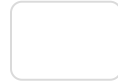


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The Azadi Briefing: Conditions For Afghan Journalists Worsened In 2023

By [Abubakar Siddique](#)

Welcome to The Azadi Briefing, an RFE/RL newsletter that unpacks the critical issues in Afghanistan. To subscribe, click [here](#).

I'm Abubakar Siddique, senior correspondent at RFE/RL's Radio Azadi. Here's what I've been tracking and what I'm keeping an eye on in the days ahead.

The Key Issue

Afghan journalists [complain](#) of growing restrictions amid mounting Taliban repression during the past year.

Journalists inside the country told RFE/RL's Radio Azadi that access to information and censorship is tightening as they face torture, beatings, arrests, and threats.

"Freedom of expression faces grave challenges," said a journalist who requested anonymity. He added that the Taliban often prevented them from publishing critical stories.

A woman journalist in western Afghanistan said that the Taliban barred her from doing her job.

"It was the worst year for journalists," she told Radio Azadi. "I was repeatedly thrown out of press conferences just because I am a woman."

The Taliban has banned women from showing their faces on television. It has also shut down radio stations run by women.

The Afghanistan Journalist Center (AFJC), an Afghan media watchdog, has documented 168 cases of violence and intimidation against journalists. These include instances of censorship, lack of access to information, detentions, conviction, torture, and threats.

Afghanistan is now one of the seven [most dangerous](#) countries for journalists globally, according to the global media watchdog Reports Without Borders.

In March, a bomb attack claimed by Islamic State-Khorasan, a Taliban rival, killed three journalists and injured 20 more.

Why It's Important: Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, press freedom has dramatically declined in Afghanistan. It flourished while the pro-western Afghan republic existed from 2001 to 2021.

Despite early Taliban promises to allow media freedom, its hard-line government has tortured, threatened, and detained scores of journalists.

The once vibrant Afghan media was dramatically diminished after the Taliban closed independent print and electronic media outlets. Television and radio stations as well as newspapers also shut down after losing international funding.

In draconian efforts to control the free flow of information, the Taliban has denied visas to foreign correspondents and banned some international broadcasters.

Hundreds of Afghan journalists went into exile after the Taliban's return to power. Many were harassed or fled out of fear of persecution by the Taliban.

What's Next: The Taliban is shaping a media environment that only serves its interests.

Even the independent media outlets still working inside Afghanistan are increasingly unable to publish or broadcast anything critical of the Taliban. At the same time, the group appears to be determined to replace journalism with propaganda.

Without access to the country, international media too will find it difficult to do in-depth reporting about Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

What To Keep An Eye On

The February 8 parliamentary elections in Pakistan appear to be under increasing threat from Islamist militants along the country's western border with Afghanistan.

On January 3, former lawmaker Mohsin Dawar survived an [assassination](#) attempt in North Waziristan. He leads a secular Pashtun political party, the National Democratic Movement, which opposes the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban groups.

On the same day, a candidate of the Islamist Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-), Qari Khairullah, survived a roadside bomb attack in Bajaur. North Waziristan and Bajaur are districts in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

These were the latest in the growing number of attacks on the February 8 parliamentary elections being held in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the rest of Pakistan. The region is bearing the brunt of attacks by Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) since the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan. The TTP shares ideological and organizational ties with the Afghan Taliban.

Why It's Important: The TTP's campaign has already poisoned Islamabad's relationship with its erstwhile ally, the Taliban.

Since October, Pakistan has repeatedly shut border crossings with Afghanistan and expelled more than half a million Afghans to try to pressure the Afghan Taliban.

Escalating attacks in the run-up to Pakistan's parliamentary vote would derail a fragile [diplomatic effort](#) to mend ties between Islamabad and Kabul.

That's all from me for now. Don't forget to send me any questions, comments, or tips that you have. You can always reach us at azadi.english@rferl.org

Until next time,

Abubakar Siddique

If you enjoyed this briefing and don't want to miss the next edition, subscribe [here](#). It will be sent to your inbox every Friday.

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