



INDIA:

PRESS FREEDOM IN DANGER

Journalists face attacks,
legal harassment, and
state censorship

PRESS FREEDOM VIOLATIONS IN INDIA

(OCTOBER 2022 - MARCH 2023)

Press freedom in India has rapidly deteriorated since Prime Minister Modi and his nationalist conservative Bharatiya Janata Party came to power in 2014. Journalists face physical attacks, legal harassment, and censorship.

124

IPI documented at least **124 press freedom violations** in the six-month period between October 2022 and March 2023. **State authorities were involved in 75 percent of the press freedom violations documented.**

According to IPI's monitoring, at least **35 journalists** experienced physical, verbal, or online attacks during this six-month period.

In November 2022, the Lashkar-e-Toiba militant group published a letter threatening 21 editors and reporters based in Kashmir. In January 2023, three journalists were attacked by police in Delhi at the scene of a fatal accident, and a video journalist was attacked by police while reporting on the farmer protests in the Jajpur district.

In March 2023, a journalist was shot twice outside his office in Jaunpur by armed men. According to the journalist, the attack was retaliation for a report he published on an alleged assault by the brother of the president of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Jaunpur district. Also that month, a group of 30 activists of the Students' Federation of India trespassed into the offices of Asianet News in Kochi and threatened staff about a report the channel aired on the sexual assault of a girl.

ONE JOURNALIST KILLED



On February 6, 2023, journalist Shashikant Warishe was deliberately killed in a motorcycle accident by land dealer Pandharinath Amberkar in retaliation for a report he published on illegal land grabs by Amberkar. The land dealer, who has links to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, has been charged with murder.





Journalists in India who report on elected officials are often targeted.

State authorities are trying to silence journalists by prosecuting them under India's criminal code, the Information Technology Act, 2000, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 1967. As the government's crackdown on civil liberties continues, journalists and independent media are also increasingly facing money laundering and tax fraud charges. During the monitoring period, IPI documented at least 43 cases of journalists facing arrest, detention, and charges.



In October 2022, two journalists were charged under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act**, the criminal code, and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act for publishing an allegedly seditious article on Jammu and Kashmir. After a series of online threats were posted against journalists in Jammu and Kashmir by the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba group, the Indian police raided the homes of at least six journalists and confiscated equipment, followed by a second raid of the homes of three journalists and a newspaper owner and the offices of a newspaper in Srinagar. In October 2022, a journalist and outspoken critic of the Modi government was targeted with money laundering charges filed by the Enforcement Directorate.

In January 2023, Kolkata police registered a case against ten journalists under the criminal code and the IT Act, 2000 for allegedly misreporting the site of a stone-throwing incident on a high-speed rail and damaging the image of the chief minister of West Bengal. A criminal case was also registered by a municipality official against eight journalists based in West Bengal for reporting on corruption within the Nabadwip Municipality. In March 2023, a 19-year-old reporter was arrested in Uttar Pradesh on criminal charges filed by a leader of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, the youth wing of the BJP, for questioning a state minister at a community forum. That same month, a journalist in the Kashmir region was arrested by the National Investigation Agency on terrorism charges under the criminal code and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and charges were filed against two journalists by the son of a government official in Haryana for posting allegedly defamatory comments about the government official in two WhatsApp groups. In March 2023, the Delhi High Court stayed trial proceedings in a criminal defamation case filed by a Bharatiya Janata Party leader against a journalist for a tweet she wrote about his arrest in a sexual harassment case.



CENSORSHIP:

IPI documented at least 35 cases of censorship during the monitoring period, which included at least 20 internet and mobile network shutdowns ordered by the government. In 2022, India shut down the internet at least 84 times, the highest number of any country in the world for the fifth year in a row. More than half of these network shutdowns occurred in the Jammu and Kashmir region.

During the monitoring period, the government abused emergency powers to tighten its control of online content and silence independent media. The government:

- 👉 ordered Twitter to block 122 accounts, which belonged to journalists, authors, and politicians in India, amid an ongoing crackdown on civil liberties in Punjab.
- 👉 ordered Twitter and YouTube to block clips of a BBC documentary critical of Prime Minister Modi.
- 👉 raided BBC offices in New Delhi and Mumbai as part of an investigation into tax violation allegations.
- 👉 issued an order to block Pakistan-based streaming platform Vidly TV on grounds of national security.
- 👉 warned Republic TV, India Today, Zee News and Times Now that reporting on the Delhi liquor policy case must be based on official government press releases.
- 👉 searched the Asianet News office in Kozhikode after a government official filed a complaint.



In addition, Gautam Adani, a billionaire and Modi ally, took control of NDTV, acquiring nearly 65 percent of the independent news channel.

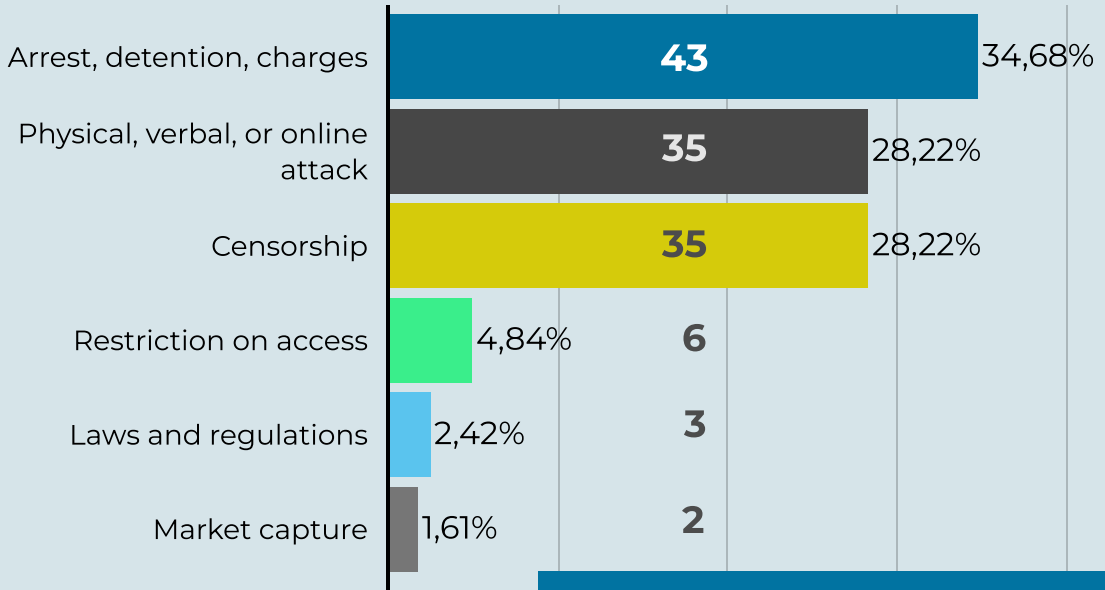


NEW LAWS AND RULINGS RESTRICTING JOURNALISTS' RIGHTS

During this period, the following measures and rulings undermining privacy and freedom of expression were introduced.

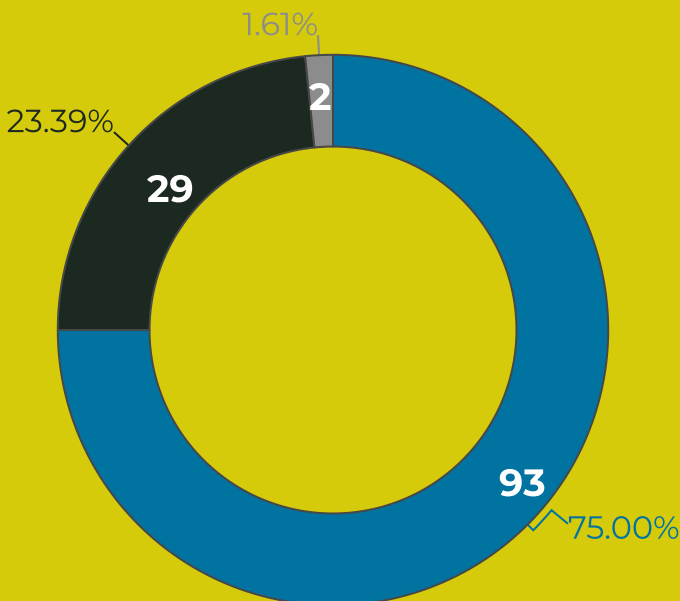
- ➔ The draft Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 concedes broad powers to the government beyond reasonable exceptions to exempt itself from compliance with the bill's data protection rules.
- ➔ The IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023 require platforms to delete content related to “any business” of the government deemed to be “fake or false or misleading” by a fact-checking agency of the government.
- ➔ A court in Delhi ruled that there is no statutory exemption for journalists to disclose sources to the Central Bureau of Investigation, especially when disclosure is necessary to aid criminal investigations.

Type of press freedom violations



124 press freedom violations

Source of incidents



- State actor
- Non-state actor
- Unknown



ONE JOURNALIST KILLED

Shashikant Warishe

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Violations
impacted

50
MALE

&

7
FEMALE

journalists

IPI monitors and collects data on press freedom violations in India as part of an ongoing cross-border project that brings together partner media outlets in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal to create public awareness about attacks on journalists and highlight the erosion of press freedom across South Asia.



To report a violation:
info@ipi.media

