

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN PAKISTAN'S JOURNALISM WORLD

IMPUNITY REPORT 2025



THIS REPORT INCLUDES

- Overview: "From bad to worse"
- Special report: "Growing legal actions against media practitioners"
- Violations: Most dangerous places and mediums to practice journalism in Pakistan
- Measuring progress: Pakistan Impunity Index 2025

Adnan Rehmat and Iqbal Khattak

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Acknowledgement:

Freedom Network thanks the managers of its Safety Hubs at major press clubs across Pakistan for documenting the threats and attacks against journalists and its Program Coordinator **Faiza Hassan** for archiving and processing the information. Freedom Network also generates monthly monitoring reports based on the same data, which are available on its website. Freedom Network has issued this annual impunity report for the past many years. However, for the first time, the 2022-23 report separately started acknowledging the threats and attacks against ‘other media professionals’ (‘OMPs’). This is because Pakistan now has two laws for the protection of journalists – a national law at the federal level and a provincial law in Sindh – that both also recognize threats to media practitioners and media professionals who may not be traditional employed journalists but are threatened or attacked due to their acts of journalism or their association with news organizations in quasi-editorial or non-editorial roles. This report has been produced by **Freedom Network** (FN) with support from **International Media Support** (IMS).

Disclaimer: The data used and analyzed in this report was generated by the **Safety Hubs Network**, which Freedom Network with IMS assistance helped establish and manages in partnership with the **National Press Club** in Islamabad, **Karachi Press Club**, **Lahore Press Club**, **Multan Press Club**, **Quetta Press Club**, **Peshawar Press Club**, **Gilgit Press Club** and **Muzaffarabad 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, victims are assisted through the **Pakistan Journalists Safety Fund** (PJSF), also managed by Freedom Network with IMS assistance. The list of cases included and considered for analysis in this report is based on cases brought to the notice of the Safety Hubs Network or those reported in media. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list. The actual number of violations against journalists in Pakistan may be higher than the cases documented here.

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Executive Summary: From bad to worse

This is an annual report that tracks trends and key cases related to impunity of crimes against journalists and other media practitioners in Pakistan and violations against media freedoms, to mark November 2, the globally observed and UN-recognized International Day to End Impunity of Crimes against Journalists (IDEI).

The period under review (November 2024 to September 2025) indicates a nearly doubling of the scale of violations against media and its practitioners in Pakistan compared to the preceding year.

Simultaneously there was a discernible shrinking of space for dissent and a sharp increase in legal cases against practitioners of free speech, especially against journalists exercising freedom of expression online under the national cyber crime law. Vague charges and weak procedural safeguards enabled authorities to use criminal law as a tool of pressure, undermining freedom of expression and journalistic independence in Pakistan.

Growing legal intimidation against journalists

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), originally enacted in 2016, underwent significant amendments between November 2024 and September 2025. These changes intensified debates about the tension between digital security and fundamental freedoms, with major consequences for journalists, activists, and rights advocates. During this period, PECA evolved from a contested cybercrime law into a more actively enforced and punitive tool, especially after the January 2025 amendments, which broadened its scope and increased penalties.

Rights groups, journalists' unions, and international organizations argued that the new amendments created greater legal ambiguity and excessive administrative powers, which were then used against journalists, social media creators, and political activists. This manifested in arrests, FIRs, channel blockings, and threats of prison and fines. The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) was also used more frequently, compounding the chilling effect on investigative reporting and shrinking civic space.

The report documents at least 36 formal legal cases filed against 30 journalists and media practitioners by government authorities, with dozens more receiving notifications for alleged infractions under PECA. Of these, 22 cases were under PECA and 14 under PPC, with some individuals facing multiple charges. Most PECA cases targeted practitioners in Punjab, while all PPC cases were also in Punjab.

The January 2025 amendments to PECA were passed quickly, with little consultation, and introduced controversial provisions such as criminalizing “fake or false” information, establishing the Digital Rights Protection Authority (DRPA) with broad powers, and expanding the definition of blockable content to include broadcast media. Further restrictions were added in September 2025, reinforcing the government’s intent to control digital spaces despite criticism.

The crackdown led to widespread condemnation and documentation by various organizations. Freedom Network reported 22 cases under PECA, mostly in Punjab. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists noted that 150 journalists faced charges under PECA in December 2024 alone, often for allegedly spreading false narratives against state institutions. The International Press Institute described PECA as a powerful tool to suppress journalists, while the Pakistan Press Foundation recorded 168 attacks on journalists and media workers in 2024. Reporters Without Borders, Global Voices, and the National Assembly also documented numerous cases, with the International Federation of Journalists likening PECA 2025 to “martial law.” Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International called for repeal or reform, citing violations of international human rights standards.

Several high-profile cases illustrate the law’s use against journalists, including arrests and charges under terrorism and PECA, as well as targeting of YouTube channels. The cumulative effect of these legal actions has been a chilling impact on press freedom, self-censorship, resource and livelihood losses, risks to digital platforms, and disparate geographic impacts, especially in Punjab.

Growing violations against media practitioners

A sharp rise in attacks and violations against journalists and other media professionals in Pakistan were documented between November 2024 and September 2025. During this ten-month period, at least 142 cases of violations were documented, marking a nearly 60% increase compared to the previous year. The hostile environment for media, which intensified after the February 2024 general elections, has made almost every region in Pakistan unsafe for journalism, with incidents reported across all provinces and territories.

Verified data processed by this report reveals that Islamabad and Punjab were jointly the most dangerous places for journalists, each accounting for 28% of the violations, followed closely by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, Balochistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. No cases were reported from Gilgit-Baltistan. The most targeted medium was television, followed by print and digital media, with one radio journalist also affected.

Violations included one verified murder of a journalist, four assassination attempts, 30 instances of legal action, 15 cases of arrest and detention, 39 cases of physical assault, 30 threats (both online and offline), three kidnappings, three disappearances, and ten digital threats. A majority of the documented victims were journalists, but other media professionals such as citizen journalists and non-editorial staff were also targeted.

Government authorities were identified as the primary perpetrators in 71% of cases, with miscellaneous actors, political parties, and unknown sources responsible for the remainder.

Growing impunity of crimes against journalists

Pakistan was the first country to legislate specifically for the safety of journalists, with laws enacted at both the federal and Sindh provincial levels. However, the operationalization of these laws and the establishment of safety commissions have been inconsistent, with only Sindh and the federal government making significant progress.

As part of the IMS-FN annual report in 2024, the “Pakistan Media Impunity Index” was introduced, a tool to measure progress in combating impunity for crimes against journalists and other media professionals across federal and provincial levels.

The index evaluates three main areas: policy-related actions, legislation-related actions, and operational-related actions. The Pakistan Media Impunity Index 2025 shows that by October 2025, the federal and Sindh governments scored 9 out of 10 for their efforts in policy formulation, legislation, and notification of safety commissions.

In contrast, the other regions – Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab – lagged far behind, scoring between 1 and 2 out of 10 due to the absence of relevant laws, policies, or operational mechanisms.

Some positive highlights included the appointment of chairpersons for the federal and Sindh journalists’ safety commissions in 2025, marking a positive step forward. Kamal Uddin Tipu was appointed as the first chairman of the federal commission, and Aijaz Memon took over as chairman of the Sindh commission. Despite these advancements, the federal commission remained incomplete, with some members awaiting security clearance and operational challenges persisting.

Overall, the Impunity Report 2025 data paints a picture of escalating risks and persistent impunity, in Pakistan with journalists facing threats to their lives, frequent legal harassment, and physical violence, especially in regions like Islamabad, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The findings underscore the urgent need for stronger protections and accountability mechanisms for media practitioners in Pakistan.

While Pakistan has made legislative strides in recent years, especially at the federal and Sindh levels, the lack of progress in other regions and the incomplete operationalization of safety commissions continue to hinder efforts to combat impunity for crimes against journalists. Legal frameworks alone are insufficient; effective implementation and ongoing monitoring are essential to ensure the safety of media practitioners and accountability for violations.

Special Report: Growing legal actions against media practitioners, including through PECA

The **Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA)**, originally enacted in 2016 as Pakistan's primary legislation on cybercrimes and cybersecurity, underwent significant amendments during the period from November 2024 to September 2025. These changes have sparked intense debate about the balance between digital security and fundamental freedoms, with profound implications for journalists, political activists, and rights advocates. This analysis examines the key developments, controversies, and documented harms during this critical ten-month period.

Between November 2024 and September 2025, the controversial PECA law of 2016 shifted from an already-contested cybercrime framework into a more actively enforced and broadened instrument after the January 2025 amendments, which expanded its remit and enhanced punitive measures.

Rights groups, journalists' unions and international organisations in Pakistan and internationally argued that the changes created through the PECA Amendment Act 2025 enhanced legal ambiguity and excessive administrative powers that were then operationalised against journalists, social-media creators and political activists – through arrests, first information reports (FIRs), channel blockings and the threat of prison and fines.

But PECA was not the only legal instrument used to blunt professional journalism and freedom of expression in the period under review. The regular Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) legal framework was also excessively used in the period under review. The combined effect was a measurable chilling on investigative reporting, the thinning of online civic space, and concrete harms to livelihoods and information access.

Legal cases: Data varies but data tracked and verified by this report in the period under review (data from other sources is referenced below) showed at least 36 formal legal cases were filed against 30 individual journalists and other media practitioners in Pakistan by government authorities. These were formal legal cases while dozens of other journalists were issued sub-legal notifications to show case for various alleged infractions under the Prevention of Cyber Crime Act (PECA) law.

Of the formal legal cases, one category of cases was under the Prevention of Cyber Crime Act (PECA) under which 22 media practitioners were charged and the other category was the

Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) under which at least 8 media practitioners were charged with 14 separate cases. Some of the media practitioners faced more than one cases under PPC against themselves.

Cases under PECA: In the period under review, cases against at least 22 individual journalists and other media practitioners were documented under PECA in Pakistan. Of these at least 16 (or 73%) were against media practitioners based in Punjab, 3 (or 13%) in KP, 2 (or 9%) in Sindh and 1 (or 4%) in Balochistan. The provisions of PECA laws applied against these media practitioners, all of whom were males, varied from at least one and up to seven clauses against each individual.

Cases under PPC: In the period under review, cases against at least 8 individual journalists and other media practitioners were documented under PPC in Pakistan. All the 8 (or 100%) journalists and other media practitioners charged under PPC were based in Punjab province. At least 4 of these journalists faced more than one case under PPC.

Chronology of PECA-related developments and controversies

The major legal and operational changes to PECA in January 2025 through parliament generated multiple controversies. Pursuant to this, various patterns of use and harm were documented especially toward journalists, political and human-rights activists between in the period under review.

January 2025 – the amendments: The most significant development occurred on January 29, 2025, when the parliament enacted sweeping amendments to PECA. The amendments were rushed through the National Assembly on January 23, 2025, and passed with minimal consultation with stakeholders, drawing immediate condemnation from media and human rights organizations. Thereafter the Senate also approved the amendments, making them law.

The amended legislation introduced several controversial provisions.

- First, it criminalized the dissemination of “fake or false” information, making it a cognizable offense punishable by up to three years in prison and fines exceeding Rs2 million. Human Rights Watch noted that the law’s vague language regarding what constitutes “fake” information creates significant potential for abuse, as authorities can subjectively determine the veracity of online content.
- Second, the amendments established the Digital Rights Protection Authority (DRPA), a new regulatory body tasked with monitoring social media content, investigating violations, and imposing penalties. Critics argued that this concentration of power lacks adequate oversight mechanisms and judicial checks.
- Third, the amendments broadened the definition of content that authorities can block and removed the exemption previously enjoyed by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA)-licensed television channels, bringing traditional broadcast media under the PECA scope for the first time.

September 2025 – further restrictions: Despite widespread opposition to the January 2025 amendments, the government authorities introduced yet another amendment to strengthen PECA in September 2025. According to Reporters Without Borders, this move demonstrated the government’s determination to expand digital control mechanisms despite domestic and international criticism.

Impact: a systematic crackdown – and widespread condemnation

The period from November 2024 to September 2025 witnessed an unprecedented assault on press freedom through the PECA weaponization against journalists. The scale and systematic nature of this crackdown – including varying data – are documented by multiple sources.

- **Freedom Network:** In the period under review, cases against at least 22 individual journalists and other media practitioners were documented under PECA in Pakistan. Of these at least 16 (or 73%) were against media practitioners based in Punjab, 3 (or 13%) in KP, 2 (or 9%) in Sindh and 1 (or 4%) in Balochistan.
- **Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists:** In December 2024 alone, the PFUJ reported that 150 journalists faced charges under PECA, accused of spreading “a false narrative against state institutions,” particularly security agencies.
- **International Press Institute:** The IPI reported that by March 2025, the 2016 PECA law had become “a powerful weapon to crack down on journalists.”
- **Pakistan Press Foundation:** Throughout 2024, the PPF documented 168 attacks on journalists and media workers.
- **Reporters Without Borders:** Between January and September 2025, at least nine journalists were “abusively targeted” under PECA according to RSF.
- **Global Voices:** By June 2025, Global Voices reported a total of 670 cases filed under PECA across Pakistan, though not all specifically targeted journalists.
- **National Assembly:** A September 2025 Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting meeting at the National Assembly revealed that over 350 cases had been registered under PECA, with many appearing to be illegal.
- **International Federation of Journalists:** IFJ characterized PECA 2025 as “martial law,” arguing that it gave authorities legal power to process cases lodged by unknown people against media and activists. This created an environment where anonymous complaints could trigger serious legal consequences, amplifying the chilling effect on free expression.
- **Human Rights Watch:** HRW called for immediate repeal or reform of the amendments, stating these “include provisions making the dissemination of ‘fake or false’ information a criminal offense punishable by up to three years in prison” in violation of international human rights standards.
- **Amnesty International:** AI urged Pakistani authorities “to amend PECA to bring it in line with international human rights law,” describing the amendments as establishing “sweeping controls on social media.”

Notable cases against journalists under PECA

In the period under review, several high-profile cases illustrate the excessive application of PECA against journalists.

- **Matiullah Jan** was arrested by Islamabad Police in December 2024 and charged under terrorism laws alongside PECA-related charges, though he was eventually granted bail by an anti-terrorism court.
- **Harmeet Singh** was charged under PECA during coverage of Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf's November 2024 protest for allegedly "propagating false narratives against state institutions." This case exemplifies how political reporting became criminalized under the amended law.
- **Waheed Murad** was arrested under PECA in March 2025. He was eventually granted bail on March 28, 2025, by an Islamabad court on a surety bond of Rs 20,000 rupees but only after spending time in custody.
- **Farhan Mallick** arrested under PECA on March 26, 2025, and sent to jail on judicial remand. He secured post-arrest bail in two cases on April 8.
- **YouTube channels:** Beyond individual journalists, authorities also targeted media platforms. A dozen YouTube channels were targeted under PECA within the first nine months following the January amendments, representing a concerted effort to control digital media spaces.

Implications of these legal cases for journalists

The legal cases against media practitioners were ostensibly instituted with the aim of curbing their freedom of expression, including both political and journalistic expression. By way of implication and implied outcome, the accumulative effect was multifarious. Some of the these included the following:

1. **Chilling effect and self-censorship:** Even when cases do not lead to convictions, repeated FIRs [first information reports], multiple summons, including by the National Cyber Crime Investigations Agency (NCCIA) and the threat of PECA/PPC prosecution cause journalists to pull back on investigative reporting, especially on security, corruption or politically sensitive topics.
2. **Resource and livelihood impact:** Legal defence costs of individual media practitioners, platform/blocking losses and temporary detentions reduce income and resources for independent reporters and non-legacy independent outlets and freelancers.
3. **Digital platform risks:** Orders to block channels or take down content reduce audience reach and can permanently damage independent, non-legacy digital-first journalism ventures.
4. **Disparate geographic impact:** Media practitioners some regions are affected more than others such as Punjab province. The local political dynamics and enforcement priorities shape risk exposure for media practitioners.

5. **Legal ambiguity and abuse potential:** Vague charges against media practitioners such as broad “fake news” or loosely referenced PPC sections, including sedition and terrorism, enable use of criminal law as a tool of pressure, particularly when procedural safeguards including judicial review, notice-and-counter-notices, are weak.

Cases Under Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) Against Journalists – Timeline (Dec 2024 to Sept 2025)

December 2024

- **Dec 3:** The federal government plans to bring wholesale changes to PECA, forming a new authority with powers to block online content and prosecute those propagating fake news.
- **Dec 12:** Federal government announces the establishment of a Digital Rights Protection Authority (DRPA) to tighten control over online content.
- **Dec 13:** Islamabad Police chief initiates action against individuals involved in an allegedly malicious social media campaign.
- **Dec 14:** Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) initiates action against 150 individuals, including journalists and vloggers, for allegedly promoting a false narrative against state institutions.
- **Dec 15:** Pakistan federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) condemns the arrest orders against journalists under PECA.



January 2025

- **Jan 23:** A bill seeking amendments to PECA is introduced in the National Assembly, proposing prison terms for spreading disinformation.
- **Jan 24:** Journalists and media bodies vow to challenge the amendments in court.
- **Jan 25:** The Senate witnesses a fierce showdown over the controversial PECA Amendment Bill.
- **Jan 30:** President Asif Zardari gives his assent to the amendments to PECA brought in by the government of Shahbaz Sharif despite widespread backlash.



February 2025

- **Feb 1:** Federal information minister defends PECA amendments amid protests.
- **Feb 7:** Parliamentary panel decides to liaise with journalists on PECA law.
- **Feb 11:** Lahore High Court (LHC) declines immediate suspension of PECA amendments.
- **Feb 18:** Islamabad High Court (IHC) to hear a new challenge against PECA amendments.



March 2025

- **Mar 7:** Balochistan High Court (BHC) summons attorney general in PECA challenge.
- **Mar 16:** Plea challenging the constitutionality of PECA law filed in Peshawar High Court (PHC).
- **March 26:** Journalist Farhan Mallick arrested under PECA and sent to jail on judicial remand.



April 2025

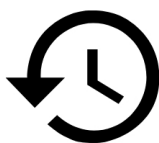
- **Apr 1:** Human rights groups condemn the crackdown on press freedom in Pakistan.
- **Apr 8:** Journalist Farhan Mallick secures post-arrest bail in two cases.
- **April 18:** IHC orders the government to submit a reply to pleas against PECA amendments.



Cases Under Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) Against Journalists – Timeline (Dec 2024 to Sept 2025)

May 2025

- **May 3:** Freedom Network report on International Press Freedom Day highlights the chilling impact of PECA on press freedom.



June 2025

- **Jun 5:** IHC issues a final deadline to the federal government to respond to petitions against PECA amendments.

July 2025

- **Jul 9:** Islamabad court orders YouTube to block 27 channels for spreading fake, misleading, and defamatory content.
- **Jul 12:** Islamabad court suspends the YouTube ban order for two journalists.



August 2025

- **Aug 7:** Senate Standing Committee expresses concern over the use of PECA against journalists.

September 2025

- **Sept 11:** Senate Standing Committee reviews the implementation of PECA and rules that 372 cases registered under PECA by provincial authorities were illegal.



The Year in Review – Violations against media and its practitioners (Nov 2024-Sept 2025)

At least 142 cases of attacks and violations against media and its practitioners, including journalists and other media professionals (OMPs), took place in Pakistan in the period between November 2024 and September 2025. Violations surged by nearly 60% compared to the preceding year, which recorded a total of 57 cases. This alarming rise underscores an escalating trend of targeting media professionals and OMPs and repression of the media sector, according to data documented and verified by Freedom Network in the period under review.

The findings reveal that the media hostile environment persisting after the February 2024 general elections has intensified, evolving into a more perilous landscape for journalists across the country. All cases reported here relate to journalism work. Cases, including some murders, that were not verified by Freedom Network as being related to journalism work, as reported or suspected, are not included in this data.

The data shows that almost no place in Pakistan is safe – the provinces and the federal capital as well as other federally administered territories remain risky regions to practice journalism. Here are key findings from the period in review:

Scale of violations against media practitioners: At least 142 cases of threats and attacks were documented against journalists, other media professionals and media institutions in the 10 months from November 2024 to September 2025 across all territories of Pakistan, including the four provinces, Islamabad, and the Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) regions. This is an average of over 14 cases of violations against media and its practitioners every month or one violation every second day. Of the 142 verified cases, at least 130 (or 91%) cases of violations were reported against journalists and nine (6%) against other media professionals (such as citizen journalists and non-editorial employees of news organizations).

Categories of violations: The documented cases in the period under review included one journalist and other media professional **killed** for their journalism work, plus four unsuccessful **assassination attempts**; 30 specific instances of **legal action** against journalists; 15 cases of **arrests and detentions**; 39 cases of **physical assault**; 30 cases of **offline or online threats**; three cases of **kidnapping**; three cases of **disappearance by unknown sources** and 10 cases of **digital threats**.

The most dangerous regions for media practitioners: Overall, Islamabad and Punjab jointly emerged as the riskiest and most dangerous places to practice journalism in Pakistan in the period under review, with 28% of the violations (40 out of total 142 cases) each. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) was the second worst with 27% of the violations (39 cases), followed by Sindh (10 cases, or 7% of the violations) as the third worst. Balochistan was the fourth most dangerous region with 5% violations (7 cases), followed by AJK with 4% violations (6 cases). No case was reported from Gilgit-Baltistan (GB).

The riskiest mediums for media practitioners: Of the total 142 attacks and other violations against journalists, other media professionals and media institutions recorded in Pakistan in the period under review, **TV medium** emerged as the single largest victim type of media with at least 52 of the 142 cases (37%) against its practitioners. **Print media** was the second most targeted medium with 40 media practitioners working for it targeted (28%) while 33 cases (23%) were recorded of online journalists targeted (**digital media**). One case of a radio journalist getting targeted was also documented.

Chronicles of violations: Key findings

A. Categories of media victims

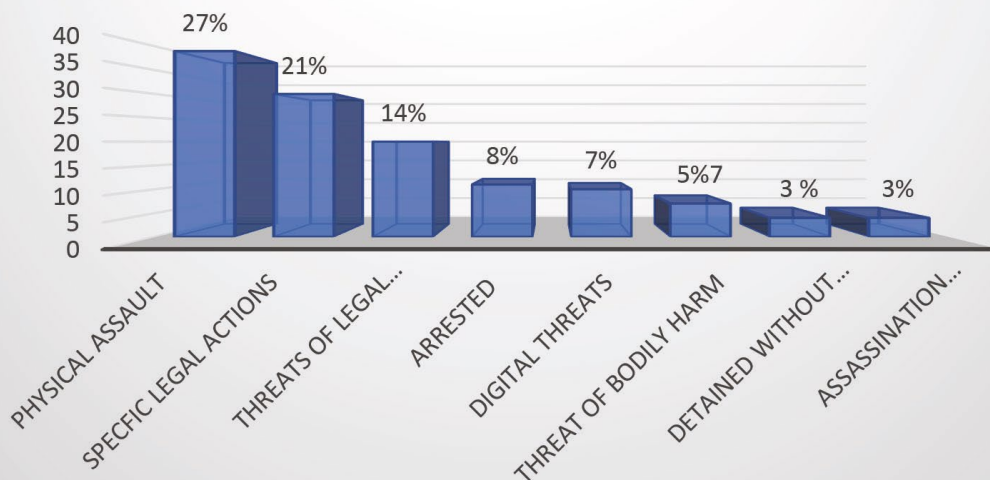
During the reporting period, at least 130 cases of violations were reported against journalists and nine against other media professionals (such as citizen journalists and non-editorial employees of news organizations).

B. Categories of violations against journalists and other media professionals (OMPs)

The **top three categories of violations** against journalists and OMPs in Pakistan during the period under review were (i) 39 cases of physical assault (27%) in which 19 journalists and one OMP were injured and 19 manhandled; (ii) 30 cases of specific legal actions (21%) involving civil and criminal law; and (iii) 20 cases in which threats of legal actions (14%) were issued either by a private party or the state. The top three most frequent categories constituted a total of 89 cases (62%) – over half of the total number of violations.

Other categories of violations included 11 cases of journalists arrested (8%); 10 cases of digital threats (7%) including abuse, trolling and hacking; seven cases wherein bodily harm was threatened (5%); and four cases (3%) each where a journalist was either detained without a formal case registered or survived an assassination attempt.

Violations Against Journalists and OMPs in Pakistan



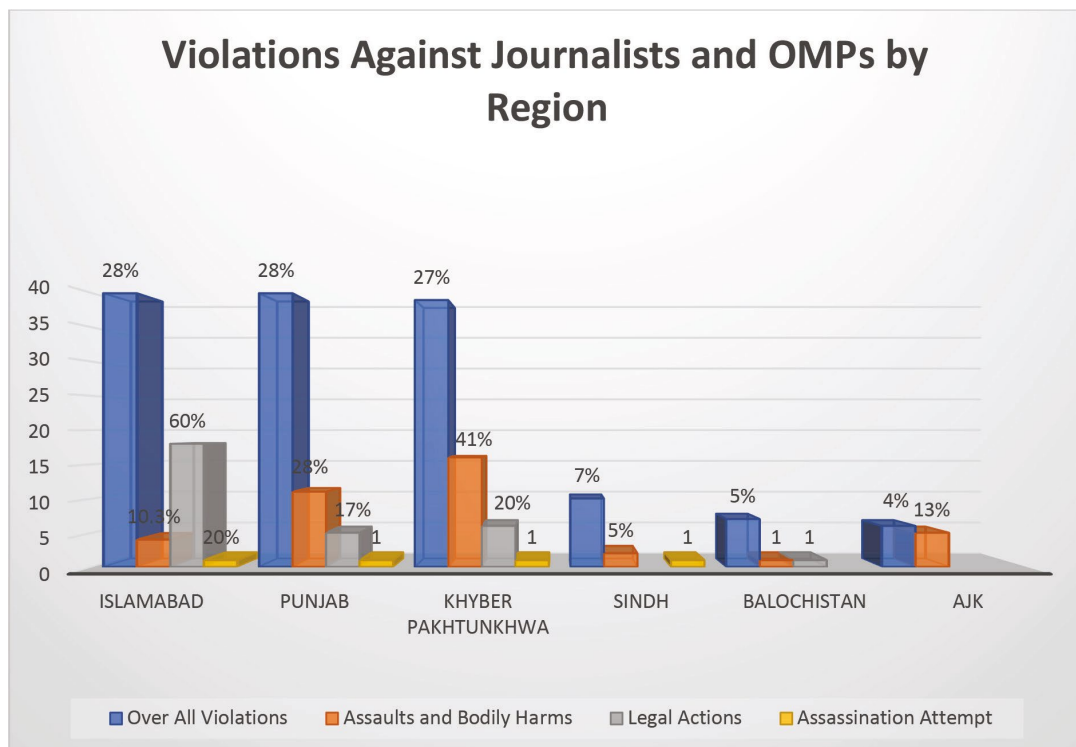
C. The most dangerous regions for journalists and OMPs in Pakistan

Overall hostility: Overall, Islamabad and Punjab emerged as the riskiest and most dangerous places to practice journalism in Pakistan in the period under review, with 28% of the violations (40 out of total 142 cases) each. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) followed closely as the second worst with 27% of the violations (39 cases). Sindh was the third most dangerous region with 7% violations (10 cases). Balochistan emerged as the fourth worst with 5% of the violations (7 cases), followed closely by AJK (six cases, or 4% of the violations). No case was reported from Gilgit-Baltistan.

Risk to life: In terms of assassination attacks on journalists, there were a total of five cases that were verified as related to journalism work with one fatality and four survivors. During the period under review, the sole journalist murdered verifiably linked to their journalism work was from Sindh. All four attempted murder cases involved journalists – one each from Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh.

Assaults and bodily harm: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) emerged as the most physically dangerous region for journalists and OMPs in the period under review with 16 of 39 cases (41%) of assault, including injury, documented. Punjab and AJK followed as the second and third most violent regions, with 11 cases (28%) and five cases (13%), respectively. Islamabad ranked fourth worst, with four cases (10%), while Sindh recorded two cases (5%). Balochistan reported a single case of assault against a journalist.

Legal actions: There were 30 cases registered against journalists and OMPs altogether in the period under review, out of which Islamabad had 18 cases (60%), the highest, with KP second at six cases (20%), Punjab third at five cases (17%), and Balochistan fourth with one case (3%).



D. The riskiest mediums for journalists and OMPs in Pakistan

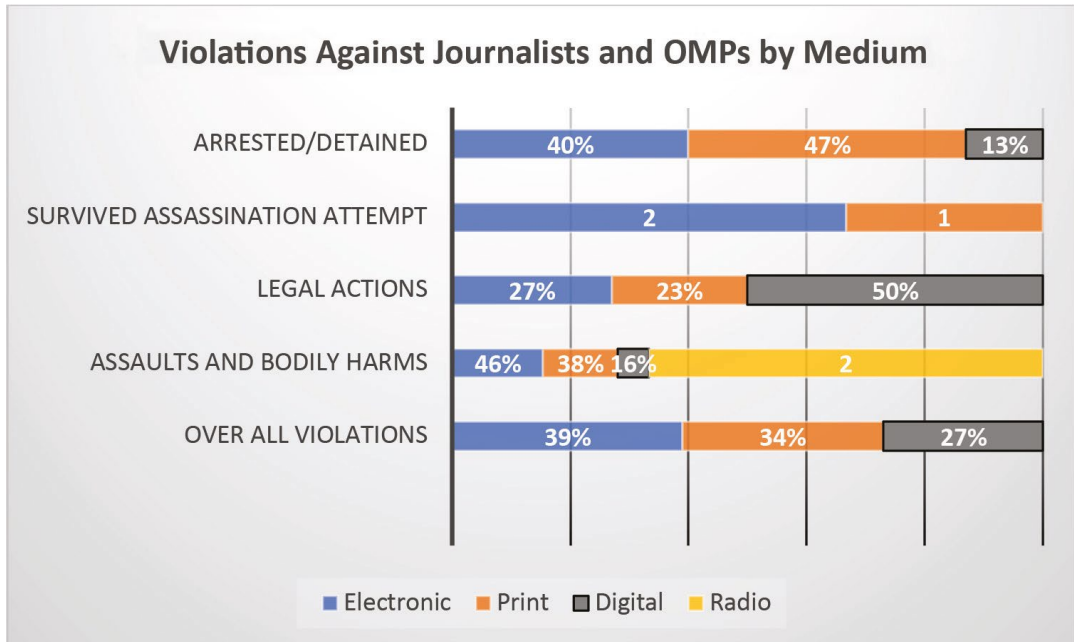
In the crosshairs: Of the total 137 attacks and other violations against journalists, other media professionals and media institutions recorded in Pakistan in the period under review, **TV medium** emerged as the single largest victim type of medium with at least 53 of the cases (39%) against its practitioners. **Print media** was the second most targeted medium with at least 46 media practitioners (34%) working for it targeted while 37 cases (27%) were recorded of online journalists targeted (**digital media**). One case of a radio journalist getting targeted was also documented.

Killed: The sole journalist killed during the period under review whose murder was verified as linked to his journalism work, was affiliated with electronic media. Of the three journalists and other media professionals who *survived assassination attempts*, two were associated with electronic media, while one worked in the digital media sector.

Legal cases: Of the 30 journalists against whom legal cases were registered, 15 (or 50%) were affiliated with digital media, 8 (or 27%) with electronic media, and seven (or 23%) with print media.

Assaulted and manhandled: Of the 32 journalists either assaulted or manhandled, 15 (46%) worked for electronic media, 12 (or 38%) worked for print media and 5 (or 16%) for digital media.

Arrested or detained: Of the 15 journalists arrested under specific cases or detained without being charged, seven (47%) worked for print media, six (40%) worked for electronic media and two (13%) were associated with digital media.

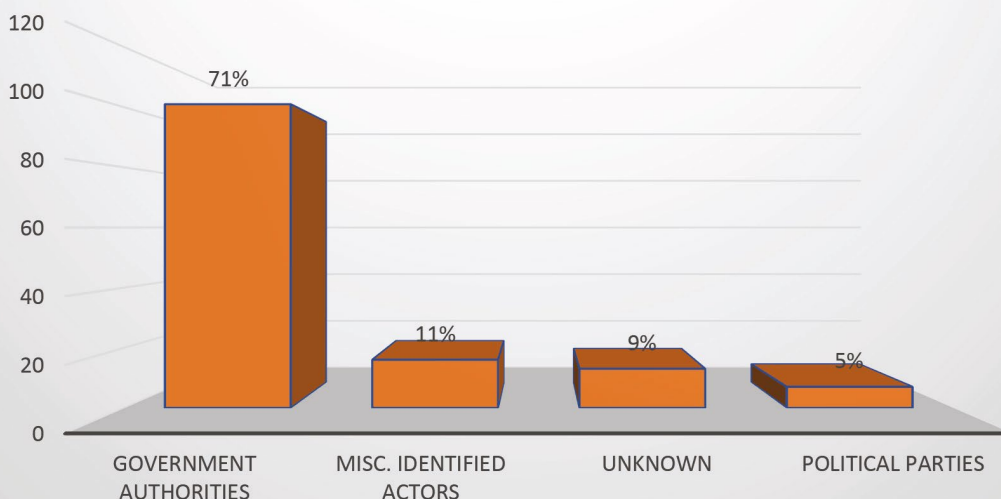


E. The most vicious threat actors targeting journalists and OMPs in Pakistan

DISCLAIMER: The information included here is in good faith and based on reporting by victims or their families and does not necessarily imply it is verified, unless specified. The information filed here is aimed at analyzing trends for the sole purpose of informing strategies to reduce threats against media and its practitioners and is not meant to defame anyone.

Among the **top three identified actors** against journalists and OMPs in Pakistan during the period under review were 101 cases (71%) in which **government authorities** or their officials were the instigators. The second most frequently reported threat originated from **miscellaneous** identified threat actors with 16 cases (11%), which included non-state actors as well as criminal gangs and various private groups and individuals, followed by **political parties** with seven cases (5%). There were at least 13 cases (9%) in which the threat actors could not be identified and remained unknown.

Threat Actors Targeting Journalists and OMPs in Pakistan



F. List of journalists killed in Pakistan during the year

The following is a list of the four journalists and OMPs killed in the period under review for, but the murder of only one could be verified by Freedom Network as being linked to his journalism work. The mandates of various organizations that monitor murders of journalists are different. Most do not investigate “work-related” motives while Freedom Network does. In some cases when definitive conclusions related to journalism work are difficult to prove, Freedom Network keeps such cases “open” until their fate is decided. Often murders cases are not easily or quickly resolvable. His attackers could not be identified. He had been receiving threats.

Verified case: On September 21, 2025, **Imtiaz Mir**, a current affairs anchorperson for *Metro 1* TV channel, was shot by unidentified gunmen as he was travelling to work in Karachi in Sindh province in a car being driven by his brother. He sustained two grievous bullet wounds in his face. He was rushed to a hospital where he succumbed to his injuries on September 28, 2025.

Unverified cases

On December 21, 2024, journalist **Zafar Naich** was shot dead by two a group of gunmen as he going to work in Rahim Yar Khan city in southern part of Punjab province. No motive or identity of the attackers could be ascertained.

On April 15, 2025, **A. D. Shar**, a correspondent for Hum News TV channel, was attacked by a group of men with axes and hacked to death in Thar region in Sindh province. No motive or identity of the attackers could be ascertained.

On May 24, 2025, journalist **Latif Baloch** who worked for *Intikhab* daily and *Aaj News* TV channel, was shot and killed by masked gunmen inside his home in Awaran in Balochistan province. No motive or identity of the attackers could be ascertained.

On August 16, 2025, Karachi-based journalist **Khawar Hussain**, was found shot dead in his vehicle in Sanghar city in Sindh province. Suicide was suspected but investigations are under way.

Pakistan Media Impunity Index 2025

Pakistan was the first country in the world to legislate specifically on the issue of safety of journalists by first enacting the provincial Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021 and then The Protection of Journalists and Other Media Professionals Act 2021 at the federal level.

These milestones came nearly a decade after the United Nations adopted the global UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and Issues of Impunity in 2012 with Pakistan listed among five pilot countries for its implementation. Pakistan endorsed the Plan in 2013.

After a long advocacy cycle by several stakeholders, steered primarily by the Pakistan Journalists Safety Coalition (PJSC), a broad-based national alliance facilitated by Freedom Network with assistance from the International Media Support (IMS) and comprising media, journalists, civil society, political parties and rights groups, legal frameworks by the federal and Sindh governments were enacted to develop policies, structures and resources to protect journalists and other media practitioners against threats, intimidation, attacks and harm.

Because Pakistan is a federation, the state allows both federal and provincial level legislation customized for local needs. This provides the federal government as well as all the four provinces and two regional territories – Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan (GB), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Punjab and Sindh to enact their respective legislation.

So far only the federal government and Sindh province have enacted laws for safety of journalists. Even in these two cases progress in terms of operationalization of the laws and establishment of safety commissions charged with implementation and creating responsive systems has been patchy. The other three provinces and two special territories have not even enacted the laws yet and are in varying stages of generating political consensus to get there.

This uneven progress as well as continuing crimes against media and its practitioners necessitates a standardized barometer of measuring progress at the federal and provincial/local levels to combat impunity of crimes against journalists and other media professionals. This is especially so since combating impunity must be a legal and judicial process premised on formal policy and legislative cover requiring ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Hence the **Pakistan Media Impunity Index** developed by FN-IMS. The inaugural version was published in 2024 measuring progress up to November 2024. The index below rates and ranks specific qualitative and quantitative measures, partly inspired by the UN Plan of Action on

Safety of Journalists and Issues of Impunity for the period November 2024 and September 2025.

The index includes a matrix of three main areas of monitoring – **policy-related** actions, **legislation-related** action and **operational-related** actions. However, in this version of the index, the assessment does not include the performance of the safety commission established so far only by Sindh.

Pakistan Media Impunity Index – 2025 score (Maximum score: 10; 0 for each ‘No’, 1 for each ‘Yes’)

Indicators	AJK	Balochistan	GB	Federal	KP	Punjab	Sindh
A. Policy Related Actions							
1. UN Plan of Action endorsement (either formally or in policy/legislation) so far	N	N	N	Y (past)	N	N	Y (past)
2. SDG 16.10.1 related commitment or action (inc. reporting) by the state / stakeholders so far	N	N	N	Y (past)	Y (past)	N	N (past)
B. Legislation Related Actions							
3. Consultations (inc. by PJSC) with stakeholders (political parties, govt, civil society, unions, press clubs, etc.) in 2024	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
4. Production of a draft safety law so far	N	N	N	Y (past)	N	N	Y (past)
5. Discussion of draft/issue by relevant committees of assemblies/parliament so far	N	N	N	Y (past)	N	N	Y (past)
6. Tabling of bill relevant legislature so far	N	N	N	Y (past)	N	N	Y (past)
7. Passage of law so far	N	N	N	Y (past)	N	N	Y (past)
8. Gender diversity in composition of the Commission under the law	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
C. Operational Related Actions							
9. Notification of safety commission / appointments of chairperson and members (in case law is passed) so far	N	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
10. Operationalization of Commission including office, staff, budget, rules of business, etc. (in case law is passed) so far	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y
2025 RATING	1/10	1/10	2/10	9/10	2/10	1/10	9/10
2024 RATING	0/10	2/10	1/10	9/10	2/10	1/10	9/10

Pakistan Media Impunity Index – 2025 Scorecard

Good progress:

- By start of October 2025 when this report was compiled, the **Impunity Index 2025** score shows that the federal and Sindh governments have done well so far in terms of both framing policy and enacting legislation and following up with notification of safety commissions to implement the legal framework. Both scored 9 out of a maximum score of 10 for these steps.
- On December 4, 2024, the Sindh government appointed Aijaz Memon as the new chairman of the Sindh Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners (SCPJMP). The appointment followed the resignation of Justice (retd) Nazar Akbar on September 12, 2024.
- On June 18, 2025, the federal government approved the appointment of Kamal Uddin Tipu as the first chairman of the Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals (CPJMP). This was a follow-up of the promise made by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif at an international conference in Islamabad jointly organized by Freedom Network and International Media Support.

Poor progress:

- The governments of the other five regions – AJK, Balochistan, GB, KP and Punjab are at least four years behind the progress so far made by the federal and Sindh governments. These five regions have neither framed policies nor enacted legislation or legal frameworks that will bring them on a par with the federal and Sindh governments when it comes to policy and legislation level actions on the issue of safety of journalists.
- KP and GB region scored 2 out of 10. The two marks are for at least stakeholder consultations in these two provinces held on initiatives by media and civil society, led by Freedom Network, not the government initiative, plus the existence of a draft law each on safety of journalists and media practitioners on which, thanks to PJSC, there is consensus in KP but which the government has failed to present in the provincial cabinet or table it in the provincial assembly. Likewise, despite consensus among media and civil society in GB, as outlined in a special report assessing GB's state of media, freedom of expression, right to information and safety of journalists launched by FN in 2025, there has been no forward movement.

No progress:

- Punjab, Balochistan and AJK scores 1 out of 10 thanks to PJSC-steered efforts to mobilize stakeholders to convince the governments of these regions to make forward movement on legislative and policy fronts.
- On the policy side, the Punjab caretaker government in 2023 established an official executive committee comprising a representative of Pakistan Journalists Safety Fund

(managed by Freedom Network), Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists and information and interior officials, including the police, to respond to threats and attacks against journalists. The committee, however, has not been able to help journalists despite an elected government assuming office after the February 2024 general elections. Unless the executive body is replaced by a statutory mechanism such as the safety commission established by Sindh government under the provincial journalists' safety law, its score will remain extremely low. In 2025 FN launched a series of reports separately assessing for South Punjab, Central Punjab and North Punjab the state of media, freedom of expression, right to information and safety of journalists.

- The same is the case of Balochistan, which has neither enacted legislation, despite the existence of consensus among media and civil society and a draft law, nor established an executive committee like Punjab.
- In AJK also, despite local consensus as outlined in a special report assessing AJK's state of media, freedom of expression, right to information and safety of journalists launched by FN in 2025, there has been no forward movement.

Freedom Network and Federal Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals in 2025

For three years frustration was growing over the federal government's inordinate delay in notifying chairperson and members of the Federal Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals after an Act was passed in the National Assembly on 8 November 2021 and the Senate on 20 November 2021.

The first six months of 2025 year went without any announcement from the federal government to report any forward movement on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif promise he had made on 6 December 2022 while addressing "Asia Safety Forum" in Islamabad, held by Freedom Network (FN) in collaboration with International Media Support (IMS).

Finally good news emerged on 1 July 2025 when the federal government notified the appointment of Kamal Uddin Tip as chairperson for the "Commission on Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals". The notification was welcomed by the journalist community, civil society organizations and the international community supporting Pakistani media.

Mr Tipu comes with background of years-long experience of combating crimes as a senior police official – including a stint as the deputy inspector general Islamabad Police – and leading the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) during his public service career.

He is someone who has worked with the media sector. This should come handy in his challenging mandate of combating impunity for crimes against journalists and media workers. Pakistan has been among the top countries where perpetrators of such crimes have not been dealt with through the legal framework successfully to bring them to justice.

Mr Tipu visited the office of Freedom Network on 13 August 2025 to learn about the work this independent organization is doing for safety of journalists and issue of impunity since its inception in May 2013. He has also been visiting other organizations and meeting different experts to dive deep into the subject matter which indicates his proactive nature.

Pakistan is the first country to specifically legislate on safety of journalists and combating combatting impunity for crimes against them. A law alone does not ensure impunity is curbed, as Pakistan's experience shows where dozens of journalists have been killed after the enactment of these laws without anyone being punished for them.

Mr Tipu said his experience with Punjab Police will hopefully “activate” the dysfunctional “Punjab Journalists Protection Coordination Committee,” which is headed by Deputy Inspector General Legal of Punjab Police. After his contact, a meeting was scheduled in October, the first such meeting after months.



ISLAMABAD: Freedom Network Executive Director Iqbal Khattak presents a shield to Chairperson of Federal Commission on Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Kamal Uddin Tipu [L]. Photo by Freedom Network

And yet, the federal commission even by the start of October 2025 remained incomplete with two nominated members awaiting “security clearance”. Mr Tipu, in the meanwhile remained active, seeking out space and resources for the Commission he now heads to prepare to combat impunity in the months and years ahead. He will be assisted by Ikram Barkat, a former colleague from PEMRA, as the secretary to the Commission. Commission Chairman Mr Kamal Uddin Tipu and Mr Iqbal Khattak, the Executive Director of Freedom Network, agreed to institutionally join hands for the mission of combating impunity of crimes against journalists.

Freedom Network and journalists’ safety advocacy with the Punjab government

Advocacy is among the tools Freedom Network is using to advance the agenda of provincial legal framework to combat impunity for crimes against journalists in one province or another. This tool has been productive so far having played an integral part in uniting all stakeholders to bring in safety law in the Sindh province in 2021, becoming the first province to honour party chairperson Bilawal Bhutto’s promise he had made with FN in a meeting in Islamabad months before the general elections in 2018.

This tool was tried in remaining three provinces also but Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab have struggled to emulate the feat by Sindh. In Punjab a breakthrough was made on 10 July 2025 when the Pakistan Journalists Safety Coalition (PJSC) Punjab chapter established direct contact Punjab Minister for Information Azma Bukhari on launching the delayed collaborative advocacy for legal framework on safety of journalists in Punjab. On behalf of the Punjab chapter of PJSC, Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists Secretary-General Arshad Ansari played a key role in establishing this direct contact with the Punjab government. The response of the minister was unequivocal when Freedom Network Executive Director Iqbal Khattak, on behalf of PJSC raised the issue of legislating on safety of journalists in Pakistan’s most populous province.

“I am in total agreement,” Azma Bukhari said in a special meeting to express her government’s support for the cause of safety of journalists in Punjab. She directed her secretary to get her a “one-page briefing” on this issue and also advised the Secretary Information for the government of the Punjab, who was present in the meeting, to “kick off” the process for legislation on this subject.

Earlier, the Punjab government had taken an administrative decision during the caretaker set-up to notify a “Punjab Journalists Protection Coordination Committee” on 19 May 2023 with a mandate to “intervene whenever and wherever journalists come under attack across Punjab.” This committee has not been meeting regularly and does not have the requisite visibility across the province. The Assistant Inspector General (Legal) of Punjab Police, by designation leads this body. Because of frequent postings in the law enforcement departments the committee has proven to be generally ineffective in addressing the pressing issue of safety of journalists. Dozens of journalists in Punjab have faced threats and violence from various threat actors since the committee was set up without benefitting from its mandate.

In its meeting held on 20 August 2024, the committee meeting members endorsed and approved a proposal suggested by the PJSC Punjab chapter that the committee recommend to the Punjab government to transform this administrative order into a formal legal framework and pursue specific legislation to set up a Commission on Protection of Journalists, as established under journalists' safety legislation by both Sindh government and federal government.

The PJSC Punjab chapter will continue to pursue further direct contacts with the Punjab government in collaboration with the broader journalists' community, civil society, political parties and academia for the cause of safety of journalists in the Punjab province.



LAHORE: A delegation of Pakistan Journalists Safety Coalition-Punjab chapter and Freedom Network meets Punjab Minister for Information Azma Bukhari in her office on 10 July 2025. Photo by PID Punjab.

ABOUT FREEDOM NETWORK

Freedom Network is Islamabad-based independent media watchdog and development sector research, advocacy and training organization. It was established in 2013.

In 2017, Freedom Network was awarded the prestigious French Republic's "Human Rights Prize" 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.

www.fnpk.org

info@fnpk.org