Minister P. Chidambaram. During an interview with a news channel, Chidambaram raised questions regarding India's claims of conducting surgical strikes in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Subsequently, the channel chose not to broadcast the interview, illustrating the challenges faced by journalists in the country. This incident underscores the complexities surrounding media freedom and the influence of political narratives on journalistic expression.<sup>30</sup>

Overall, attacks on press freedom have continued to increase in the country. According to monitoring reports, **at least 148 cases of attacks and violations against media organizations and journalists occurred between May 2020 and April 2021**, representing an increase of more than **40 percent** compared to the **91 cases** documented the previous year. This sharp rise highlights the growing risks faced by journalists in Pakistan. Many journalists have expressed disappointment that Western democracies, which frequently advocate for press freedom globally, have **not taken meaningful action or raised strong objections** in response to this escalating repression. As a result, journalists feel increasingly isolated and vulnerable in their struggle for free expression.<sup>31</sup>

In 2023, in Brussels, the European Union took the initiative in promoting democracy and human rights by publishing a book titled 'Guidance for the Survival of Journalists' authored by Peter McIntyre. This publication, released by the International Federation of Journalists, has been dedicated by the global organization for the protection of journalists to the true heroes of their profession. The book emphasizes that war and violence are never solutions to problems; however, when they do occur, journalists and other media personnel play a crucial role in clearing the fog of deception, lies, and misinformation that often follows. Their responsibility is to highlight the impact of these events on the lives of ordinary people. In fulfilling this role, journalists and their colleagues often put their lives and safety at risk.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has been advocating for enhanced safety for several years, focusing on journalists and freelancers in the most perilous situations with inadequate protection. This initiative was launched alongside the establishment of

the International News Safety Institute. This book is a component of that initiative, showcasing the experiences of those who have reported from hostile environments and striving to learn from these experiences to save valuable lives.<sup>32</sup>

The safety of journalists is not solely a concern when gunfire erupts; it also involves fostering a culture of awareness regarding risks across all facets of journalism—whether in war zones, investigative reporting, or covering events on the streets. While there has been an effort to highlight the needs of local journalists, most of the available information stems from training courses designed for international representatives and prominent names in electronic media. This book aims to disseminate messages about safety, and it will also incorporate local versions to showcase regional experiences in support of local offices. Indeed, these journalists possess a wealth of knowledge and experience, having learned to survive while working on the front lines of conflict. It is essential to gather these lessons and recognize the courage and determination of those journalists who strive to bring the truth to light, even in adverse conditions.<sup>33</sup>

Iqbal Khattak, Executive Director of the Freedom Network has stated that journalists in Pakistan have learned to self-censor after decades of persistent threats and attacks. Contrary to public perception, provincial governments are more accountable than the federal government in addressing these challenges. 'We are collaborating with the governments of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to introduce legislation for the protection of journalists,' he remarked. When influential voices are not safe from attacks, it indicates that the freedom of the media in Pakistan is nearing its end. 'The media in Pakistan often resembles a large television set, with the remote control not in the hands of the public but in the hands of the powerful. The government has never been serious about taking measures to protect journalists; rather, it seeks to

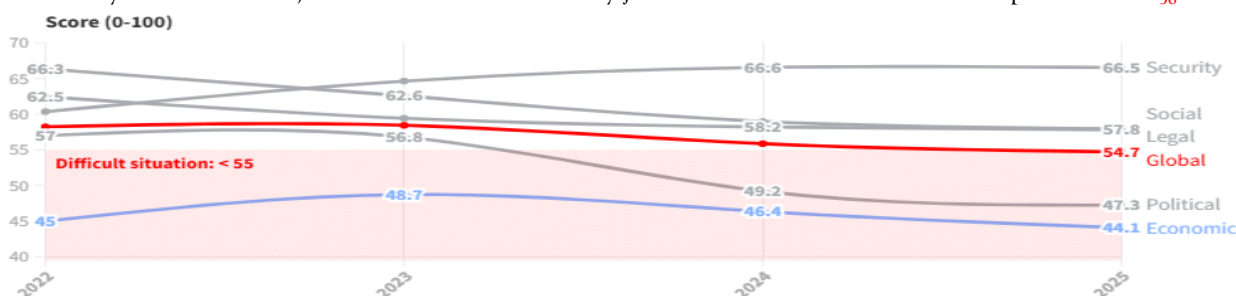
maintain an atmosphere of fear, as evidenced by the tightening of freedom of expression through various new laws. In light of this situation, it is imperative for media organizations and journalistic associations to ensure the safety of journalists.<sup>34</sup>

Enhancing the protection of journalists and addressing the impunity of their aggressors are fundamental initiatives in UNESCO's advocacy for press freedom and the right to free expression. Further more The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity seeks to establish a secure and supportive environment for journalists and media professionals, thereby promoting peace, democracy, and sustainable development on a global scale. This initiative addresses key elements of prevention, protection, and legal accountability. It advocates for a collaborative and comprehensive strategy for its execution, encompassing six focal areas: awareness raising, policy formulation and standard setting, monitoring and reporting, capacity enhancement, research, and coalition development. In alignment with the UN Plan of Action, we engage with governments, media organizations, professional bodies, NGOs, and various stakeholders to combat impunity.

The ongoing failure to deliver justice for journalists who have been murdered represents a significant threat to press freedom. Even ten years after the United Nations designated an international day to combat impunity for crimes against journalists, and over three decades since the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) began systematically documenting these killings, **nearly 80 percent of journalist murders remain unresolved.** This persistent lack of accountability underscores the critical challenges faced by media professionals and the urgent need for effective legal protections. (CPJ Report, Arlene Getz, CPJ Editorial Director) <sup>35</sup>



The International Federation of Journalists killed journalists' annual reports 2023 shows that 2023 year was one of the worst years since 1990, never before have so many journalists fallen in such a short space of time.<sup>36</sup>



Source: World Press Freedom Index, Link to share  
©Reporters Without Borders - Blanche Marès & Côme Nottaris

Source World press freedom 2002-2025 index

While in 2025, the economic indicator of *Reporters without Borders* world Press freedom index hits its lowest points as global state of press freedom become "difficult".<sup>37</sup>

Pakistan has a concerning track record of failing to punish the killers of journalists; the country ranked 11th on CPJ's 2023 Global impunity index. A study by Freedom Network in 2022 found that there were "no convictions in 96% of journalist killings" between 2012 and 2022 in Pakistan. Despite passing the "Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act" in 2021, the country has continued to see high-profile cases of impunity.<sup>38</sup>

In Pakistan, the concept of journalist safety encompasses the strategies implemented to shield journalists and media practitioners from threats and acts of violence encountered during the execution of their responsibilities. This involves not only the protection of their lives but also the assurance of their capacity to operate freely and autonomously, devoid of apprehension regarding physical or legal

intimidation, as well as the safeguarding of their confidential sources.

Journalists encounter considerable obstacles in maintaining objectivity while covering the scandals involving politicians and bureaucrats, as well as state narratives and activities in conflict areas. The repercussions for disclosing the truth to the public can be severe, including extrajudicial killings, violence, enforced disappearances, threats to their safety and that of their families, harassment, and arbitrary detention, along with financial difficulties. It is crucial to educate media organizations and journalists about these perilous circumstances and the strategies they can be implement to reduce these risks, which are advised by international organizations.

From 2000 to 2025, Pakistan has consistently been a dangerous place for journalists, with a high number of killings and widespread impunity for perpetrators, according to organizations like the International Media Support (IMS) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).<sup>39</sup> This has

affected journalists' economic and political conditions, leading to a climate of fear and self-censorship. Private TV channels in Pakistan began operating in 2002, according to the Pakistan Advertisers Society. While there were early attempts at private broadcasting, such as Network Television

Marketing (NTM) in 1990, the real surge in private channels came with the establishment of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) in 2002, which allowed for the licensing of private satellite and cable channels.

#### Statistics

Year	Countries	Pakistan Rank	Pakistan Rank %age	Ruling Govt	Media Laws
2003	159	128	81%	General Pervez Musharraf Govt	Between 2001 and 2008, Pakistan saw significant media law developments, including the establishment of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) in 2002 and the passage of the PEMRA Ordinance. These laws aimed to regulate the electronic media and had a substantial impact on freedom of expression. Additionally, the Press Council of Pakistan Ordinance, Defamation Ordinance, and Freedom of Information Ordinance were also enacted during this period.
2004	167	153	91%		
2005	168	157	92%		
2006	170	157	91%		
2007	167	152	89%		
2008	170	152	81%	PPP-Govt	Between 2008 and 2013, Pakistani media laws primarily focused on regulating electronic media through the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). PEMRA played a key role in setting standards for broadcasting and distribution services. There was also a focus on print media through the Press Council of Pakistan, which was responsible for ethical standards and registration.
2009	180	145	87%		
2010	180	158	84%		
2011	179	151	84%		
2012	179	151	84%		
2013	180	159	88%	PMLN-Govt	Between 2014 and 2018, Pakistani media laws saw some notable developments, primarily focused on protecting journalists and regulating the media landscape. Key legislation during this period included the Protection of Journalists Act of 2014 and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016. The Protection of Journalists Act aimed to safeguard journalists from disclosing sources of information, especially regarding national security. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) was enacted to address cybercrimes and regulate online content, including the circulation of fake news and objectionable material.
2014	180	158	87%		
2015	180	159	88%		
2016	180	158	87%		
2017	180	139	77%		
2018	180	145	80%	PTI- Govt	Between 2019-2022, several media laws and regulations were developed or amended in Pakistan, primarily focused on regulating social media and protecting journalists. Key developments include the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022,
2019	180	142	79%		
2020	180	145	80%		
2021	180	158	87%		
2022	180	158	87%		

					which integrated the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2019 and enhanced provisions for community radio. The Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021, aimed to safeguard the rights and safety of journalists, including their right to privacy and freedom of expression. Additionally, the government implemented rules for the removal and blocking of unlawful online content and introduced amendments to the Penal Code to address "rumors and false information" on social media.
2023	180	150	83%	PMLN-Govt	Between 2023 and 2025, Pakistan has seen several developments in media laws, including the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 amendments. These changes aim to regulate online content and address issues like fake news and online harassment. Additionally, the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals (Amendment) Bill, 2023 was introduced to transfer the implementation of the 2021 Act to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
2024	180	152	84%		
2025	180	158	87%		

By analyzing the Data, it shows the average percentage of freedom of express situation in Pakistan during General Pervez Musharraf-Govt was 87.5 % secondly

PPP-Govt 85.4% thirdly PMLN- Govt 83.8 % , and forth at PTI Govt 83.2 % and PMLN+PPP Govt 84.6%.<sup>40</sup>

Pakistan faces significant challenges regarding journalist safety, marked by frequent violence, threats, censorship, and a high incidence of unpunished killings. The country is recognized as one of the most dangerous places for journalists, where physical attacks, intimidation, and online harassment are prevalent. Female journalists are particularly vulnerable, facing increased risks due to the rise of digital media.

In response to these threats, Pakistan has enacted several laws aimed at safeguarding journalists, including the "Protection of Journalists & Media Professionals Bill" at the federal level, along with provincial laws in Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab. These legislative efforts are designed to align with the UN's framework for the prevention, protection, and prosecution of crimes against journalists. International organizations such as UNESCO and the International Media Support (IMS) are actively involved in monitoring journalist safety and bolstering national safety initiatives.

Despite these legal frameworks, the effective implementation of protective measures and prosecution of offenders remains problematic. Journalists continue to face ongoing violence, including attempts on their lives, compounded by political interference that further jeopardizes their safety.

How much adverse condition is for journalists in Pakistan? In this context, I reached out to senior reporters, media experts, media managers to inquire about the overall safety conditions for journalists and Their feedback is summarized below;

**Dr. Tauseef Ahmad Khan**, Author, Analyst, Columnist, Ex-Chairperson Mass Communication, shared their views on journalist's safety. The safety of journalists in Pakistan constitutes a critical concern within the broader discourse on press freedom and human rights. Journalists in the country are persistently exposed to multifaceted threats, including intimidation, harassment, and physical violence, perpetrated by diverse actors such as militant factions,



political groups, state authorities, and organized criminal networks. This precarious environment not only undermines the fundamental principles of free expression but also impedes the capacity of the media to function as a democratic watchdog. Addressing this complex and entrenched challenge necessitates a holistic and multi-dimensional approach that integrates efforts from governmental bodies, media organizations, civil society, and international stakeholders. This study proposes a comprehensive framework encompassing key policy initiatives and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening mechanisms for journalist protection and promoting a safer operational landscape for media practitioners in Pakistan. 35

**Tariq Abul Hassan**, Geo investigating reporter articulated their perspectives regarding the Safety of journalists based on his observations and experiences that This framework outlines critical measures to enhance journalist safety in Pakistan through a multi-faceted approach. Key institutional reforms include the establishment of formal safety protocols, provision of insurance, legal aid, and psychological support, as well as improved job security and fair compensation to reduce vulnerabilities. Empowering civil society and journalist unions is emphasized by strengthening professional associations, fostering NGO collaboration, and developing rapid response mechanisms. Digital security is addressed through capacity building in cybersecurity, countering online harassment, and promoting the use of encryption tools. The framework also highlights the importance of leveraging regional and international support via advocacy, conditional aid, and transnational networks. Lastly, it calls for targeted protections for vulnerable groups, particularly female journalists and those from marginalized or rural backgrounds, ensuring inclusive and gender-sensitive safety measures. 36

**Fazal Aziz**, a VOA correspondent in Sindh and Baluchistan, expressed his views on the safety of journalists in the light of his observations and experiences. In a workshop held in Islamabad, a foreign trainer taught that remember, "A dead body cannot file a story," so do not take any risks while reporting. Voice of America also does not force us to take such risks and report. Rather, we are urged by

our organization to follow safety measures in full. However, we have been warned several times by security agencies for conducting objective reporting.37

**Ashraf Khan** is a freelance senior journalist worked for AFP, APP, Newsweek, Far Eastern Economic Review and Christian Science Monitor, expressed their thoughts on the protection of journalists that in a story, the dateline holds significant importance and it is essential for the reporter to reach the scene. Therefore, while reporting on the devastation caused by floods, a reporter risks their safety by sitting in a large iron pot to reach the flood victims and capture their stories. Regarding the intensity of the heat, an incident was recounted where a senior AFP colleague was with me. When we left our location in Jacobabad, we discovered that the temperature had soared to 51 degrees Celsius. Consequently, our organization prohibited us from creating a dateline story about this life-threatening temperature, and my senior was called back to Islamabad. He further explained that we were also instructed by the organization to drink plenty of water 24 hours before heading to the flood-affected areas to avoid dehydration, as these regions often lack water. Drinking water in front of thirsty flood victims posed a significant dilemma, leading to a sense of guilt. He mentioned that the organization not only provides us with training and guidance but also supplies all necessary resources.38

**Riaz Suhail** Karachi based BBC and Multimedia Journalist expressed his observations by shedding light on Journalist's Safety issues in Pakistan. He told that we were engaged in reporting from the flood-affected areas for nearly 45 days. The victims were relocating to safer places from these disaster-stricken regions, and we reporters were heading there to capture the devastation. We were willing to take risks to document the situation. We were informing both authorities and the public about the issues faced by people surrounded by water as far as the eye could see. One individual swam over to us and pleaded that his house, where his wife and four children were, was nearby. He asked us to report on their helplessness and suffering, hoping the government would assist them. I entered the water with the camera operator, and as we progressed, the

water level rose. It reached from our waists to our shoulders, forcing me to hold the camera above my head due to my shorter height. At one point, I felt that my decision to enter the water without a life jacket was completely wrong and emotional made in response to that man's plea. Fortunately, a rescue boat arrived and saved us. We had only one bottle of water and a single pack of biscuits. The boat was low on fuel, and we had lost our way. We put ourselves in danger, even though we had been instructed by our organization to keep safe and avoid taking any risks. Furthermore, Suhail said that before embarking on crisis reporting, it is crucial to consider two key factors. First, assess the essential supplies needed for the location where you will be reporting. Second, determine how you will gain access to the area where the story is unfolding, as events like floods can lead to various challenges. Essential items include water purification systems, medicine, mosquito nets, life jackets, power banks, battery chargers, generators, and electrical devices. These supplies are vital because disaster-stricken areas often experience severe conditions, disrupting the entire system of life. In such situations, filing a story becomes a significant challenge. Reporting on crises involves a significant aspect related to the mental health of the reporter. In this context, an incident occurred where a child was running alongside a Rickshaw to obtain food, only to have his foot crushed and injured by the wheels. Witnessing this left, I profoundly traumatized. Issues related to mental trauma can adversely affect the quality of reporting, leading to aggression in reporters and diminishing their interest in their work. They may become weary and mentally exhausted. Covering stories in flood-affected areas, while risking one's life, can lead to violations of ethical codes and safety measures. The situation may tempt one towards adventure, but it is crucial never to violate SOPs. Before we proceed to reporting, all necessary instructions, training, and materials are provided.<sup>39</sup>

**Muhammad Farooq**, Senior Producer & Cameraman at AP (South Asia) expressed his views on the safety of journalists by sharing his observations and experiences. We are fully insured and it is emphasized that we follow complete safety measures and do not compromise on the safety of our lives ‘reporting

without the necessary equipment and supplies is not allowed.<sup>40</sup>

**Mazhar Abbas**, renowned Journalists, Analyst and Anchorperson, communicated that Insurance is not provided. Training is lacking, and the race for superiority has led to substandard journalism. Media managers lack awareness of field reporting, so how can we expect them to follow the safety and logistical protocols for journalists? Here, everything must be determined by the journalist themselves in these chaotic conditions, as even journalistic organizations do not take serious measures in this regard.<sup>40</sup>

**The young reporter Rana Javed**, associated with Geo News, shared his observations regarding the devastation caused by floods due to the heavy rains in Sindh rural area. The suffering and economic hardships faced by the victims were beyond description. Ironically, the government machinery was nowhere to be seen in terms of relief efforts. When he spoke to a family affected by the disaster, they expressed their frustration in a harsh tone, saying that media personnel only sell images. Reporting in nearly 12 feet of water without resources was a life-threatening task, and in my eagerness to be among the first to report, He acknowledged that I set aside all safety protocols and committed violations.<sup>41</sup>

**Suhail Sanghi**, editor and senior journalist, formerly a reporter for Dawn News, stated at the seminar that the lack of awareness among reporters/media managers in this field is a shared responsibility, as they promote non-professionals. The role of the editor has weakened, while owners and management have become stronger, resulting in a decline in institutional content. SOPs are often disregarded. In reality, compromises are made from the top down, which then trickle downwards. Good organizations send their reporters to conflict zones for reporting to minimize risks, and subsequently conduct physical and mental check-ups to ensure that reporters are not experiencing trauma after their assignments. He mentioned that without safety measures, reporters themselves are responsible for the risks they take, especially those who do not speak up.<sup>42</sup>

**Raja Kamran**, Neo Tv Journalist with more than 18 years of experience in researching, investigating, writing, editing, and presenting news items, bulletins, stories or documentaries for different broadcasts on television, Online and Print was shedding light on journalist safety training and measures, it was emphasized that when colleagues reporting on the fires in the forests of Murree and Thar Parker were told they were going to provide news, they should not become the news themselves. Therefore, considering the risks to life, they were advised not to report. It was suggested that they assess their working conditions before proceeding. They should avoid burnout in the story and refrain from excessive adventurousness. It is crucial to have resources and necessities according to the location of the crisis zone. They were reminded not to exceed their limits and not to become so curious that they might not return. Always adhere to proper reporting guidelines. Dealing with mental trauma is exceedingly challenging. Reflecting on my experience, I recounted that on May 11 in Karachi, a bloodbath was occurring at Malir Kala Board; where I witnessed four individuals lose their lives during a shooting. Following this incident, I suffered from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Sleeping in darkness became difficult for me. I struggled with insomnia for several days and had to rely on medication for an extended period. This was the first such incident in my life. In another incident, during the reporting of a scandal involving a pharmaceutical factory, every reporter had a strong desire to advance and outpace others by reporting on the scenes within the factory walls. Armed guards were present within the factory premises, posing a significant risk of aggressive action in response to any interference. As a senior reporter, I advised my colleagues not to get caught up in the competition, as it could lead to being trapped inside. Instead, we must endure the pressure from media managers while prioritizing our safety and ensuring that we file our stories accordingly.<sup>43</sup>

**Qamar Ahamed Rizvi**, is senior Crime Reporter Daily Jang, Karachi told that there is no mechanism/training for journalists by their media organization in Pakistan. Journalists do reporting on their own risk. Reporters have to take all kinds of risks to save their job, due to lack of awareness and training about safety measures during reporting, the

risks are doubled. Furthermore, competition in the field and pressure from media managers also push reporters towards more risks. Neither do they get insurance from the organization nor do they get protection from the state. In such situations, reporters are constantly enduring mental stress. Sometimes they become victims of trauma due to reporting unpleasant events and their mental health is severely affected and media organizations do nothing to solve these physical problems. Thus, they remain mentally disturbed for a long time, which affects their performance.<sup>44</sup>

**Aziz Sanghur** is a Producer, Director, and Scriptwriter, as well as a documentary filmmaker and freelance journalist. He participated in the "South Asian Journalists Workshop" in New Delhi, focusing on Urban Governance. He is a native Balochi speaker and is part of the Baloch community. During a seminar, Aziz Sanghur remarked that practicing journalism in Baluchistan is a dangerous endeavor. Journalists face dual pressures: economic instability and ongoing threats. In the conflict-ridden area of Baluchistan, telling the truth, voicing the truth, and revealing the truth has become a criminal act, with journalists often paying the ultimate price—death—in a region where obtaining news is merely a distant hope. Despite these significant risks, journalists in Baluchistan refuse to remain silent, recognizing that if they stop speaking out, the land itself will succumb to silence in the face of truth. If a reporter cannot feel safe, how can an ordinary citizen expect to feel secure? When the camera is muted, who will convey the truth? When bullets silence words, who will document history? Furthermore, global journalism organizations are failing to adequately protect journalists. It is insufficient for them to simply release statistical reports; they must actively hold state authorities accountable and ensure they are responsible for the safety of journalists.<sup>45</sup>

**Muzafar Ejaz**, Editor Daily Jang, Karachi told that in Pakistan, journalists lack training and support from their media organizations, forcing them to report at their own risk. They face various dangers and mental stress without insurance or state protection, which is exacerbated by competition and pressure from media managers. The absence of safety training increases

their vulnerability, and many suffer from trauma due to distressing events they cover. Despite these challenges, media organizations fail to address the mental health issues faced by reporters which negatively affecting their performance over time. The injustice is that, except for a few major media organizations, no organization provides medical cover to journalists.<sup>46</sup>

**Amjad Irshad**, Editor of the Daily Umit Karachi, said that reporting in Pakistan is becoming more dangerous with each passing day. Due to the race to be the first and the competition, journalists are not informed about safety measures and neither are they provided with proper training. Most journalists are unable to realize when the red line is crossed in reporting on sensitive topics and the most important point is the lack of insurance.<sup>47</sup>

**Said Nazir** is co-founder and Co-Managing Director of Tribal News Network and belongs to the Khyber district in former FATA. Said Nazir joined Pak-Afghan Cross Border Radio Project (Pact Radio) as a reporter in the Khyber district. In 2006 helped the government establish Khyber radio in the Khyber district close to the Pak-Afghan border to provide alternative programs to the message of hate and polarization spread by Mullah and militant's radio in the district. He contributed a wide range of reports to the weekly magazine program "Da Pulay Porey" (Across the Border) for two years. Said Nazir told regarding conflict zone reporting how risky & tough job it is. <sup>48</sup> The collective accounts of journalists, editors, and analysts depict journalism in Pakistan as a profession fraught with danger, where safety has become a fundamental human rights and democratic issue. Journalists face continuous threats from militant groups, political actors, state agencies, and criminal elements, creating a climate of fear that undermines press freedom. Despite their courage and dedication, reporters operate without adequate institutional support, training, insurance, or mental health care. Media organizations prioritize competition and profit over safety, leaving journalists to take personal risks in conflict zones and disaster-stricken areas.

Field experiences shared by reporters reveal the life-threatening conditions they endure while covering floods, violence, and crises, often without essential

equipment or guidance. Many suffer from trauma and emotional exhaustion, as mental health remains an overlooked aspect of journalist safety. International media outlets like VOA and AP provide training and insurance, but Pakistani journalists largely lack such protection, highlighting a stark disparity between global standards and local practices.

Several professionals, including Dr. Tauseef Ahmad Khan and Tariq Abul Hassan, call for a comprehensive safety framework encompassing institutional reforms, legal safeguards, psychological support, digital security, and gender-sensitive policies. They emphasize collaboration among government bodies, media organizations, civil society, and international partners to ensure accountability and sustainable protection.

Journalists working in regions like Baluchistan and former FATA face compounded risks due to conflict and economic instability, where truth telling can cost lives. Yet, despite these dangers, they persist in their mission to inform the public, driven by professional integrity and a sense of duty.

In conclusion, the interviews collectively highlight resilience amid institutional neglect. The absence of safety protocols, insurance, and mental health care, combined with systemic exploitation, threatens not only journalists' lives but also the integrity of journalism itself. Ensuring journalist safety in Pakistan demands structural transformation, legal enforcement, and recognition of journalism as a public service vital to democracy. Protecting journalists is essential not just for their survival but for safeguarding society's right to truth and free expression.

The interviews collectively paint a stark picture of the dangers faced by journalists in Pakistan, where the struggle for truth comes at a high personal cost. Despite these challenges, journalists continue their work, driven by a commitment to public service and democracy. However, without systemic reforms—spanning training, legal protections, organizational support, and mental health care—journalist safety remains precarious. Addressing this crisis is vital not only for the protection of media workers but also for safeguarding the fundamental democratic right to free and fearless expression in Pakistan.

To ensure the research is reliable, valid, and provides authentic information, a questionnaire was distributed among 100 senior journalists and other

news providers regarding the protection of journalists in Pakistan. Insights in this research, the recorded responses have presented as following:

**RQ1-** Were you provided with information regarding safety measures, training workshops, seminars, or guidelines?

In response 89% said that they have never been given any kind one of them while 11 % yes. In which 7 % were international who endorsed that before going to coverage they have been provided training, briefing, life insurance, helmet, built proof jacket & extra financial benefits, 4 % national journalist's said that these privileges were given to them only a few times, not every time.

**RQ2-** Have you been provided with the necessary equipment (safety kit) for the field according to your requirements.

**A:** - In response to the question, the rate for 'yes' was 89%, while 'no' accounted for 11%.

**RQ3-** Are travel facilities provided to you for working in the field?

**A:** - For that, 90 % journalists answered yes and 10% said travel, facilities not provided to them.

**RQ4-** Do you seek guidance from local guide to navigate the field?

**A:** - A lack of familiarity with the reporting area, language, and geography increases risks for journalists. Therefore, this question is of utmost importance, as 97% reported that they rely on local source on personal connections to mitigate unavoidable risks, while the remaining 3% are unable to secure such guidance because of different reasons.

**RQ5-** Do you hire a local guide to work in the field?

**A:** - 97% told that that get local guide on personal relations to minimize the unavoidable risks factor the other 3% cannot not get guide.

**RQ6-** Does your organization provide life insurance while sending you for reporting in disputed regions?

**A:** - Out of 100, 7% international journalists said yes while 91% said no, 2% national Journalists replied only a few times, not every time.

**RQ7-** Do you think that journalists in Pakistan are effectively carrying out their duties without facing any threats in their pursuit of truth and the public's right to information?

**A:** - 94% journalists indicated that they encounter dangers, risks, and various obstacles while reporting, while 6% stated that one would be safe and secure as

long as they do not cross the boundaries set by the authorities.

**RQ8-** Do you believe that the government, public institutions, courts, and human rights organizations in Pakistan are fulfilling their role in providing protection to journalists?

**A:** - In response to this question, 94% of journalists expressed a lack of confidence, while the remaining 6% stated that it can be said to some extent that they are playing their role.

**RQ9-** Did you reported threat given to you?

**A:** - 80% told yes, they have been given threats in different way like phone calls, chasing, and expulsion from job, which they reported to colleagues, PFUJ knowing that no result will come out.

**RQ10-** Do you have effective methods for reporting risks?

**A:** - Their responses have revealed insights in this research that a significant majority of journalists, 87 percent, believes they lack effective means to report threats. Among those who faced unnecessary risks and interventions, 59% did not report it to the police, and of those who did report, 27% were dissatisfied with the police response. The primary reason for not reporting experiences of unnecessary interventions was journalists' unfamiliarity with any existing procedures. This unfamiliarity was compounded by the fact that journalists did not trust the current procedures and were fearful of retaliation. In some cases, the lack of trust in the procedures stemmed from past unsuccessful attempts to report unnecessary interventions.

**RQ11-** Have you ever experienced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

**A:** - Apart from a few young journalists majority of them reported indicated that they have faced such situations multiple times. After covering violent incidents, journalists often face post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to a combination of the nature of their work and the psychological impacts of trauma. This is particularly true for journalists who have witnessed the bloody riots in Karachi and have extensive experience reporting on conflicts and wars in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as they tend to exhibit symptoms of PTSD. To alleviate the isolation faced by journalists, complete rest and regular communication with trusted colleagues after dangerous assignments could lead to better outcomes.



All reporters are at a heightened risk for various mental health issues, including PTSD, compassion fatigue, guilt, and general emotional stress. Our media organizations have neglected to implement measures to help reporters recover from and treat this condition, resulting in prolonged negative effects. Journalists in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in particular, continue to confront psychological aspects and post-traumatic stress disorder.

**RQ12-**Do you believe that freedom of expression is granted to journalists in Pakistan?

**A:** - In response to this question, a significant majority, specifically 97 percent, indicated that journalists in Pakistan face restrictions on freedom of expression, and the space for the public's right to know is increasingly diminishing. Furthermore, Pakistan's ranking in the global index regarding freedom of expression is also experiencing a decline.

**RQ13-**Do you aware of public privacy rights, media ethics, and social responsibility?

**A:** - Journalist's Response about awareness of public privacy rights, media ethics, and social responsibility was 87% in yes while 13% did not provide a satisfactory response.

**RQ14-**Do you aware of the government bill that has been approved for the protection of journalists?

**A:** - 48 journalists responded regarding government bills, stating that they are aware of them, while 52 respondents indicated only limited knowledge, which is not a promising situation.

**RQ15-** Do you aware of national and international journalistic organizations that provide protection to journalists?

**A:** -Out of 100 journalists, 74 mentioned the Pakistan Union of Journalists, while the remaining 26 referred to international media organizations that work for the betterment of journalists.

The study reveals significant gaps in the protection and support systems for journalists in Pakistan, with a prevalent lack of safety training, life insurance, mental health support, and trust in official protective mechanisms. The high incidence of threats and psychological trauma underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to safeguard journalists and uphold freedom of expression.

## Conclusion

The persistent threats and dangers faced by journalists in Pakistan reflect deep-rooted structural, institutional, and societal challenges to press freedom. Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and the press, legal frameworks and recent legislative developments, journalists continue to face violence, harassment, abduction, online intimidation, and legal coercion from both state and non-state actors. The pervasive lack of accountability for attacks on media professionals fosters a culture of impunity, which remains the primary cause of recurring assaults, threats, and killings. This environment not only endangers individual journalists but also undermines the credibility and independence of the media as a whole, weakening the public's right to accurate and reliable information.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, multi-layered strategy. At the local level, journalists need robust protective mechanisms, including training to assess and mitigate risks, practical safety interventions, access to emergency support, and guidance on how to respond to threats effectively. Legal safeguards must be strengthened to ensure that perpetrators, including those who plan or orchestrate attacks, are prosecuted promptly and impartially, and that statutes of limitation or political interference do not hinder justice. The creation of independent commissions or oversight bodies, staffed with impartial judges, can enhance accountability and provide a rapid-response mechanism for investigating violations of journalists' rights. Protective programs, such as witness protection schemes and emergency assistance, should be efficiently operationalized and scaled to the national level when necessary, ensuring that journalists at the greatest risk receive timely support.

At the national level, governments must demonstrate clear political will by publicly condemning attacks on journalists, reinforcing the social and professional value of media, and committing to uphold the rule of law. State authorities should ensure that all investigations into journalist-targeted crimes are thorough, transparent, and free from undue influence or interference. International cooperation and scrutiny play a complementary role, as foreign correspondents, regional human rights mechanisms, and UN frameworks can help highlight threats, attract

global attention to violations, and support domestic efforts to enforce accountability. Local and international actors together can create pressure to uphold journalist safety and prevent impunity.

The safety of journalists is intrinsically linked to the broader recognition of press freedom and the social importance of the media profession. Protecting journalists is not merely about safeguarding individual lives; it also ensures that societies receive accurate, timely, and trustworthy information, which is vital for democracy, human rights, and social accountability. Even journalists who may not adhere fully to professional standards have the fundamental right to life and protection from unlawful harm. Press freedom, journalistic independence, and the credibility of reporting are interdependent, and threats to journalists compromise all three, ultimately eroding democratic governance and public trust.

Furthermore, the engagement of civil society, media organizations, and journalists themselves is critical in sustaining advocacy for a safer media environment. Social organizations and professional coalitions can monitor violations, provide guidance, and amplify the voices of journalists at risk. A proactive approach that integrates prevention, protection, and accountability—the “three P” framework recommended by the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists—is essential for a sustainable solution. By ensuring that attacks are not ignored and perpetrators are held accountable, societies can reduce the recurrence of violence and create a climate in which journalists feel safe to report freely and objectively.

In contemporary Pakistan, where journalists are disproportionately exposed to threats, both domestic and international attention is necessary. Local journalists, who often face the highest risks, require protective programs and legal enforcement, while foreign correspondents play a vital role in drawing global attention to these issues. Coordinated efforts at multiple levels—local, national, and international—are crucial to address systematic impunity and create an environment where journalists can perform their work without fear. Accountability, prevention, and legal enforcement are mutually reinforcing: by prosecuting perpetrators and enforcing protective measures, states can prevent future attacks and strengthen the rule of law.

Ultimately, ensuring the safety and protection of journalists is central to preserving the free flow of information, the independence of the media, and the democratic fabric of society. Violence against journalists thrives in environments where freedom of expression is absent or undermined. Sustainable protection requires a combination of effective advocacy, political commitment, robust legal frameworks, comprehensive safety measures, and international support. Only through coordinated efforts among the government, civil society, media organizations, and international institutions can Pakistan establish a secure and enabling environment in which journalists are empowered to perform their duties, uphold public accountability, and contribute to a thriving democratic society.

In Pakistan, laws have been put in place to safeguard journalists, but doubts about their effectiveness and enforcement remain. The Journalist and Media Professionals Protection Act of 2021 was enacted to ensure the rights of journalists, which encompasses protection, privacy, and the confidentiality of sources. Nevertheless, journalists have indicated that this protection is dependent on following certain designated “codes of conduct,” which could impose limitations when they exceed anticipated boundaries.

Furthermore, Media experts say that the PECA Ordinance, officially the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, is the primary legislation in Pakistan addressing cybercrimes and cybersecurity. It defines cybercrimes, sets standards for cybersecurity, and provides legal mechanisms for investigating and prosecuting offenses related to electronic and internet-based activities. In January 2025, amendments were made to the PECA Act to enhance regulatory oversight of online content and impose stringent penalties for the dissemination of misinformation, particularly on social media. However, in reality, this restricts freedom of expression,

Consequently, the opportunity for journalists to report is progressively shrinking. Additionally, the freedom of the press in Pakistan is also shaped by economic elements, such as the government's dependence on advertising and the possibility of censorship, as well as prevailing social and cultural pressures.

Journalists have expressed significant criticism towards the PECA Amendment Act 2025, raising alarms about

its capacity to suppress free speech and online expression, especially in relation to independent journalism.

The act establishes a new criminal offense concerning the dissemination and sharing of false information, accompanied by harsh penalties. Journalists are apprehensive that the ambiguous definitions and extensive scope of the law may result in arbitrary enforcement and potential misuse of authority by the government.

The overall conclusion of this research paper is that journalists who are engaged in reporting for foreign media organizations are required to strictly adhere to the SOPs issued by media managers and assignment editors. The editorial department has been eliminated in local media organizations due to the presence of non-professionals, resulting in a shift from standard journalism to substandard and interest-driven journalism. Due to a lack of training and awareness, security risks for journalists have significantly increased. Between 1999 and 2025, the World Press Freedom Index indicates that Pakistan has remained between 77% and 91%, which is a perilous region for journalists. In this context, a comparative analysis of various journalistic eras reveals that while threats existed in the 1980s, their intensity was not of the same nature as today. Now, not only journalists but also their family members, relatives, and friends are living in a state of proximity to the pain and fear that journalists face. Most importantly, those who perpetrate injustices and abuses against journalists continue to roam freely, which is an even more alarming situation that must be addressed urgently to restore journalists' trust.

### **Suggestions**

Journalist safety is a pressing and globally relevant concern, with the level of risk varying significantly across regions. Nonetheless, journalists everywhere face a common set of threats, including physical violence, digital surveillance and attacks, legal intimidation, and harassment—both online and offline. Female journalists, in particular, encounter gender-specific threats such as sexual harassment, doxing, and targeted smear campaigns, which require tailored protective measures. Addressing these risks effectively demands a two-pronged approach: individualized protection through risk assessments,

safety training, and digital security protocols; and systemic solutions including the establishment of dedicated national protection mechanisms, the strengthening of legal and policy frameworks, and the creation of independent, well-resourced bodies to investigate and prosecute crimes against journalists. Combating impunity is essential to reversing the trend of shrinking press freedom and ensuring that journalists can work without fear of violence or retribution. Policymakers have a critical role to play in translating commitments to press freedom into concrete legislative and institutional action.

Properly trained journalists who experience a sense of security in their work represent one of the most potent strategies for combating disinformation. It is imperative for journalists to advocate for media proprietors to emphasize the importance of safety training and timely remuneration, in compliance with legal standards. The postponement of salary payments is particularly egregious due to its detrimental impact on journalists' mental well-being, which is already challenged by the inherent demands of reporting, editing, and scrutinizing the complex and troubling context of Pakistan.

To ensure journalist safety in Pakistan, a multifaceted approach is needed; encompassing legal reforms, security training, and increased awareness. This includes strengthening existing laws, implementing comprehensive security plans for media organizations, and educating journalists on safety protocols and conflict-sensitive reporting. Additionally, fostering a culture of accountability for attacks on journalists and promoting dialogue between civil society, media outlets, and government bodies are crucial.

Legal and institutional reforms should focus on strengthening existing laws by activating and enforcing federal and provincial laws on journalist safety, ensuring they are effectively implemented to protect journalists and address impunity. The federal law on journalist safety should be amended to remove provisions that could restrict journalists' rights, such as Section 6, and similar laws should be enacted in other provinces including Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab. A National Training Institute for the Safety of Journalists and Media Workers should be established to provide specialized training and resources. Accountability must be ensured through the creation of a commission of

impartial judges to respond quickly to attacks on journalists and hold perpetrators accountable, while all attacks on media professionals should be thoroughly investigated and prosecuted to deter future incidents.

A National Charter on Media Safety should be developed to outline priorities and actions for implementing the UN Plan on the Safety of Journalists in Pakistan, including practical measures such as hotlines and safe houses. A detailed roadmap should be created to implement the UN Plan of Action addressing safety and security issues comprehensively. Specialized training programs should be provided for journalists, including conflict-sensitive journalism, risk assessment, and hostile environment awareness, along with first aid and emergency assistance training and access to 24/7 hotlines. Journalists should also be educated on digital security tools and practices to help them identify and mitigate online threats.

Efforts must be made to address impunity by raising awareness about the UN Plan of Action and emphasizing accountability for crimes against journalists. Collaboration and dialogue should be promoted between civil society organizations, media associations, unions, and government bodies to effectively address safety concerns. Media organizations should be encouraged to develop comprehensive security plans for their personnel, including appropriate infrastructure and safety equipment. Partnerships with international organizations such as UNESCO, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and Reporters Without Borders should be established to share best practices and resources. Political parties should be encouraged to include commitments to journalist safety and freedom of expression in their election manifestos. Practical measures should be introduced to provide journalists with access to legal assistance, including counsel and representation, while safe houses and support programs should be developed for those who have been threatened or attacked. Financial assistance should be made available for journalists injured or deprived of their livelihood due to attacks. Finally, ongoing monitoring and advocacy are essential to track violence against journalists, promote their rights, and support their ability to report freely and safely.

By implementing these measures, Pakistan can create a safer environment for journalists and ensure their freedom of expression

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