



PAKISTAN:

PRESS FREEDOM UNDER SIEGE

Journalists face violent attacks, legal intimidation, and censorship

PRESS FREEDOM VIOLATIONS IN PAKISTAN

(OCTOBER 2022 - MARCH 2023)

Press freedom in Pakistan is under siege. Violence against journalists is common and many take great risks to report the news. Journalists face physical attacks, death threats and online harassment, and legal intimidation through arrests and criminal charges .

35

IPI documented at least 35 press freedom violations in the six-month period between October 2022 and March 2023. More than half of the press freedom violations documented were committed by agents of the state of Pakistan.

There were at least **10 documented cases of violent physical attacks against journalists**. In October 2022, three armed men attacked and threatened to kill an editor of a public interest media news site in the Pakistan-administered region of Gilgit-Baltistan. In December 2022, a bureau chief of a newspaper was shot and seriously injured by four armed men in Sialkot, Punjab for investigating and disclosing corruption by municipal officers and the Secretary General of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists received an anonymous death threat. In three separate cases, unknown armed men attacked journalists at home or on the way home in Islamabad, Parachinar, and Lahore. In March, a group of fruit vendors assaulted two cameramen who were reporting on rising fruit prices.

PAKISTANI JOURNALIST KILLED IN KENYA

On October 24, Pakistani investigative journalist and news anchor Arshad Sharif was shot and killed by law enforcement in Kenya. Sharif, who was critical of the government of Pakistan, had fled Pakistan due to threats to his life. Kenyan authorities stated that a police officer mistakenly fatally shot the journalist while searching for a stolen car near Nairobi. Following his death, Javeria Siddique, a freelance journalist and wife of the late Arshad Sharif, was the target of an online harassment campaign led by pro-government supporters.

Perpetrators of attacks against journalists are rarely, if at all, brought to justice. In November 2022, army officials detained the brother of killed journalist Hayatullah Khan as punishment for his family's inquiries into the Supreme Court's commissioned report on Khan's death, which has yet to be released to the public.



The number of criminal investigations into journalists in Pakistan has increased in recent years. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), the country's cybercrime law, and the Pakistan criminal code are often deployed to silence critical media and weaken independent journalism in Pakistan.

In October 2022, a team of 30 to 40 officers from the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) arrested an [ARY anchor](#) in Lahore on charges pertaining to a 2003 bank fraud case. In December 2022, an [anchor](#) was fined and sentenced to two years imprisonment in a criminal defamation case filed by the father of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leader Daniyal Aziz. In January 2023, a [journalist from BOL News](#) was arrested on criminal charges by the FIA for his alleged role in leaking personal tax data about a former army chief. In February 2023, an [anchor with BOL News](#) was arrested by the FIA on charges of “hate speech” under the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act and the criminal code. In March 2023, a [third journalist from BOL News](#) was arrested on multiple charges under the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Pakistan criminal code.



NEW LAWS TO SILENCE JOURNALISTS

During this period, the government advanced new proposals giving authorities broad powers to silence any criticism of government policies. The federal cabinet passed an amendment that [empowers the FIA](#) to prosecute anybody who spreads “rumors and false information against state institutions” on social media, with offenses punishable with prison terms of up to seven years. The [Criminal Laws \(Amendment\) Act, 2023](#), introduces a maximum five-year prison term and fine for anybody who publishes or shares information with the intent to “ridicule or scandalize” the military and judiciary.

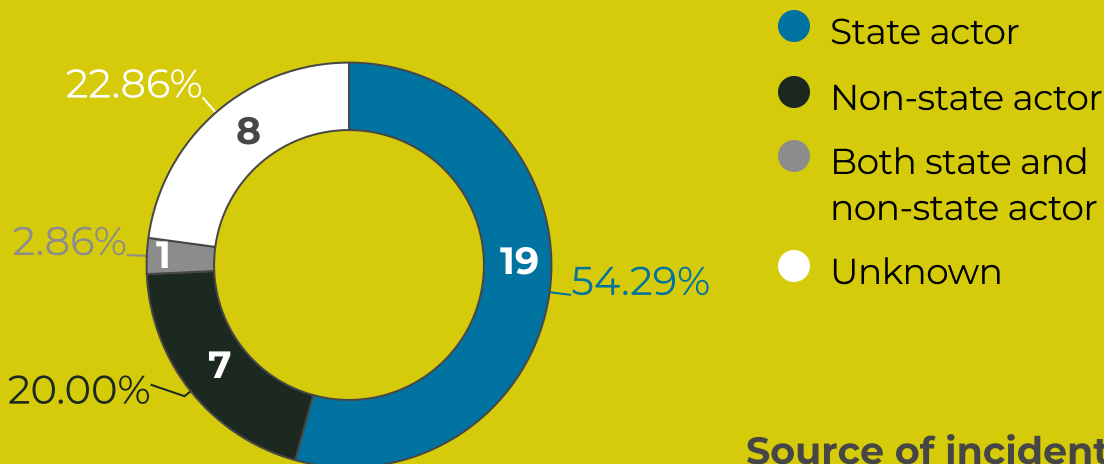
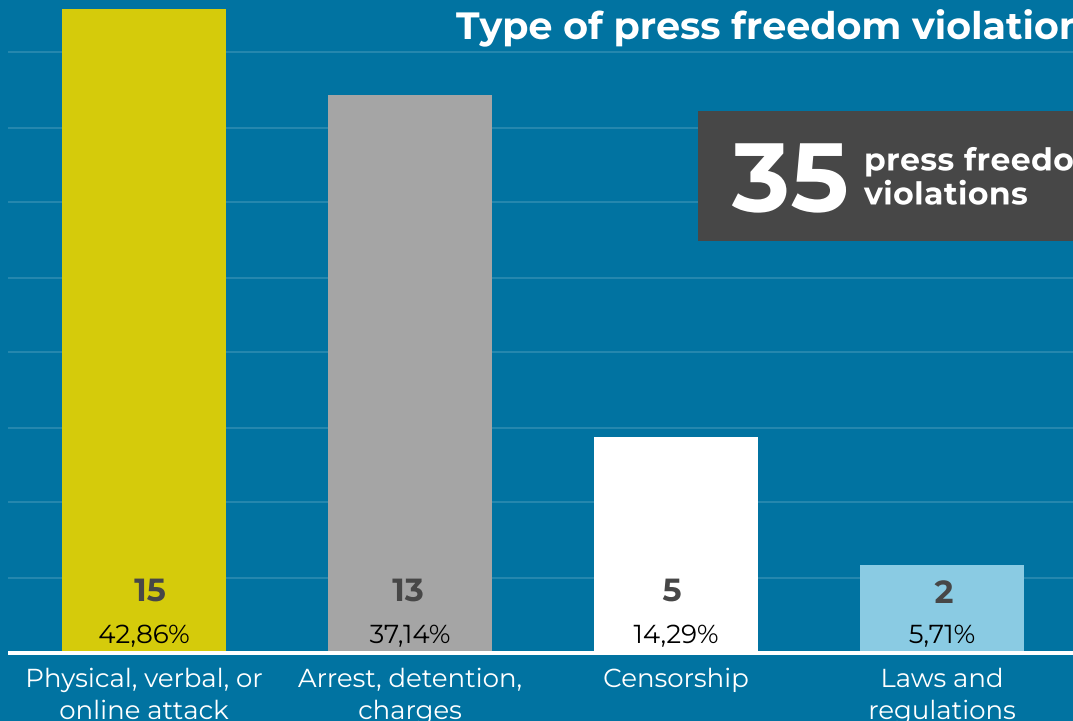
The government also enacted a number of measures to further censor news and restrict press freedom:

- 👉 The government blocked investigative news site [FactFocus](#) after it released a report on the wealth amassed by the Chief of Army Staff.
- 👉 The government shut down the internet in the port [city of Gwadar](#) as protests led by the Haq Do Tehreek movement continued.
- 👉 Wikipedia was [blocked](#) after it refused to delete “blasphemous content.”
- 👉 The [Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority](#) has banned all media broadcasts of former Prime Minister Imran Khan’s recorded and live speeches.



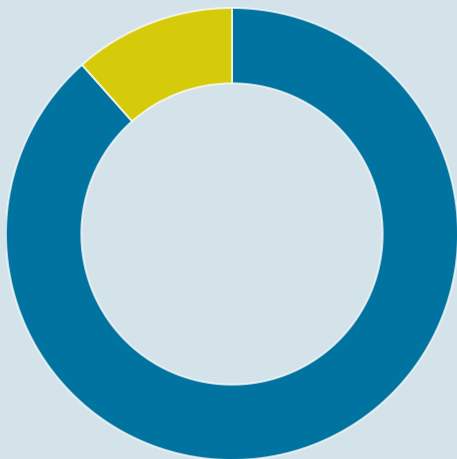
Type of press freedom violations

35 press freedom violations



Source of incidents

● Male ● Female



Violations impacted
23 male journalists and 3 female
journalists.

IPI monitors and collects data on press freedom violations in Pakistan 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

