

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	343
Land:	Pakistan
Kilde:	Freedom House
Titel:	Freedom of the Press 2016 - Pakistan
Udgivet:	28. september 2016
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	17. januar 2017

FREEDOM HOUSE

PAKISTAN

Press Freedom Status:

NF

Legal Environment:

19 / 30

(0=BEST, 30=WORST)

Political Environment:

29 / 40 (↑1)

(0=BEST, 40=WORST)

Economic Environment:

16 / 30

(0=BEST, 30=WORST)

Press Freedom Score:

64 / 100 (↑1)

(0=BEST, 100=WORST)

QUICK FACTS

Population:

199,047,300

Net Freedom Status:

Not Free

Freedom in the World Status:

Partly Free

Internet Penetration Rate:

18.0%

Overview

While the rate of media workers' killings has declined somewhat in recent years, the number and intensity of threats directed at journalists from a variety of actors, including the military and intelligence agencies and militant groups, remained high in 2015. Impunity remained the norm for crimes against journalists.

Key Developments

- In August, the broadcast regulator issued new guidelines that limited discussion of security operations and other sensitive topics.
- In November, reporter Zaman Mehsud of the *Daily Ummat* and *Daily Nai Baat* was shot and killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. The Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.
- Journalists with Pakistan's largest private television network, Geo TV, and its affiliated outlets remained frequent targets of violence and intimidation.

Legal Environment: 19 / 30

The constitution and other legislation, such as the Official Secrets Act, authorize the government to curb freedom of speech on subjects including the constitution itself, the armed forces, the judiciary, and religion. Since 2010, broadly defined contempt laws have been employed by the judiciary to restrict reporting on particular cases or judges, making reporting on judicial matters perilous for most journalists.

Journalists can face prosecution under a variety of antiterrorism measures. In June 2015, authorities filed criminal charges against three reporters under the Antiterrorism Act, in what the journalists said was retaliation for their coverage of a police raid targeting Zulfiqar Mirza, a prominent politician. At least seven other journalists who covered the raid face criminal charges under separate laws. The 2014 Protection of Pakistan Act gives security forces expansive powers to search, detain, and use force against suspects. It also includes vague references to “internet offenses and other offenses related to information technology”—provisions that have raised concerns that the law could be used against journalists.

Defamation is a criminal offense punishable by fines and up to two years in prison. Blasphemy laws are regularly used against journalists. In 2014, a court in the remote, semiautonomous Gilgit-Baltistan Region convicted Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman, owner of Geo TV, of blasphemy over a controversial entertainment segment broadcast on one of the network’s programs. He was sentenced to 26 years in prison along with fines, as were a morning-show host and two celebrity guests, though the court’s ruling was reportedly not applicable outside the region. However, in March 2015, a court in Sindh Province ordered Rehman’s arrest, and in April prohibited him from selling his assets until a final verdict was announced in the blasphemy case. The status of his case is unclear, and Rehman remained free at year’s end. In addition to direct legal repercussions, journalists who are charged under blasphemy laws are subject to threats and violence. Shoaib Adil, editor of the liberal magazine *Nia Zamana*, fled to the United States after he was accused of blasphemy in 2014 and became a target of extralegal threats. *Nia Zamana* closed in his absence, but has since reemerged as an online outlet. Separately, in September 2015, a court in Lahore ordered Pakistan’s broadcast and print regulatory bodies—the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and the Press Council of Pakistan (PCP), respectively—to institute a ban on coverage of Altaf Hussain, head of the secular Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM); the order came in response to

several petitions alleging that he had defamed state institutions, including the armed forces, in various speeches.

Accessing official information remains difficult, and existing provisions for obtaining public records are ineffective. In 2014, a senate committee submitted a draft freedom of information bill to the cabinet. The bill, which would replace a 2002 ordinance on the topic, has drawn praise from local and international transparency advocates, and by some measures would constitute the most robust freedom of information legislation in the world if adopted. After numerous delays, in July 2015 Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced that his cabinet would proceed with considering the bill; however, it had not been approved at the year's end.

At the provincial level, the governments of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa passed freedom of information legislation in 2013. Although the ordinances faced criticism for vague language and a large number of exemptions, and the Punjab version lacked explicit protections for whistle-blowers, both laws were generally considered progressive. In 2014, the two provinces established information commissions to oversee implementation of their laws. However, in May 2015, the legislature of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa amended its law to remove itself from the oversight of its information commission, reduced the number of commissioners from three to two, and opened new legal channels to appeal its decisions. A freedom of information bill floated in Sindh Province in 2015 drew criticism from transparency advocates for reproducing flaws within its existing 2006 access law, whose vague language renders it largely ineffective.

Pakistan's press council, the PCP, is tasked with hearing complaints against print media and promoting journalistic ethics, but is generally ineffective.

Members of PEMRA are appointed or approved by the government, and the agency has a record of issuing politicized suspensions and fines. In May 2015, the Information Ministry requested that PEMRA block the transmission of the television channel BOL TV after it emerged that the station's parent company had been implicated in a fraud scandal. PEMRA cancelled the station's license in September, even after it was acquired by another media group; BOL TV employees effectively lost their jobs as a result. In August 2015, PEMRA promulgated a new set of mandatory guidelines for broadcast outlets. Many of its new provisions were criticized by media advocates, including directives to only broadcast information related to security operations that had been

approved by government agencies, as well as new restrictions on the content of political debates.

The authorities are believed to engage in online surveillance, and the communications of some journalists are reportedly monitored. Such practices encourage self-censorship and deter contacts between journalists and their sources. According to a June 2015 report issued by the UN Human Rights Council, anyone wishing to use encryption or virtual private network (VPN) services must acquire approval from the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority.

In January 2015, the government issued a draft cybercrime law known as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Bill (PECB). The legislation was excoriated by civil society groups for provisions that would undermine press freedom, free expression, and privacy rights. These include mandating that internet service providers retain their customers' data for at least one year, and that they provide that data to the government upon request; empowering the government to censor undesirable digital content without a court order; and criminalizing certain forms of online speech, such as statements deemed to support terrorism. The PECB cleared a parliamentary committee in November, but had not been approved by the National Assembly at the year's end.

A number of media advocacy organizations, such as the Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF), operate in the country. Journalists frequently stage demonstrations to protest violations of media freedom.

Political Environment: 29 / 40 (↑1)

Political actors, government officials, and military and intelligence officers regularly complain about critical reporting, and some have attempted to exert control over media content through unofficial "guidance" to newspaper editors on placement of front-page stories and permissible topics of coverage. Armed groups, political parties, and state institutions have coerced news outlets into publishing denunciations of their opponents. Fear of reprisals has caused some journalists to self-censor, particularly on military or intelligence operations, sensitive social or religious issues, and certain militant groups and political parties.

Websites and blogs addressing sensitive subjects are routinely blocked, and the government has increased censorship of allegedly blasphemous material in recent years. YouTube remained inaccessible throughout 2015, after the government blocked it in 2012 in response to unrest surrounding a controversial anti-Islam film.

Media access to certain parts of the country remains restricted, either by special government regulations or a high threat of violence. Conditions for reporters covering the ongoing civil conflict and military offensive in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and some districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province remain difficult, with journalists at risk of detention, threats, expulsion, abduction, attacks, and other interference by actors including Taliban militants and local tribal groups, criminal organizations, and the army and intelligence services. Journalists' ability to cover military operations in the FATA is limited, as they can gain official access only if they agree to become embedded with military units, which means that any reporting is subject to potential censorship. Media in general remain much more tightly restricted in the FATA than elsewhere in Pakistan. Independent radio is allowed only with permission from the FATA secretariat, and no newspapers are published there.

Separately, in Pakistani-administered Kashmir, publications need special permission from the regional government to operate, and publications that support independence for Kashmir are generally prohibited. In August 2015, journalists from both the Pakistani- and Indian-administered regions of Kashmir met in Islamabad, and agreed on a framework to promote information sharing between media houses in each.

Journalists reporting in or near FATA remained at risk of violence in 2015. In November, Zaman Mehsud, who worked for the *Daily Ummat* and *Daily Nai Baat* newspapers, was shot dead by gunmen in the Tank district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Mehsud, who was also head of the South Waziristan chapter of the Tribal Union of Journalists, had mainly reported in the FATA. The Taliban claimed responsibility for his killing. Separately, Geo TV journalist Muhammad Rasool Dawar was twice detained in Peshawar, near FATA, by men he claimed were members of security forces; he said they had blindfolded and threatened him, and that the harassment had prompted him to flee to Islamabad for a short period of time. In September, another journalist working in Peshawar, Abdul Azam Shinwari, was shot and injured shortly after relocating there from the FATA, where he had received numerous threats.

In the southern city of Karachi, civil conflict over the last several years has made reporting hazardous. In January 2015, Agence France-Presse photographer Asif Hassan was shot and injured during a confrontation in the city between police and supporters of the Jamaat-e-Islami party, who were protesting the French magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

Journalists with Geo TV and its affiliated outlets continued to suffer violence and intimidation in 2015, with many such incidents also taking place in Karachi. In July, the Karachi bureau chief of Geo News, Faheem Siddiqui, was abducted and beaten by police, who also confiscated his mobile phones, other electronics, and paper documents. Siddiqui was later released in a remote area of the city. In September, unidentified gunmen on motorbikes opened fire on a Geo News vehicle in the city, killing satellite engineer Arshad Ali Jafri. The same month, Aftab Alam, a former Geo News reporter, was shot and killed in Karachi; he had recently retired from journalism due to health issues, and the motive for his killing was unknown at the year's end. In an April 2015 interview, Hamid Mir, a prominent Geo News journalist who survived a 2014 assassination attempt, said the outlet had significantly toned down reporting on a number of sensitive topics, including certain military figures as well as human rights violations, due to pressure and threats.

Reporters in Balochistan Province face pressure and harassment from Baloch nationalists, Islamist groups, and the government. Several local journalists have been killed or forced into exile in recent years after receiving repeated threats. In January 2015, an Islamist group threatened to attack the Quetta Press Club in the provincial capital unless it expelled its Christian members. And in November, Panjgur-based journalist Barkat Baloch was threatened by the brother of a local politician, prompting a demonstration at which media workers demanded that authorities take action to protect journalists. In April 2015, two judicial commissions were established to investigate the murders of six journalists killed in Balochistan between 2011 and 2013. In September, two suspects were arrested in connection with the 2014 murder in Quetta of two reporters and an accountant who worked for the news agency Online.

A number of other attacks on journalists in 2015 were committed by Islamist militants or security forces. In May, police officers assaulted a group of journalists in Sindh Province while they were outside a local courthouse covering legal proceedings involving Zulfiqar Mirza. In November, attackers claiming to represent a local affiliate of the Islamic State militant group threw a grenade into the offices of the Dunya News television channel in Punjab

Province, injuring two employees. In December, attackers claiming membership to the same group launched a second grenade attack on the Lahore offices of another television station, Din News, resulting in three injuries.

While Pakistan remains among the most dangerous places in the world for journalists to operate, the number of killings has declined somewhat over the last five years. However, nearly all murder cases from previous years remained unsolved in 2015, as did as the assassination attempt on Hamid Mir. However, by March, authorities had arrested six individuals in connection with the attempted murder of another high-profile journalist, Raza Rumi of the *Friday Times*, in Lahore the previous year.

In December 2015, several print and broadcast outlets formed a new group, Editors for Safety, dedicated to monitoring violence against media practitioners and helping them cope with the country's tenuous security situation. The organization is a division of the PPF.

Economic Environment: 16 / 30

Pakistan is home to hundreds of daily, weekly, and monthly news publications that publish in English, Urdu, and a number of regional languages. Several dozen all-news cable and satellite television channels—some of which broadcast from outside the country—provide live domestic news coverage, commentary, and call-in talk shows, informing viewers and shaping public opinion on current events. However, the government continues to control Pakistan Television and Radio Pakistan, the only free-to-air terrestrial broadcast outlets with a national reach; staff receive directives from the Information Ministry, and their coverage supports official viewpoints.

Private radio stations operate in some major cities but are prohibited from carrying news programming, and PEMRA imposes a maximum broadcast radius of 50 kilometers on private FM transmitters. In some rural regions such as the FATA, illegal extremist radio is prominent, with radical Islamists broadcasting unchallenged propaganda. International television and radio broadcasts are usually available in Pakistan, with the exception of news channels based in India. The internet is not widely used, with about 18 percent of the population accessing the medium in 2015. However, blogs and social media are growing in popularity, and many traditional news outlets provide content over the internet.

Cable television operators occasionally pressure media outlets to censor views that could conflict with their business interests, or suspend transmission of certain channels in response to threats. Authorities in recent years have pressured cable companies to drop Geo TV from their services.

Provincial and national authorities have used advertising boycotts and bribes to put economic pressure on media outlets or provide incentives to keep journalists in check. Both state and private interests, including the powerful intelligence agencies, reportedly pay for favorable press coverage, a practice that is exacerbated by the low salaries of many journalists.

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