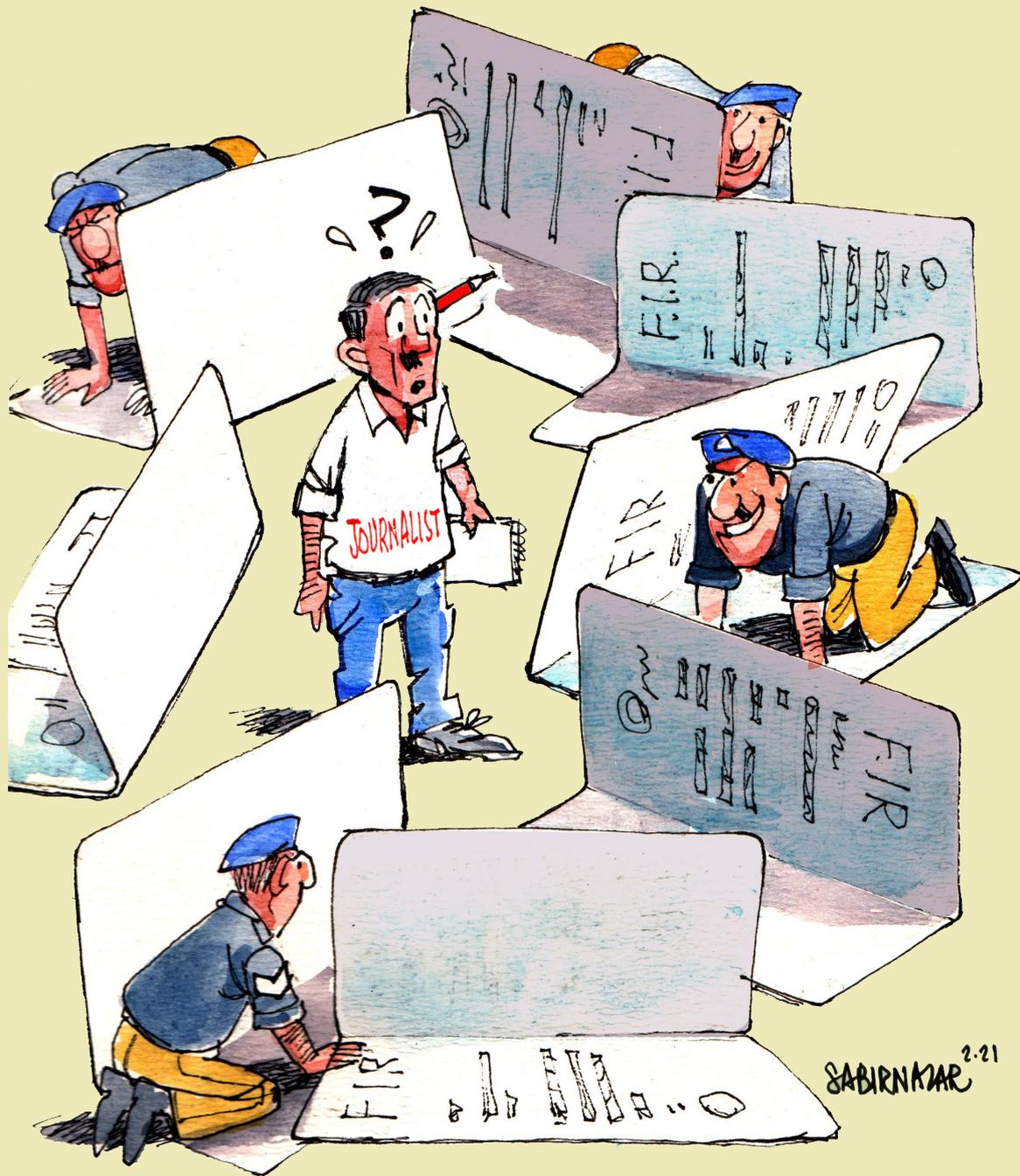


# Expanding theatre of threats against media practitioners in Pakistan



Freedom Network Pakistan Press Freedom Report – 2020-21  
World Press Freedom Day 2021



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# 1. Executive Summary

At least 148 cases of attacks and violations against media and its practitioners, including journalists, took place in Pakistan over the course of one year – between May 2020 and April 2021. This is an increase by over 40% from the 91 cases of violations documented in the preceding year (May 2019-April 2020) and signified a dramatic escalation in the climate of intimidation and harassment that is adversely affecting freedom of expression and access to information environment in the country, according to this research and analysis report by Freedom Network, an award-winning Pakistan-based media rights watchdog that tracks violations against journalists and attacks on freedom of expression on an ongoing basis.

The report, released in Pakistan in 2021 to mark the World Press Freedom Day marked globally on May 3 every year, reveals that invisible and visible hands have joined forces to tighten the screws on media in Pakistan through various means of coercive censorship, including murders, legal cases, assaults, abductions, detentions and threats, resulting in squeezing the space for freedom of expression and media freedoms resulting in increasing silence and erosion of public-interest journalism.

The data shows that no place in the four Pakistani provinces or Islamabad is safe – attacks against journalists are taking place everywhere and that shockingly the state and its functionaries have emerged as the principal threat actor wielding the biggest stick to browbeat the media into submission and growing silence.

According to the key findings of the [Freedom Network Pakistan Press Freedom Report 2021](#), monitored for the period May 2020 to April 2021:

- **Scale of violations against media in Pakistan and their frequency:** At least 148 cases of attacks and violations against journalists and media practitioners were documented in Pakistan in the one year between May 3, 2020 and April 20, 2021 across all territories of Pakistan, including the four provinces, Islamabad and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. This is an average of over 12 cases of violations a month – one every third day. The violations included killing of 6 journalists for their journalism work and 7 other failed assassination attempts, 5 kidnappings, 25 arrests or detentions, 15 assaults and 27 legal cases registered against journalists.
- **The top three categories of violations** against the journalists in Pakistan in the period under review included 27 **legal cases** filed against them (18%), 26 verbal **threats** of murder or other dire consequences (17%), and at least 25 cases of **arrests or detention** of journalists by law enforcement agencies (16%). These three categories of violations – legal cases, threats and detentions – constituted over 60% of the 148 categories of violations against media in Pakistan in the period.
- **The most dangerous regions in Pakistan for journalists:** Overall, Islamabad emerged as the riskiest and most dangerous place to practice journalism in Pakistan in the period under review with 34% of the violations (51 out of total 148 cases) recorded in the

federal capital. Sindh was the second worst with 26% of the violations (38 cases) and Punjab the third most dangerous with 20% (29 cases). These were followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) with 9% (13 cases) and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) with 6% (9 cases) and Balochistan with 5% (8 cases). No violations were documented from Gilgit Baltistan (GB).

- **The most targeted journalism mediums in Pakistan:** Of the total of 148 attacks and violations against journalists recorded in Pakistan in the period under review, TV medium emerged as the single largest victim of type of media with at least 79 cases (54%) of the cases against its practitioners. Print media was the second most targeted medium with 58 journalists working for it targeted (38%) while 11 cases (7%) were recorded of online journalists targeted. No targeting of a radio journalist was documented.
- **The biggest threat actors targeting media in Pakistan:** The State emerged as the biggest threat actor against journalists in the period under review as victims and their families blamed it in a whopping 46% of the 148 documented cases of violations against media practitioners. A group of miscellaneous **'others'** (including feudal lords, land mafia, traders, individual clerics, lawyers, etc.) was the second largest threat actor with 25% (at least 36 cases) while the **'unknown'** category emerged as the third largest category of threat actor blamed by the victims and their family, as well as the authorities and their employers, as being behind violations against 25 journalists (16% cases).

## 2. Scale of violations against journalists in Pakistan and their frequency

At least 148 cases of attacks and violations against journalists and media practitioners were documented in Pakistan in the one year between May 3, 2020 and April 20, 2021 across all territories of Pakistan, including the four provinces, Islamabad, Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Kashmir. This is an average of over 12 cases of violations a month – one every third day.

The documented violations included:

- 06 cases of **murders** of journalists, plus 7 other unsuccessful assassination attempts.
- 27 instances of **legal cases** registered against journalists.
- 05 cases of **abductions**, plus another case of unsuccessful kidnapping attempt.
- 25 cases of **arrests, detentions or illegal confinements** of journalists by the State.
- 15 cases of **physical assaults**, 11 of which caused bodily injuries.
- 04 cases of **attacks** on the homes of journalists.
- 26 cases of specific **threats** of murder or other dire consequences issued to journalists.
- 15 cases of **harassment** of journalists.

### 3. Categories of violations against journalists in Pakistan

CATEGORIES OF VIOLATIONS AGAINST MEDIA IN PAKISTAN  
(MAY 2020-APRIL 2021)



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The top three categories of violations against the journalists in Pakistan in the period under review included 27 legal cases filed against them (18%), 26 verbal threats of murder or other dire consequences (17%), and at least 25 cases of arrests or detention of journalists by law enforcement agencies (16%). These three categories of violations – legal cases, threats and detentions – constituted over 60% of the 148 categories of violations against media in

Pakistan in the period.

**Killing and attempted murder:** At least six working journalists were killed for their journalism work in the period under review. The murders constituted 4% of the total 148 cases of violations against journalism practitioners. At least another seven journalists – 5% of the total violations – survived assassination attempts. The total cases of murders and attempted murders totaled 13, or 9% of the total 148 violations.

**Legal cases:** At least 27 cases were documented in which journalists were served with legal notices for various alleged infractions, or 18% of the 148 total cases of violations.

**Threats:** Specific verbal threats of murder or other dire consequences constituted the second largest frequent category of violations against journalists in the period under review with 26 cases documented, or 17% of the total 148 violations.

**Arrests or detention:** At least seven cases of arrests (under specific charges) and 18 cases of illegal detention by authorities without serving cause were documented in the period under review – a total of 25, or 16% of the total 148 violations recorded.

**Assault:** At least 15 journalists were physically assaulted in the period under review, of which 11 sustained serious injuries. This category of violation constituted 10% of the total 148 violations against the journalists.

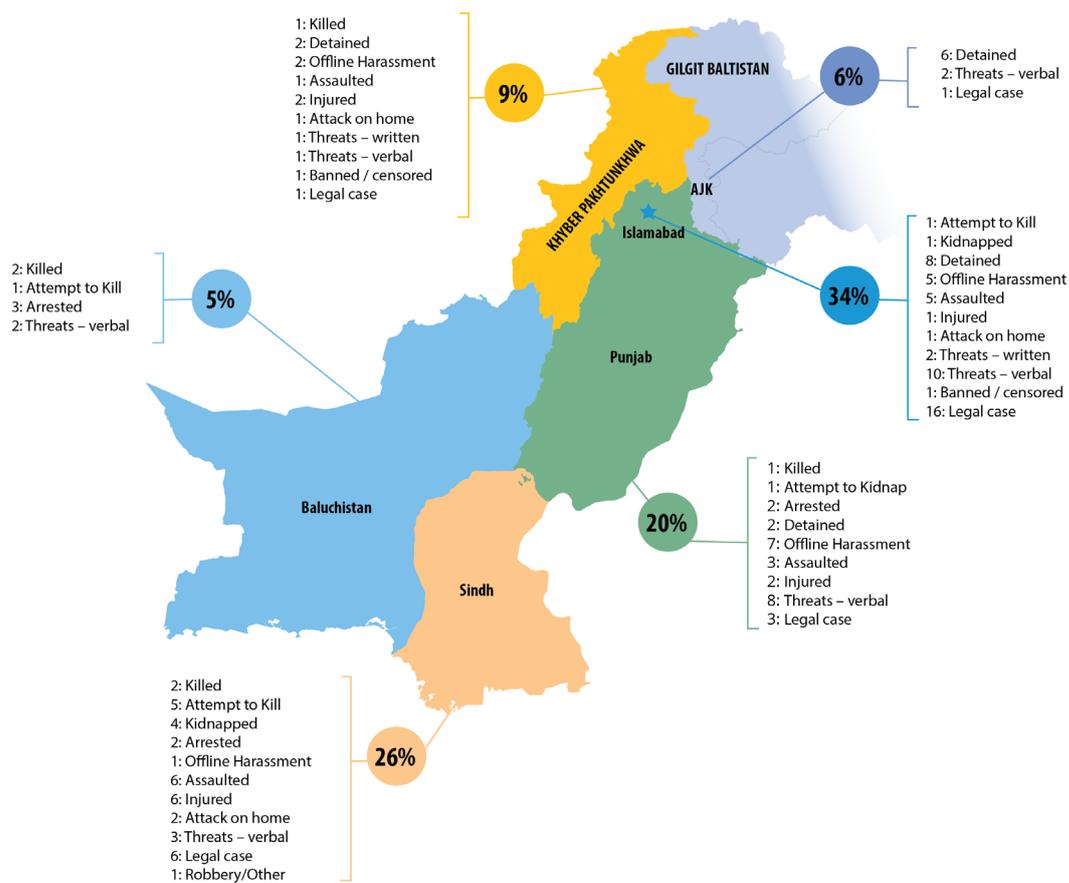
**Kidnapping:** At least five cases of abductions and one of attempted abduction of journalists were documented in the period under review, or 4% of the total cases of 148 violations.

**Harassment:** At least 15 cases of harassment and intimidation of journalists were documented in the period under review, constituting 10% of the total 148 violations recorded.

# 4. The most dangerous regions in Pakistan for journalists

## PAKISTAN MEDIA WATCH: THREATS, ATTACKS & HARASSMENT BAROMETER (MAY 2020-APRIL 2021)

Threats, Attacks & Harassment against Pakistani JOURNALISTS, MEDIA WORKERS & BLOGGERS



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**Overall hostility:** Overall, Islamabad emerged as the riskiest and most dangerous place to practice journalism in Pakistan with 34% of the violations (51 out of total 148 cases) recorded in the federal capital. Sindh was the second worst with 26% of the violations (38 cases) and Punjab the third most dangerous with 20% (29 cases). These were followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) with 9% (13 cases) and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) with 6% (9 cases) and Balochistan with 5% (8 cases). No violations were documented from Gilgit Baltistan (GB).

**Risk to life:** In terms of threat to the lives of journalists, Balochistan and Sindh emerged as the most dangerous regions in Pakistan with two journalists killed in each of the two provinces as well as one unsuccessful assassination attempt in Balochistan. KP and Punjab were the second worst with one journalist killed in each province. In Sindh five attempted murders of journalists were thwarted while another attempted murder failed in Islamabad. No murders were reported from AJK, GB or Islamabad.

**Bodily harm:** In terms of physical assaults and bodily harm, Sindh emerged as the most violent region in the country for journalists documenting 12 of the total 26 cases – 46% – of assaults and injuries of journalists during the period under review. The second worst was Islamabad with 6 cases (23%) and third worst Punjab with 5 cases (20%). KP documented 3 cases (12%). No physical assaults were reported from AJK, Balochistan and GB.

**Arrests:** In terms of arrests, detentions and illegal confinements, of the total 25 cases documented, eight (32%) were documented from Islamabad, six (24%) from AJK, four (16%) from Punjab, three (12%) from Balochistan and two (8%) each from KP and Sindh. No case was reported from GB.

**Capture:** In terms of abductions and attempted kidnappings, a total of six cases were reported in the period under review – four (66%) journalists kidnapped in Sindh and one from Islamabad. An attempt to kidnap a journalist was thwarted in Punjab. No cases were reported from AJK, Balochistan, GB, KP and Islamabad.

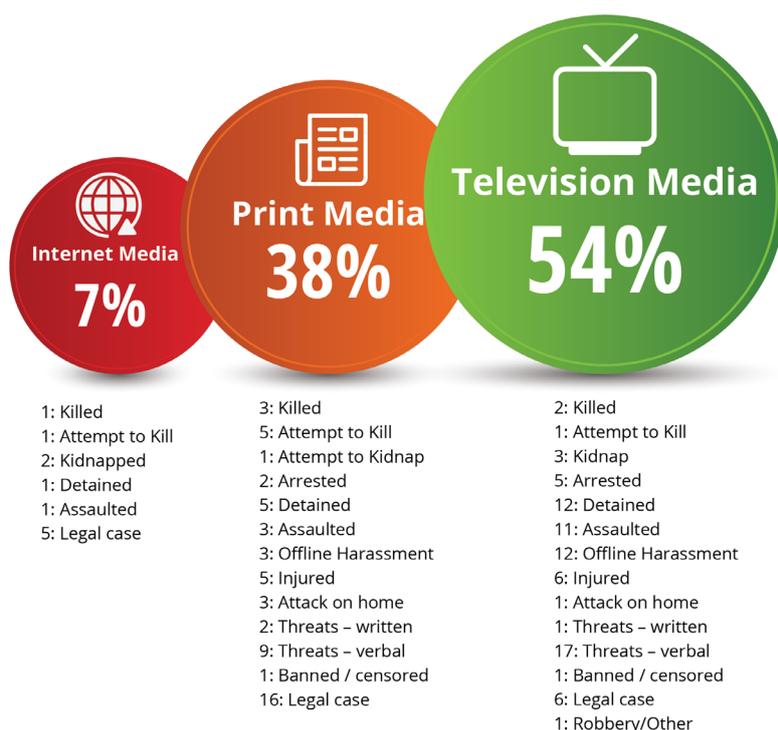
**Threats:** In terms of specific verbal threats that journalists received, of the total 26 cases, 10 (38%) were documented in Islamabad, eight (31%) in Punjab, two (8%) each in AJK and Balochistan and one in KP. No verbal threat to any journalist was documented in GB.

**Legal:** In terms of legal cases registered against journalists, of the total 27 cases documented, Islamabad emerged as the most hostile for journalists with 16 cases (60%), Sindh was second with six cases (22%) and Punjab third with three cases (11%). One legal case each was documented in Islamabad and KP. No legal cases were documented from Balochistan or GB.

**Harassment:** Of the total 15 cases of harassment and intimidation documented in the period under review, at least seven cases (45%) were from Punjab, 5 cases (33%) from Islamabad, two cases (13%) from KP and one from Sindh. No harassment cases were documented from AJK, Balochistan and GB.

# 5. The most targeted mediums in Pakistan for their journalism

## THREATS, ATTACKS & HARASSMENT AGAINST VARIOUS TYPES OF MEDIA



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**TV and print media in crosshairs:** Of the total of 148 attacks and violations against journalists recorded in Pakistan in the period under review, TV medium emerged as the single largest victim of type of media with at least 79 cases (54%) of the cases against its practitioners compared to print, radio and internet.

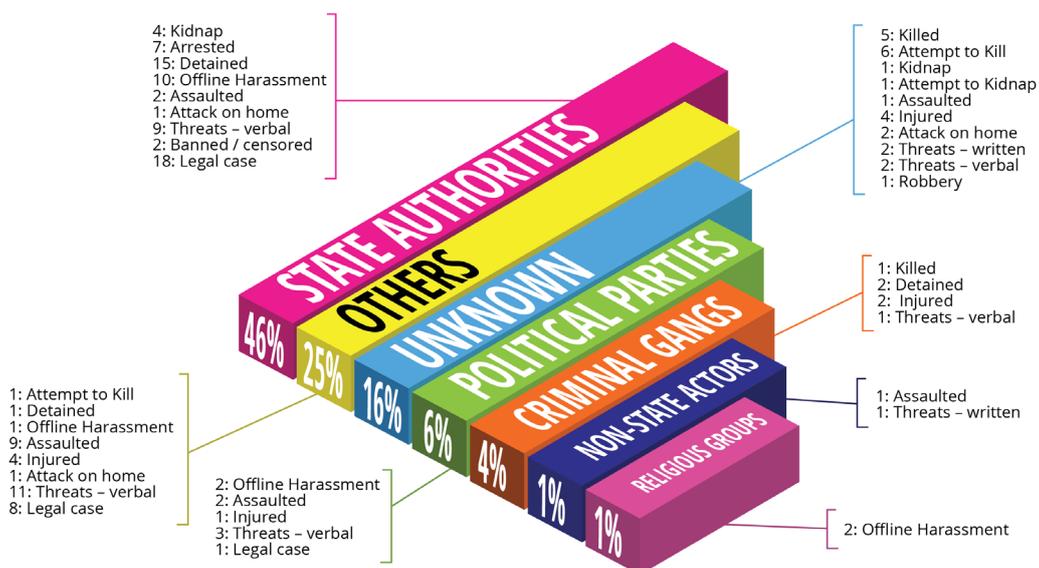
Print media was the second most targeted medium with 58 journalists working for it targeted (38%) while 11 cases (7%) were recorded of online journalists targeted. No targeting of a radio journalist was documented.

In the period under review:

- Of the 6 journalists **killed**, 3 worked for print, 2 for TV and 1 for an online journalism platform.
- Of the 7 journalists who **survived assassination attempts**, 5 worked for print and 1 each for print and internet media.
- Of the 27 journalists against whom **legal cases** were registered, 16 were from print, 6 from TV and 5 from internet media.
- Of the 5 journalists **kidnapped**, 3 worked for TV and 2 for internet media.
- Of the 15 journalists **assaulted**, 11 worked for TV, 3 for print and 1 for internet media.
- Of the 11 journalists **injured**, 6 worked for TV and 5 for print.
- Of the 7 journalists **arrested**, 5 worked for TV and 2 for print.
- Of the 18 journalists **detained** illegally, 12 worked for TV, 5 for print and 1 for internet media.
- Of the 15 journalists who faced **harassment**, 12 worked for TV and 3 for print.

# 6. The most vicious threat actors targeting journalists in Pakistan

## THREAT ACTORS ATTACKING AND HARASSING JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA



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**State authorities:** In a whopping 46% of the 148 documented cases of violations against media practitioners in Pakistan – thus the biggest threat actor – in the period under review, the victims or their families suspect the involvement of the State and its authorities and functionaries in the attacks on them compared to other influential threat actors such as political parties, religious groups or criminal gangs and influential individuals, or unidentified threat sources. Among specific threat actors, the State authorities were not suspected of involvement in any of the six journalists killed but were allegedly involved in registering legal cases against 18 journalists, assaulting two, kidnapping four, arresting seven, detaining 15, harassing 10, enforcing censorship on two and threatening nine journalists. Thus, the state

authorities demonstrated an arsenal of various ways in which to harass and harm journalists in Pakistan.

**“Others”:** A group of miscellaneous ‘others’ (including feudal lords, land mafia, traders, individual clerics, lawyers, etc.) with 25% (at least 36 cases) – emerging as a distinct overall category of actors targeting journalists in Pakistan for their journalism work – emerged as the second largest threat actor in the period under review. These ‘other’ categories of threat actors attempted to kill one journalist, detained, harassed or attacked the home of one journalist each, assaulted nine journalists and injured four, threatened 11 and registered legal cases against eight journalists.

**“Unknown”:** The victims and their family, as well as the authorities and their employers, have been unable to identify perpetrators of violations against 25 journalists (16% cases). ‘Unknown’ threat actors were involved in killing five of six journalists murdered, making unsuccessful attempts to murder another six journalists, kidnapping one and attempting to abduct another, injuring four and attacking the homes of two journalists and threatening another four.

**Political parties:** Surprisingly another major category of threat actor identified by the victims or their families were political parties – constituting 6% (9 cases). Political parties were allegedly involved in assaulting two journalists, injuring another, harassing two and registering a legal case against one journalist.

# 7. List of journalists killed in Pakistan for their journalism work during May 2020 to April 2021

The following is a list of the six journalists killed in the period under review:

**Ajay Lalwani**, news correspondent for daily *Puchano*, was shot on March 18, 2021 in Sukkur city in Sindh, as he sat in a barber shop. He suffered three gunshot wounds and died before reaching the nearest hospital. His attackers remain unknown. Lalwani was of Hindu faith.

**Qais Javed**, a journalist associated with daily *Ehadnama*, was shot dead on December 7, 2020, Dera Ismail Khan city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He was gunned down by two unidentified assailants riding a motorcycle, as he stood in a courtyard outside his home. Javed was of Christian faith.

**Abid Hussain**, reporter for *Jurm-o-Saza* publication, was shot dead on September 25, 2020 in Mandi Bahauddin city in Punjab, as he rode home with his brother on a motorcycle. He died while shuttling between hospitals. While his attackers remain unidentified, his brother said they shouted at Hussain before shooting him that this was in retaliation for his reporting. One suspect was later arrested.

**Shaheena Shaheen**, editor of Dazgohar magazine and PTV channel talk show host, was shot dead on September 5, 2020 in Turbat city of Balochistan. She was shot by her husband of six months who after shooting her left her at the local hospital and fled. Shaheen is the second female journalist to be murdered in Pakistan after Urooj Iqbal was also killed by her husband in Lahore on November 25, 2019 for resisting his demands to quit journalism.

**Anwar Jan Khetran**, a journalist with daily Naveed-e-Pakistan was shot dead on July 23, 2020 in Barkhan town of Balochistan. He was gunned down by two persons, later identified by his family as the guards of the provincial food minister upset with his reporting, as he walked home from office. He died on the spot.

**Zulfiqar Mandrani**, a senior journalist associated with daily Koshish, was abducted and later shot dead on May 26, 2020 in Jacobabad in Sindh. His family nominated six persons with a history of harassing Mandrani of which two were later arrested.

## DISCLAIMERS

- **DATA:** The data used and analyzed in this report was generated by the **Pakistan Press Club Safety Hubs Network**, which **Freedom Network** helped establish and manages in partnership with National Press Club in Islamabad, Karachi Press Club, Lahore Press Club, Quetta Press Club and Peshawar Press Club. The hubs monitor and document threats and attacks against journalists using pre-developed templates with cases cross-verified by press clubs, journalists' unions, media houses and journalists and/or their families. The hubs also provide intermediation assistance for victims. In serious cases, the victims are assisted through the **Pakistan Journalists Safety Fund (PJSF)**, also managed by Freedom Network.
- **LIABILITY:** The list of threat actors is based on information provided by victims or their families and alleged involvement of suspected threat actors cannot be independently verified either by the Pakistan Press Clubs Safety Hubs Network or Freedom Network.
- **CASES:** The list of cases included and considered for analysis in this report is based on cases documented by the Pakistan Press Clubs Safety Hubs Network that have been brought to their notice. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list. The actual number of violations against journalists in Pakistan may be higher than the cases documented here.



## ABOUT FREEDOM NETWORK ([www.fnpk.org](http://www.fnpk.org))

Freedom Network is a Pakistan-based independent media and development sector research, advocacy and training organization registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). It was established in 2013.

In December 2017, Freedom Network was awarded the prestigious global French Human Rights Prize 2017 by the Government of France for “its efforts for safety and protection of journalists and promotion of freedom of expression.”

**OUR MISSION:** To protect civil liberties, including freedom of expression and access to information, and promote an informed society that sees media as a key partner in a democratic and pluralist Pakistan.

**OUR OBJECTIVES AND EXPERTISE:**

- 1. To serve as a watchdog on the right to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet and of civil society**
  - a. Through 24/7 monitoring of the rights to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and online
  - b. Through monitoring and documenting violations of freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet
  - c. Through researching the causes, symptoms and case studies of the violations of freedom of expression in all forms of media
  - d. Through monitoring violation of the right to expression of non-media sections of society such as human rights groups, development practitioners, and the performing arts industry.
  
- 2. To promote an ethical and professional media**
  - a. By promoting, supporting and conducting advocacy, research, analysis and training initiatives for media
  - b. By promoting, supporting and conducting initiatives to help civil society strengthen its stakeholding in a pluralistic, independent, open and professional media with emphasis on professional ethics and journalism best practices
  - c. By strengthening the interface between media and civil society by improving professional development communications within and for development sector organizations as well as for their supporters and donors.
  - d. By promoting a culture of safety and security for journalists and media houses through advocacy, research and training on issues of safety and impunity against journalists.
  
- 3. To serve as an advocate for freedom of expression and access to information as fundamental rights**
  - a. Through a broad range of advocacy, research and analysis initiatives
  - b. By promoting and building synergies between and among media and civil society stakeholders
  - c. By promoting citizens’ participation on issues relating to freedom of expression and access to information
  - d. By conducting assessment missions, studies, research, translations of resources in multiple languages on its own and for other organizations for wider national and international audiences.