



Press Freedom and Media Safety in Pakistan 2022- **2023**

Restricted content, physical violence and loaded rhetoric: Political polarisation and uncertainty impinges media safety in Pakistan



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❖ About Us

Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) was established in 1968 to strengthen the country's independent media by enhancing the professional capacity of media professionals and promoting and defending the freedom of expression and press freedom.

PPF's ability to connect with diverse stakeholders, including local and national political and media leaders, unions, editors, and publishers, has enabled the organisation to play a pivotal role in the recent enactment of the Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Professionals Act 2021 and the national Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act 2021.

With decades of experience and credibility, PPF has facilitated and implemented internationally recognised initiatives such as the Editors for Safety (EfS), a network of Pakistan's top editorial decision-makers from print and electronic media united on the single-point agenda of media safety.

At the international level, PPF has actively participated in international mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Special Rapporteurs of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). In 2022, PPF submitted a joint-stakeholder report with the endorsement of 20 leading national journalists, unions, press clubs, and media freedom advocates for Pakistan's review in the fourth cycle of the UPR.

PPF has long-standing relationships with local, national, and international media organisations.

PPF is a member of the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), elected to the IFEX Council, and served on the International Press Institute (IPI) board. PPF has also served as a founding co-chair of the Media Freedom Coalition Consultative Network (MFC-CN) for 2020-2021 and was re-elected as a member of the Steering Committee of the Global Forum for Media Development for the years 2021-2025.

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❖ Executive Summary

During 2022-23, political instability and uncertainty characterised politics in Pakistan. A charged political environment has resulted in polarisation, the impact of which was evident in the attacks on media safety and press freedom documented in the country during the past year and a half.

In a whirlwind of political activity, Pakistan witnessed a vote of no-confidence against a sitting prime minister, a new government at the helm, the dissolving of two provincial assemblies, delayed elections, divisions in the courts, economic downfall and uncertainty about the country's political and economic future. Amid this turmoil, the media has felt the direct impact of the political upheaval through physical attacks at political rallies, registration of cases and arrests of journalists considered to be towing certain party lines, loaded rhetoric used to attack journalists critical of some political parties and state-mandated regulation cutting off the media's ability to cover critical developments.

An environment of partisan politics has kept the media under attack.

In 2022-23, Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) has documented: at least 72 instances of physical attacks on journalists and media professionals — including two killings of journalists, 62 instances of manhandling or injuries, three instances of kidnappings or abductions, three instances of raids and two detentions. Journalists were threatened in at least 20 instances, in addition to which, the trolling, harassment and abuse of journalists online also continued. Journalists and media professionals were arrested in at least 16 instances, and cases were registered, legal notices were issued, or inquiries were initiated against journalists in at least 12 instances.

The [death](#) of *Channel 5* reporter Sadaf Naeem while covering former prime minister Imran Khan's rally in Punjab in October 2022 brought to light the unfortunate lack of safety measures for journalists on the ground, including at political rallies, elections and other venues. Naeem's death could have been prevented if media organisations, organisers, political parties, and local authorities had implemented effective safety measures. Naeem's death should serve as a turning point for media safety. Yet, the recently announced Code of Conduct for National Media and the code of conduct for political parties [issued](#) by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) are vague and ambiguous. It does not explicitly define measures that stakeholders must take for media safety.

Days before Naeem's death, another Pakistani journalist lost his life. Anchorperson Arshad Sharif was [killed](#) in Kenya on October 23, 2022. Sharif's murder was initially written off as an accident due to a case of mistaken identity. However, a fact-finding team has [confirmed](#) that the journalist was killed due to a "planned targeted assassination". Despite seven months since his murder, there is still little clarity on it. In a country with a pervasive culture of impunity surrounding the murder of journalists, it is vital that investigations are completed, and perpetrators are held accountable.

In other instances, journalists have faced arrests due to their work. Anchorperson Imran Riaz Khan faced arrest on multiple occasions during the past year and a half.

On July 5, 2022, he was [arrested](#) from Attock, Punjab and in February 2023, he was again [arrested](#). In both instances, he was granted bail. In a chilling reflection of the reality of legal challenges that media personnel often face, Khan's counsel had told a court in 2022 that 17 treason cases had been registered against the anchorperson in Punjab.

2023 began with the [arrest](#) of *Bol News* journalist Shahid Aslam in connection with a *Fact Focus* [investigative story](#) on the assets of former army chief General (retired) Qamar Javed Bajwa. While Aslam had not written the story, he was arrested in connection with the data leak of information regarding the former army chief.

In a complete violation of his right to privacy guaranteed under the [Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021](#), the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) asked Aslam for his passwords which he refused to share. The agency confiscated his laptop and cell phone and sent them for forensic analysis.

Aslam's arrest, the demands for his password, and the seizure of his electronic devices directly violate his ability to do his work freely. It indicates a culture where laws safeguarding journalists can openly be violated.

ARY News, head Ammad Yousaf was arrested, without warrants, on August 9, 2022, in Karachi. Similar to Aslam's case, Yousaf's right to privacy was violated. During the arrest, the police confiscated his cell phone and DVR of the CCTV from his home. Yousaf faced sedition charges, amongst other charges.

On March 20, the Lahore High Court [annulled](#) Section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) concerning sedition.

As political temperatures ran high, many rallies and protests were held. As the Pakistan Tehreek I Insaf (PTI) protested the ouster of their party chairman as the country's premier, the media at these events became the target of harassment and physical attacks. Multiple journalists were injured in April, and May 2022, and DSNG vans of various networks were damaged.

Meanwhile, political rhetoric by leaders of two of Pakistan's most prominent political parties in Pakistan — PTI and the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) — has further attempted to malign journalists. By making baseless or unverified allegations against them, the trolling, harassment and discrediting of media professionals are justified by political figures.

As the sitting prime minister, Khan [labelled](#) some journalists as mafias and blackmailers. Such baseless claims by the top of the country's leadership are dangerous and fuel fires against a

media already under attack. Meanwhile, PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz has made her stance clear on numerous occasions, such as by removing the microphone of *ARY News* during a press conference or [resharing](#) an insensitive tweet following the murder of Arshad Sharif.

The callous attitude of the political leadership at a time when political divisions are rife is dangerous for the safety of the media and press freedom. Such rhetoric is not without impact and is likely to alienate the public from the media, create certain impressions, and undermine the media's credibility. In other cases, it can justify acts of violence or ignite such attacks.

In the case of women journalists, rhetoric by key political figures is based upon personal attacks and character assassination of women in the media, similar to the online trolling and harassment they face. Khan's [claim](#) that *News One* anchor Gharida Farooqi was asking for abuse by entering male-dominated spaces is a dangerous statement implying fault lies with a woman when she faces harassment.

At the state level, control of the media has continued unabated. Policies and measures impeding free expression were commonplace throughout this period, with the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) acting more as a media censor than a regulator.

An overzealous regulator, PEMRA took it upon itself to ban entire coverage topics, depriving the public of its right to access information and making journalists work significantly harder.

From bans on [addresses](#) by the former prime minister and [coverage of terror attacks](#) to bans on proceedings outside courts and a ban on reporting on the [conduct of sitting judges](#), PEMRA has issued directives or prohibition orders in at least 15 instances. These blanket bans on coverage have further shrunk the space for free expression and created an environment of increased redlines and barriers to free speech.

Ahead of a general election, where the free flow of information and access to information is vital, such measures by PEMRA are likely to undermine the role of the media.

Instead of acting as a media regulator, PEMRA appears to be working as a censor board. Its prohibition orders have created a minefield of redlines for the media to work within.

Additionally, its punitive action has included the closure of channels.

The past year saw the cancellation of licenses, closure of channels and the issuance of show-cause notices. [ARY News](#) and [Bol News](#) witnessed multiple instances where transmission was disrupted, as well as state-mandated closures.

In August 2022, the government cancelled the No-Objection Certificate (NOC) for *ARY*, effectively suspending news transmission from this television channel. The move came just days after the transmission of the channel was suspended across parts of the country, and *ARY*

staff were arrested and had cases registered against them. The Sindh High Court had [suspended](#) the notice of the interior ministry.

On Sep 5, 2022, PEMRA announced to stop the broadcasting of *Bol News* and *Bol Entertainment* due to the failure of security clearance from the interior ministry.

These closures were once repeated in 2023. In March, both *ARY News* and *Bol News* faced closures.

On March 5, PEMRA suspended *ARY's* broadcast for airing clips of former premier Imran Khan despite a prohibition order issued against airing his speeches. On March 18, *Bol News* was blocked when it continued airing proceedings at the Judicial Complex during former premier Imran Khan's appearance despite a prohibition order.

Channel closures repress press freedom and create financial challenges for media houses.

With general elections expected in 2023, the impact of political polarisation on media safety and press freedom is of grave concern. While the role of the media to report freely is always vital, it is even more so during a period of political transition, particularly for elections which require rigorous reporting and accountability. The media must be able to report on key developments in the country without the fear of reprisal, including physical attacks, threats or legal proceedings, state-mandated prohibition or the use of political rhetoric focussed on character assassination.

Similarly, the push for monitoring content online has also increased.

A [presidential ordinance](#) passed under the PTI government proposed greater control of the digital media landscape, strengthening the draconian Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act 2016. It was later [overturned](#) by the Islamabad High Court (IHC). Coming into power, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government led by PML-N made [sweeping promises](#) on press freedom, including proposed discussions on PECA, 2016. Progress on these discussions or whether they have occurred has yet to be reported.

While the information minister has claimed that the government has not registered any cases under PECA, 2016 against journalists, the track record for press freedom under the PDM government has been much the same as its predecessor PTI government. As opposition parties, each have claimed to be a defender of free speech and press freedom. Yet, once in power, little action towards ensuring media safety, reducing media regulation or tackling the culture of impunity in crimes against the media has been documented.

As the role of digital media and online platforms become increasingly relevant, media have come under attack online. In particular, the attacks against women journalists take on a gendered nature built upon the character assassination and personal attacks of women in the media.

This year the wife of late journalist Arshad Sharif and a journalist herself, [Javeria Siddique](#), became the subject of an online trolling campaign.

Siddique tweeted: “My husband was killed with a bullet. I will be killed through character assassination.”

With the successful passage of the federal Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act 2021 and the provincial-level Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021, a legal recourse became available for media professionals under attack. Despite this, a lack of effective implementation of these laws undermines their use. The Sindh Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners was [formed](#) in November 2022. The Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals is yet to be formed at the federal level.

While there remains uncertainty about the future of elections, the nature of attacks on the media during 2022-23 at political rallies and events, state-level regulation, arrests and case registration make evident the need for effective and clearly defined measures for media safety ahead of general elections.

❖ **Recommendations on media safety in an election year**

While uncertainty looms over the fate of general elections in Pakistan, they are expected in 2023. The impact of charged political rhetoric, rallies and protests has already undermined the safety of the media and the space for free expression in Pakistan. The nature of attacks in 2022-23 makes clear that the media faces an onslaught of attacks in a charged political environment.

Ahead of the general elections and based on the preceding year's events, PPF has prepared a set of general recommendations, which, if implemented, can help ensure media safety during the political transition and elections and defend the right to free expression in Pakistan.

- The federal government must ensure the formation of the Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Other Media Professionals without further delay.
- To increase accountability, reduce violence against the media and tackle the culture of impunity surrounding these crimes, the effective implementation of the federal-level Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021 and the provincial-level Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021 is essential.

- The Election Commission of Pakistan must review its Code of Conduct for the media and, after consultations with relevant stakeholders, ensure that the code of conduct for the media provides unambiguous measures to ensure the safety of journalists and media professionals reporting on the elections.
- The Code of Conduct for National Media issued by the ECP should be reviewed, and any sections about restricting media coverage must not be included.
- The ECP must also review its code of conduct for political parties and ensure that it assigns specific responsibility to political parties about media safety and compels parties to share their plans for media safety to prevent incidents such as the death of Sadaf Naeem that took place at a political rally in October 2022.
- The ECP Code of Conduct for Political Parties, Contesting Candidates and Election Agents should assign specific responsibility to political parties for the safety of the media. Through the application of legislation that specifically protects the safety of the media, the ECP must require political parties to ensure effective measures for the safety of media are in place during their electioneering events.
- While the mandated content regulator, PEMRA, must ensure it does not encourage censorship or act as a muzzle on free speech. During both provincial elections and general elections, coverage of all developments must be permitted without the fear of reprisal for journalists or prohibition orders stopping the broadcast of key issues or incidents. PEMRA should not impinge upon the ability of the media to report freely.
- During election cycles, digital media and social media platforms may become the source of information overload. While it is the responsibility of the media to ensure accurate and verified coverage, any measures to increase regulation of these platforms or suspend internet access, as has been observed previously, must not be proposed. Free expression across all media platforms is vital for a free and fair election in a democracy.
- The registration of cases and initiating criminal proceedings against journalists or media persons work to encourage self-censorship through intimidation. Journalists must be permitted to work without fearing legal reprisals, lengthy cases or arrests.
- Media organisations must also provide journalists with safety training and equipment. The physical and mental well-being of staff should be taken into account and safeguarded through practical training, timely payment of salaries and constant evaluation of the safety risk to journalists.

❖ Physical Attacks

The brazen murder of a journalist on foreign soil, an accident that resulted in the death of a woman journalist, physical assault and manhandling that resulted in injuries, detention, kidnapping or abduction of media persons, violence during political activities such as rallies, harassment and misbehaviour by political figures and others in positions of authorities, raids at the homes of media persons — this year, the media in Pakistan faced various forms of physical violence and abuse.

In 2022-23, PPF documented at least 72 instances of physical violence against media professionals, including killings, manhandling and injuries, harassment, kidnappings and abductions, raids, detentions or attacks on a press club. Sixty-one incidents were documented in 2022, and 11 were recorded in 2023.

Such a large number of physical attacks and harassment on professionals in less than two years is a worrying reflection of the state of media safety in Pakistan. In addition to these acts of physical abuse, journalists and media professionals faced threats, including death threats, in at least 19 instances.

Two journalists killed

In 2022-23, two deaths of journalists — Arshad Sharif and Sadaf Naeem — in connection with their work have been documented.

On October 23, 2022, senior journalist Arshad Sharif was [shot dead](#) while travelling in a car in Kenya. A day later, the Ministry of Interior formed a team to investigate Sharif's murder consisting of officials from the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) and the Intelligence Bureau.

Despite varying initial accounts, a fact-finding team [report](#) released in December 2022 found that Sharif's death was a "planned targeted assassination".

The report found that the version of the Kenyan Police claiming the death to be a case of mistaken identity was "full of contradictions" and found that the post-mortem indicated that the journalist had also been tortured.

It stated: "Both the members of the FFT have a considered understanding that it is a case of planned targeted assassination with transnational characters rather than a case of mistaken identity."

The circumstances of his murder and the factors that led to his departure from Pakistan to end up in Kenya eventually remain shrouded in mystery, and investigations into the murder must continue.

It is also vital to investigate the circumstances that resulted in Sharif's departure from Pakistan and whether fear of reprisal for doing his work in the country was behind his decision to leave in

August 2022. Before this, in April 2022, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) [urged](#) the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and police to stop harassing Sharif and other journalists.

In the latest progress into Sharif's murder, on March 9, the special joint investigation team submitted its 15-day progress report with the Supreme Court, *The News* [reported](#).

In another tragic incident, on October 30, 2022, *Channel 5* reporter Sadaf Naeem was [killed](#) after being run over by the container carrying former prime minister Imran Khan during his long march in Sadhoke, Punjab. Dawn reported that the Punjab government had formed a fact-finding committee to investigate Naeem's death.

Naeem was killed while reporting on a political rally serving as a stark reminder of the lack of safety measures in place for the safety of journalists on the ground. Naeem's death could have been prevented if the necessary safety measures had been implemented. Naeem's should serve as a call to action for all stakeholders — journalists, employers, media bodies, event organisers, political parties and local authorities — to ensure that necessary safety training, equipment and measures are in place.

Manhandling and injuries

While the number of journalists killed or murdered in Pakistan has decreased in recent years, physical attacks on the media, including harassment, manhandling, and assaulting journalists resulting in injuries, have continued to occur with impunity.

While two confirmed deaths of journalists in the line of duty were documented in 2022-23, a significantly higher number of incidents of violence that resulted in injuries to media professionals have been documented. In 2022-23, at least 63 instances of manhandling, attacks, harassment and injuries to media workers have been documented.

Both verbal and physical abuse have been used to intimidate journalists, creating an environment of fear. These attacks show journalists the repercussions they may face for doing their jobs.

In the past year and a half, violence, including the manhandling and assault of journalists and media professionals for covering a story, have often been perpetrated by those in positions of authority, including police, politicians, local commissioners, security guards and others.

On February 15, 2022, *ARY News* host and journalist Iqrarul Hassan and his team were [attacked](#) by officials of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) after they had found an official taking money during a National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) door-to-door verification in a sting operation in Karachi. As per [Geo](#), five individuals were arrested.

On March 1 of this year, seven journalists — Saqib Bashir, Abbas Shabbir, Shah Khalid, Zeeshan Syed, Idrees, Ambreen and Farah — were attacked by security staff of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) during former prime minister Imran Khan's visit to the court.

According to [Dawn](#), journalists were “allegedly beaten” by police in the presence of the deputy inspector of police operations and the assistant commissioner. A [notice](#) issued by the Islamabad Inspector General of Police said an inquiry was being conducted into the incident.

In one such incident, a press club came under attack. On December 15, 2022, a group of individuals [attacked](#) the Sadiqabad Press Club in response to news coverage of abduction incidents from a sports club in Sadiqabad, Punjab.

Violence during political activities

In a year of charged political rhetoric filled with a flurry of political activities, much of this physical violence against the media was documented at political rallies and events. In other instances, political parties and politicians were responsible for the harassment of media workers.

During 2022-23, PPF has documented an alarming rate of acts of violence at political rallies or protests, harassment by politicians or their staff at press conferences, or violence in connection with covering a political event or elections. Ahead of an election year, such physical attacks on media workers covering politicians, political rallies or elections are a concerning development that raises questions about the safety of media workers during the upcoming elections, expected in October 2023.

In one such tragic incident that highlighted the alarming situation, a journalist (Sadaf Naeem) lost her life. Other journalists have also come under physical attack at rallies and protests.

PTI organised a flurry of political protests and rallies in the aftermath of Khan's removal as the premier. While numerous restrictive measures have been taken at a state level, making coverage of these events challenging, the media has also come under attack while on the field at rallies, protests and marches.

In April 2022, [multiple attacks](#) on the media took place as protests against the ouster of Khan from office. On April 13, seven reporters and camera persons received minor injuries at a PTI rally in Peshawar. In Karachi on April 16, woman journalist *Samaa TV* reporter Zamzam Saeed and her cameraperson Shahid Baloch were abused, and bottles were thrown at them. Additionally, the media teams for *24 News* and *Geo* were also targeted.

Once again in May, as Khan led his long march to the capital, violence against media workers was documented. Stones were pelted at the *Geo* and *Jang* offices in Islamabad, as a result of which some journalists were injured, the newsroom window was shattered, and a DSNG van was damaged, *Geo* reported.

According to *Samaa TV*, reporter ZamZam Saeed and a cameraperson were wounded after being attacked by PTI supporters at Numaish Chowrangi in Karachi. Additionally, reporter Yasir Hussain was injured when filming a mob setting a vehicle on fire. A *Samaa TV* team in Rawalpindi was also attacked, the report added.

According to *Aaj News*, a DSNG van for the network was attacked, a *Hum News* DSNG van, the windscreen of which was damaged and a Neo News Peshawar team was attacked, and their DSNG van was hit, all in Islamabad. An *Aaj News* DSNG van was also attacked in Lahore.

AFP photographer Asif Hassan was injured in Karachi. According to the *IFJ*, he was hit in the head by a stone intended for police officers. The photographer was taken to a hospital, where he received stitches and is said to be in stable condition.

Violence against the media has also been documented at events carried out by other political parties, such as PML-N and JUI-F.

On April 30, 2022, *PML-N workers tortured ARY News reporter Chand Nawab*, and the network's DSNG vans were hit with sticks and stones outside the *ARY* office in Karachi, [ARY](#) reported.

Two of the country's most prominent political parties, PTI and PML-N, have been callous in their responsibilities towards media safety. Not only have their political events resulted in violence against the media, but they have also made it difficult for certain reporters to do their work.

In August 2022, an *ARY News* team was kicked out of a PML-N party session, while on May 24, 2022, PML-N Vice President asked for an ARY mic to be removed while addressing a press conference. In July 2022, *Neo News* reporter Sheraz Ahmed Sherazi and cameraman Javed Aslam were stopped from covering a PTI event.

Politicians have often misbehaved or harassed journalists, such as during press conferences. In a recent such incident, in April, PTI Senator Azam Swati called a journalist a "pimp" when asked to clarify a claim the politician had made during the press conference, *The Friday Times* [reported](#). In other instances, security staff belonging to politicians have misbehaved with journalists. On February 25, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's security guard [manhandled](#) *Capital TV* Bureau Chief Akram Baloch during a press conference. Baloch told PPF that the secretary had later apologised to him.

The acts of physical violence against media workers at political rallies, the heckling of the media by party workers and leaders and the continuation of such attacks despite, in one instance, the death of a journalist at a political rally were an alarming reflection of the state of media safety in Pakistan.

In an incident of violence during election reporting, on July 19, 2022, *ARY News* reporter Hassan Hafeez was verbally attacked by Lahore's CCPO Bilal Siddiqui allegedly for questioning the role of police during a riot during by-elections in Punjab.

The risk to journalists on the field covering elections was once again highlighted when on May 29, 2022, while covering local body elections, *Bol News* reporter Muhammad Ghazanfar escaped an attack on a polling station in Mangocher in Kalat. Speaking to PPF, Ghazanfar said that the *Bol News* DSNG was distant enough from the polling station to stay safe.

Ahead of elections for the provincial assemblies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) issued the Code of Conduct for the National Media 2023. This code of conduct is insufficient to protect the media against violence and ensure media safety during election coverage.

Regarding media safety, it states: "The government and law enforcing agencies shall provide protection to media persons and media houses to maintain their freedom of expression."

This statement is far too vague and general in terms of ensuring the protection of the media. While the ECP states that government and law enforcement agencies shall provide protection to media persons and media houses to protect their freedom of expression, it does not define how so or specifically mention the safety of media professionals.

In the Code of Conduct for Political Parties, Contesting Candidates and Election Agents, also issued, the ECP states: "The political parties, candidates and election agents shall firmly restrain their workers from exerting undue pressure against the print and electronic media, including newspapers' offices and printing presses, or resorting to violence of any kind against the media."

Similar to the code of conduct for the media, the code of conduct for political parties should also use legislation that specifically protects the safety of the media. In addition to requiring political parties to restrain their workers from exerting undue pressure against the media, the ECP must also require political parties to ensure effective measures for the safety of media are in place during their electioneering events.

Kidnapping and abductions

During 2022-23, there were at least three instances where journalists or media professionals were kidnapped, abducted or said to be missing before they eventually returned home safely.

In June 2022, *Aaj News* Assignment Editor Nafees Naeem was [abducted](#) by unidentified individuals in Karachi. CCTV footage shows Naeem being ushered into a vehicle by three men. Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said that he had taken notice of the incident. The following day, on June 14, Naeem returned home safely.

While it remains to be confirmed whether it was connected with his work, on March 9, *Lok Sujag* shared that its regional editor Abid Mir had been [missing](#) since a day prior. On March 15, the digital news platform shared that Mir had returned home safely, stating that Mir's case was "way more sensitive and complicated than it appears to be". They added that they were also investigating harassment allegations against the journalist.

In another incident, on August 5, 2022, *World Is One News (WION)* Bureau Chief for Pakistan Anas Mallick was reported missing in Kabul, Afghanistan. Mallick's brother said that the journalist had been missing for 12 hours. Hours later, he was reported to be safe.

Raids

PPF documented at least three instances where the homes of media professionals were raided.

On February 16, 2022, the FIA [raided](#) editor and analyst Mohsin Baig's home in Islamabad and arrested him after he "allegedly shot at and roughed up members of the raiding team," *Dawn* reported.

In another instance, former prime minister Imran Khan's focal person on digital Dr Arslan Khalid's home in Lahore was [raided](#) on April 10, 2022.

Additionally, based on reports of harassment by the FIA, the IHC [ordered](#) the agency to stop harassing journalist Arshad Sharif in April 2022. While the FIA had denied the allegation of [harassing](#) Sharif, others had [said](#) that his house had been raided.

Detentions

While arrests and the registration of cases were common during 2022-23, media professionals faced temporary detention in Pakistan in at least two instances.

In one such incident, Committee to Protect Journalists Senior Program Consultant Steven Butler was [detained](#) by the FIA upon his arrival in Lahore in October 2022 for being on a "stop list" of the Interior Ministry. He was released following the ministry's approval.

❖ Threats

From sitting ministers to terror groups and land mafias — media persons in Pakistan received threats in connection to their work throughout 2022 and 2023. PPF has documented at least 20 instances where media professionals received threats.

While a threat is not a physical act of violence, it is a source of mental distress for media workers and their families. It is an intimidation tool to silence journalists and can be the precursor for physical acts of violence.

Despite the passage of the media safety law in Sindh and at the federal level, journalists continued to work with the fear of threats.

Under the [Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021](#), threats of violence or harassment against journalists and other media professionals must be treated as actual acts of violence or harassment. Federal law also states that no threatening behaviour shall be exempt from “immediate and effective investigation and prosecution”.

These laws should be utilised to ensure the safety of journalists and other media practitioners from threats and the fear of violence that such threats carry with them.

❖ **Arrests and registration of cases**

A tool that has become commonplace for intimidating journalists or burying them in lengthy legal proceedings is the registration of First Information Reports (FIR), or criminal complaints, against them or through inquiries initiated against them. During 2023-23, multiple cases were registered against the same media persons. The registration of cases intimidates journalists, which can result in self-censorship and also act as a warning to other media personnel.

In 2022-2023, PPF recorded at least 16 arrests of journalists and media professionals in connection with their work and at least 12 instances where cases were registered, legal notices were issued, or inquiries were initiated against media persons.

In some instances, cases were used as a stand-alone tool for intimidating journalists, while in other instances, they became the basis for their arrest. While the FIRs were registered, in some instances of arrest, the details of these FIRs were shared post-arrest. In one instance, journalist Akbar Notezai received a legal notice for a story he had written for *Lok Sujag*.

2023 began with the [arrest](#) of *Bol News* journalist Shahid Aslam in connection with a *Fact Focus* investigative story on the assets of the family of former army chief General (retired) Qamar Javed Bajwa. On January 13, Aslam was arrested by the FIA from Lahore. According to *Dawn*, a local court in Islamabad then [granted](#) the FIA two-day physical remand of the journalist on January 14. Days later, on January 18, Aslam was granted bail.

The FIA had asked the journalist for his passwords which he refused to share. Dunya News said Aslam had “refused to cooperate” with investigators and share his electronic device passwords, so they were sent for forensic analysis.

In an ongoing case that began in 2022 and carried into this year, *ARY News* head Ammad Yousaf, among other charges, faced sedition charges. Yousaf is accused of allegedly aiding former ruling political party PTI leader Shahbaz Gill for his remarks while appearing on *ARY News*.

On August 9, 2022, Yousaf was arrested in Karachi. ARY News said police officers and plain-clothed persons had “forcibly” entered Yousaf’s house. They diverted the CCTV cameras and jumped in from the top of the house’s main entrance. As per the report, the DVR of the CCTV was also taken. Days later, a court in Karachi had set him free of the charges against him, ARY reported.

Yousaf faced possible indictment under the charges. On January 6, theailable arrest warrants of Rs50,000 surety bonds were issued against Yousaf. Proceedings were adjourned on multiple occasions.

In a welcome move, the Lahore High Court on March 20 [annulled](#) Section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) concerning sedition. This section has been used in cases against media professionals such as Yousaf.

In other instances, cases against media professionals registered in 2022 used Section 131 (incitement to mutiny) of the PPC, amongst other clauses.

In May 2022, as political temperatures rose, various media personalities felt the burden of the political change of tides. Cases were registered against numerous media persons considered to be more aligned with the views of former prime minister Imran Khan. Cases were registered against Sami Ibrahim, anchorperson Imran Riaz Khan, Yousaf, *ARY CEO* Salman Iqbal, Arshad Sharif and Khawar Ghuman.

On July 5, 2022, Imran Riaz Khan was arrested in Attock, Punjab, where a criminal complaint was registered against him. The Lahore High Court granted him bail. As per [Dawn](#), Khan’s counsel Mian Ali Ashfaq said that 17 treason cases were registered against the anchorperson in the Punjab province.

In 2023, Khan was once again arrested. On February 2, Dawn reported that Khan was arrested from Lahore’s Allama Iqbal International Airport by FIA’s Cyber Crime Wing on charges of hate speech. The case against him was [dismissed](#) a day later, and he was released.

In the most recent incident, on March 20, *Bol News* reported that its Islamabad Bureau Chief Siddique Jan had been [“abducted”](#) in Islamabad. It was later reported that Jan had been

arrested by “plain clothes” men outside the *BoI News* office in Islamabad. As per the report, CCTV footage showed more than 25-30 men coming and taking him.

On March 21, the police were given physical remand of the journalist. A day later, the anti-terrorism court exempted Jan.

❖ Political rhetoric

Amid political polarisation, leading politicians have also played their role in bringing the impact of these divisions into the media through irresponsible, baseless and targeted rhetoric. Both former prime minister Imran Khan and PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz have enabled the labelling of journalists and media persons along party lines. Loaded political rhetoric can threaten media workers' physical and emotional safety.

In a national address before his ouster, Khan, in March 2022, labelled certain media members as “mafias” who were “blackmailing” them. In a dangerous and baseless allegation, Khan claimed that some journalists were being paid to spread filth and blackmail them.

In an address following an armed attack at his party's rally in Wazirabad, Punjab, on November 3, 2022, seen as an assassination attempt on the former premier, Khan [attempted](#) to implicate certain journalists and media networks — Waqar Satti, Murtaza Solangi, Hamid Mir, *Geo News* and *Samaa News* — for somehow being involved in the incident.

Khan's [remarks](#) about the media took on a specifically sexist nature when on October 18, 2022, the former prime minister said that *News One* anchorperson Gharida Farooqi was opening herself up for attacks by entering male-dominated spaces. Khan referenced Farooqi and said: “Gharidah Farooqi enters the crowd and then complaints of harassment”.

In a [tweet](#), Farooqi shared that in response to a question regarding the trolling and attacks on journalists, Khan replied: “If Gharidah Farooqi shoves herself with men, then this will happen.”

Such a remark by a former prime minister justifies the attacks that a woman journalist in Pakistan experiences and can set a dangerous precedent for others to attack women in the media by providing an excuse. It also highlights the challenge women in the media face through the specifically sexist attacks they are subjected to.

While the former premier has publicly labelled the media, members of his political party have also reiterated similar rhetoric.

In a vague [tweet](#) in April, PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry claimed that journalists associated with *Geo News* were working day and night against the Supreme Court. He added that journalists in

a specific WhatsApp group were running a paid campaign against judges. Chaudhry said they were preparing a list of all the journalists in this group.

Although it was unclear what the PTI leader meant by preparing a list, the political party had also previously adopted similar rhetoric. In December 2020, an official political party handle tweeted a list of journalists it claimed was corrupt and another list of journalists it claimed were “brave and bold”.

The PTI wasn’t the only political party that has used rhetoric to discredit or label journalists. Following the death of Arshad Sharif, PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz reshared an insensitive tweet that mocked Sharif’s murder. Nawaz re-shared the tweet with the caption: “I don’t feel good RTing [retweeting] this, but this is a lesson for mankind that we must all imbibe.”

She later apologised and deleted the tweet.

At a time when a Pakistani journalist was forced to flee the country and eventually murdered on foreign soil, Nawaz’s tweet is reflective of the callous approach that politicians have towards the media. Sharif faced intimidation under the PDM government led by PML-N, and instead of sympathising with his family or urging investigations, Nawaz chose to make light of his death.

Rhetoric for leading political figures that makes claims against the media labels them and is based on the discrediting of the media and heckling of media persons are ways of discrediting journalists or media professionals considered unfavourable or critical of a particular politician or political party. While political parties should encourage critique and the room for journalists to be critical of and hold to account their policies, politicians instead are bent on undermining the media who speak against them. While this rhetoric is not an act of violence or even a threat, it can be used by party supporters to justify the abuse, threats and possible physical attacks against a media professional. In a country where the Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, politicians are also responsible for upholding this right rather than undermining it.

❖ **Regulation and legislation**

In April 2022, the PML-N-led PDM government took charge with a welcoming message for press freedom.

Addressing a press conference, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, on April 19, 2022, announced various steps the new government would take regarding the media. Amongst other measures, she announced that the government would take steps to implement the media safety law, to “wholeheartedly” accept criticism and hold a review of the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) ordinance from 2016.

On April 11 of this year, nearly a year later, Aurangzeb said that the “four-year dark era” for the media was over, [APP](#) reported. She added that the current government had “granted full freedom of speech and expression”.

Referring to the press freedom attacks under the preceding PTI government, Aurangzeb said that with the new government, that era had ended. The information minister claimed the government had not registered any cases against journalists under PECA, 2016.

However, the overall record for press freedom since April 2022 paints a dismal state of affairs. Despite the new government coming to power, the approach toward the media has largely remained the same. Journalists have continued to come under attack, and state bodies such as PEMRA, Pakistan Telecommunications Authority and the FIA continue to work in overdrive resulting in the repression of free expression.

Additionally, there needs to be more progress toward implementing the federal-level media safety law that can provide a source of legal recourse for journalists who come under attack and help address the culture of impunity that prevails in crimes against the media.

❖ Violations of media safety laws

In 2021, Pakistan passed two media safety laws — a provincial law in Sindh province and a federal law by the National Assembly. Despite the successful passage of the two laws, there has been slow progress in the effective implementation of the laws.

The Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021 was passed in May 2021 by the Sindh Assembly. The 14-member Commission required under the law was [formed](#) in November 2022.

Meanwhile, the federal-level [Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act 2021](#) was passed in November 2021, and the Commission required under this law has yet to be formed.

In December 2022, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif shared his “firm resolve to facilitate the implementation of the Journalists Safety Law proactively,” *The Express Tribune* [reported](#). While this was a promising statement from the premier, it has not led to any action or progress regarding the formation of the Commission under federal law.

The passage of provincial and federal safety legislation specifically for journalists and media practitioners was a landmark step. However, the effective implementation of these laws is vital.

Instead, during 2022-23, PPF documented multiple instances where the safety laws were flagrantly violated.

In the instance of arrest and the cases against Shahid Aslam and Ammad Yousaf, the electronic devices of the media professionals were seized. Aslam was asked for his passwords which he refused to share. The devices of both journalists were seized.

While the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021 safeguards a journalist's right to privacy. It states: *"Right to privacy and non-disclosure of sources. (1) Each journalist and media professional shall have the right to privacy, which includes protection of the law against interference with his/their home, correspondence and family."*

The media safety laws at both the federal and provincial levels provide a basis for tackling the culture of impunity that surrounds crimes against the media and holding to account violations against the rights of journalists. Instead of seeing the laws' implementation in 2022-23, these legislations are being violated.

❖ An overzealous regulator — PEMRA

While the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) is tasked with regulating broadcast media, the body has appeared overzealous in using its authority to restrict content. From sweeping bans on entire coverage topics to cutting off air time for key political figures, PEMRA has functioned more as an arm of the state that restricts free expression rather than in monitoring and ensuring standards of broadcasting are being met.

It has created a situation where the mainstream media cannot cover key events underway in the country. Such repressive regulation directly undermines the right to free expression and the right to information guaranteed under the Constitution.

In 2022-23, PPF documented at least 15 instances where PEMRA issued prohibition orders or warnings against sharing certain content. Additionally, the regulator issued fines, show-cause notices or suspended broadcasts in at least 13 instances.

In 2022, of these orders, PEMRA issued three directives warning broadcasters against airing content against state institutions, i.e. the Army and the judiciary.

A repeat occurrence throughout 2022-23 has been the bans imposed on addresses by former prime minister Imran Khan. In August 2022, the regulatory body [banned](#) live coverage of addresses by Khan. Per PEMRA, Khan was "continuously alleging state institutions by levelling baseless allegations and spreading hate speech through his provocative statements against state institutions and officers, which is prejudicial to the maintenance of law and order and is

likely to disturb public peace and tranquillity". On August 29, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) [suspended](#) PEMRA's order.

Once again, this year, PEMRA sought to ban addresses by the former premier. On March 5, PEMRA [banned](#) all coverage of the former premier. PTI leader Fawad Chaudhry had announced that the order would be challenged in court. On March 9, the ban was [lifted](#) by the Lahore High Court (LHC).

Political leaders have also previously been targeted by PEMRA's directives through similar orders banning broadcasts of their speeches or coverage of their addresses. Such bans cut off vital information for the public and deny them access to information about key political figures. They are also counterproductive in an era where information is readily accessible online.

In another order dated March 9, PEMRA [prohibited](#) coverage of the conduct of sitting judges of the high courts and superior court. This restriction came at a time when alleged audio clips of a sitting Supreme Court judge came into the limelight. By prohibiting coverage, PEMRA restricted coverage of an issue with far-reaching consequences that continue to play out in the political arena.

In a strongly worded order, a special bench of the Supreme Court on March 29 [took exception](#) to PEMRA's directive. Terming the directive as an "unsolicited media-gagging order", the apex court bench said it felt "compelled" to remind PEMRA that, among other things, the media regulatory body was set up "to ensure accountability, transparency and good governance by optimising the free flow of information."

The top court stated that PEMRA's prohibition order did the "very opposite" of this "by imposing absolute censorship and threatening violators with punitive action. Stopping the free flow of information prevents accountability, transparency and good governance".

PEMRA's restrictions have not only been limited to the political arena. In an [alarming order](#), on February 5, the regulatory body prohibited coverage of rape at the F-9 Park in the capital city of Islamabad.

In a country where incidents of sexual harassment, including rape, are reported daily, prohibiting coverage of such acts enables an environment of lack of accountability for perpetrators and undermines the importance of reporting incidents of sexual harassment and the need to address the root causes of sexual violence.

Show-cause notices and channel closures

In addition to issuing directives on content broadcast networks are permitted to air, in 2022-23, PPF documented at least 13 instances where television networks or particular shows were issued show-cause notices, fines or faced suspensions concerning content they aired.

Throughout 2022-23, *ARY News* and *Bol News* also faced numerous disruptions and suspensions in their broadcast, including the cancellation of licenses. Taking a channel off-air has far-ranging consequences, from restricting the public's access to information and journalists' right to free expression to the financial consequences media networks face due to such disruptions in the broadcast.

On August 9, 2022, the *ARY News* broadcast was [disrupted](#), a day after PEMRA issued a show-cause notice to the channel for "airing false, hateful and seditious content". The channel was [restored](#) on the orders of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on September 1, 2022.

Just days later, on August 11, 2022, the government cancelled the No-Objection Certificate (NOC) for *ARY* "with immediate effect and until further orders based on adverse reports from agencies". The SHC had suspended the order.

This year, the channel once again faced a suspension for its broadcast. On March 5, PEMRA suspended *ARY's* broadcast for airing clips of former premier Imran Khan speaking outside Zaman Park despite a prohibition order issued on the matter. As per [ARY News](#), other channels aired the address, but action had only been taken against the network. Just days later, on March 7, the Sindh High Court ordered the restoration of *ARY News*.

Bol News also faced disruptions in broadcast over the past year and a half. On Sep 5, 2022, PEMRA [announced](#) that it was stopping the broadcast of *Bol News* and *Bol Entertainment* due to the failure of security clearance from the interior ministry. The SHC then ordered the network's restoration.

Once again in 2023, *Bol News* faced a block on March 18, when it continued airing proceedings at the Judicial Complex during former premier Imran Khan's appearance despite a prohibition order issued by PEMRA, [Dawn](#) reported.

❖ Digital Media

With the increasing relevance and use of digital platforms as a source of information and for disseminating news in Pakistan, there has also been an increased push for control of digital platforms. Despite changes in government, the policing of content shared online has continued. Proposed and passed legislation aims to control speech shared via digital platforms.

In certain instances during 2022-23, Pakistan has witnessed internet closures in certain areas, disruption in website access, or, in the case of Wikipedia, a blanket ban on the website countrywide.

Meanwhile, the digital world has also opened journalists to several attacks on social media platforms. In some instances, it resulted in the registration of cases against media persons for the content they shared online. In particular, online attacks against women journalists take on a gendered nature and are based upon personal attacks and the character assassination of women in the media.

In February 2023, the government drafted a bill under which [Dawn](#) reported that anyone who “scandalises or ridicules the Pakistan Army and judiciary through any medium” could be imprisoned for up to five years.

PECA, 2016

In both a significant win and setback for free expression, developments around the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, were centre stage during 2022.

In February, President Arif Alvi promulgated an ordinance strengthening the draconian PECA, 2016. The matter was taken to court, and on April 12, the Islamabad High Court struck down the ordinance alongside the use of Section 20 of PECA, 2016, to the extent of the expression “or harms the reputation”.

Despite the court’s decision to stop the use of Section 20 of PECA, 2016, the FIA had, on May 7, 2022, challenged this in the Supreme Court, [The Express Tribune](#) reported. However, the information minister then [announced](#) that this petition had been withdrawn as it was “squarely against the government’s stated policy and principle of standing for and ensuring freedom of expression”.

When the new Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz-led Pakistan Democratic Movement government came to power, Information Minister Aurangzeb had announced that the law minister would review PECA, 2016 “in consultation with stakeholders, including the parts where the right to freedom of expression was misconstrued, and gaps were present,” [Dawn](#) reported.

Despite the passage of a year, progress or developments regarding these consultations have yet to be reported.

Digital censorship

During the previous year, incidents of disruption in internet services or access to certain websites were documented.

After PEMRA had first banned the broadcast of live speeches by former premier Imran Khan, on August 21, 2022, during a rally by Khan, YouTube services faced disruptions in many areas of the country.

In January 2023, the internet was [shut down](#) in Gwadar, Balochistan, amidst clashes between protestors and police. It was reported that after ten days, internet services were restored.

Such measures restrict the public's access to vital information about key developments or addresses by political leaders. In a media landscape where PEMRA has been overzealous in prohibiting content aired by broadcast media, digital platforms, including social media, can provide a platform for disseminating information. By disrupting internet access or access to certain websites, the public is cut off from other sources of information. Additionally, it becomes challenging for the media to report and share developments with their audiences.

In a countrywide block in February 2023, the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) blocked Wikipedia services. Wikipedia services were initially [downgraded](#) in the country for “not removing/blocking sacrilegious content”. It was blocked for 48 hours “with the direction to block/remove the reported contents”. Following this, it was blocked in the country.

Just days later, on February 6, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif [ordered](#) that Wikipedia be restored immediately.

In each instance where access to the internet or particular websites is restricted, the public suffers a lack of access to information. Open access to information and digital platforms is vital for safeguarding free expression in Pakistan.

Women journalists and online harassment

While the threat of and acts of physical violence against media persons continue unabated in Pakistan, journalists are now subject to digital harassment, trolling and threats. In 2022-23, journalists and media professionals continued to face threats, abuse and trolling online.

While these attacks target all journalists, they take on a specifically gendered nature for women journalists. Women journalists targeted online through trolling campaigns or harassment face character assassination and personal attacks.

During political change following the ouster of Khan as prime minister, analyst and lawyer Reema Omer had commented on the violent attack against the deputy speaker of the Punjab Assembly during a session to elect a new provincial chief minister.

In a tweet, she [said](#): “PTI leaders incited and threatened violence against dissidents for weeks and now are openly condoning and justifying [the] assault on Punjab’s Deputy Speaker. In doing so, they are accepting PTI is a lynch mob – not a political party bound by the Constitution or the rule of law.”

In response, former human rights minister Shireen Mazari said: “Your petty hatred for PTI knows no bounds! But luckily u, you (sic) don’t speak for most Pakistanis, just for your foreign NGO! We have had enough of pontification and arrogance! Now go cry to your NGO.”

In another instance, in August 2022, *News One* anchor Gharida Farooqi became the [target](#) of a social media trend against her. Farooqi and Digital Rights Foundation reported the trend to Twitter, after which it was taken down.

In 2023, the wife of late journalist Arshad Sharif and a journalist herself, [Javeria Siddique](#), became the subject of an online trolling campaign.

Siddique tweeted: “My husband was killed with a bullet. I will be killed through character assassination.”

According to *The Coalition for Women in Journalism*, which sounded the alarm regarding the abuse Siddique was facing, the “pro-government viral smear campaign” accused Siddique of remarriage to Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf leader and former Sindh Governor Imran Ismail. Ismail has also denied the allegation and condemned the campaign.

“I did not write anything controversial against any institution. Despite this, I am facing online harassment,” Siddique said.

In another incident, *GTV* anchor person Tanzeela Mazhar said she was threatened by “two prominent personalities” of PTI (Dr Arslan Khalid and Hassan Niazi) who asked her to delete a tweet in which she had shared information about the Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan being involved in clashes between police and PTI supporters outside Khan’s residence in Lahore.

❖ Timeline

2022

- January 4: Audio leaked of an alleged phone call between Maryam Nawaz and Pervez Rasheed discussing media personalities.
- January 14: PEMRA issues notice to *Neo TV* for airing news regarding LPG and money laundering.
- January 17: YouTuber Lala Khurshid Khan Hazara was arrested in Balakot.
- January 24: *Rohi 24* reporter Malik Abdul Rasheed and cameraman of daily *Azad Safar Multan* Asif Khokhar were beaten in the assistant commissioner’s office in Haripur, Bahawalpur.
- January 28: Arrest warrants issued for *Samaa TV* reporter Sanjay Sadhwani.
- January 28: Release of film *Untold Story of a Serial Killer* stopped by Punjab government.
- January 31: PTI MPA Aqibullah Khan allegedly misbehaves with *92 News* journalist Mustafa Kamal.

- February 4: A GTV team, including female journalist Aftab Jahan and cameraperson Rizwan Ali, were harassed outside the Federal Government Polyclinic Hospital in Islamabad.
- February 11: PEMRA issues a show-cause notice to *News One* for comments made on an episode of G for Gharidah.
- February 14: FIA arrests social media activist Sabir Hashmi for running trends against the prime minister on social media.
- February 15: *Intelligence Bureau officials attacked ARY News host Iqrarul Hassan and their team.*
- February 16: FIA registered a case against Mohsin Baig on the complaint of then federal minister Murad Saeed.
- February 16: FIA raids analyst Mohsin Baig's house and arrests him in Islamabad.
- February 17: PEMRA fines *Channel 24* for airing an interview with Ishaq Dar.
- February 19: The then Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry says the federal cabinet approves the PECA amendment.
- February 20: President Arif Alvi promulgates an ordinance to amend PECA.
- February 22: Islamabad district and sessions court fines Najam Sethi for seeking acquittal in a defamation case.
- February 23: IHC prohibits the government from arresting people under Section 20 of PECA.
- February 24: Land mafia threatens senior journalist from Chakwal, Sajid Baloch.
- February 25: PEMRA bans ads of unapproved, under process and illegal housing schemes in Lahore.
- February 28: Imran Khan labels media in Pakistan as mafias and blackmailers.
- March 1: *Dawn* crime reporter Munawar Azeem receives threatening calls.
- March 2: PBA, APNS, AEMEND, and CPNE move Islamabad High Court against the PECA ordinance.
- March 3: Landi Kotal Assistant Commissioner Akber Iftikhar misbehaves with local journalists.
- March 11: *Such TV* anchor person Batool Rajput was harassed and detained by MNA Kanwal Shahzeb.
- March 19: *Sindh TV* reporter Yousaf Shaheen receives death threats for a story.
- March 21: PEMRA issues show-cause notice to the head of *Dunya News*.
- March 27: Around eight people attacked journalist Zahid Shareef Rana in Bhakkar for a social media post.
- March 29: *KTN* reporter Zahid Jamro arrested by Babarloi Police.
- April 2: Journalists protest ban on entry to Punjab Assembly.
- April 5: PTA asks YouTube to restore Dr Israr Ahmed's YouTube channel after it was suspended on allegations of carrying anti-Semitic remarks.
- April 8: PECA ordinance struck down by the Islamabad High Court.
- April 10: Raid at the home of former prime minister Imran Khan's focal person on digital, Dr Arslan Khalid.
- April 12: PTI workers harass *Neo TV* journalist Nasrullah Malik.
- April 13: Seven reporters and camera persons received minor injuries at a PTI rally in Peshawar.
- April 16: *Samaa TV* reporter Zamzam Saeed and cameraperson Shahid Baloch were abused; bottles were thrown at them at a PTI rally in Karachi.

- April 16: Media teams for *24 News* and *Geo* harassed at the PTI rally in Karachi.
- April 16: Former human rights minister Shireen Mazari lashes out at analyst and lawyer Reema Omer.
- April 21: PTI workers attack *92 News* reporter Khawar Mughal.
- April 21: *ARY News* was off-air in various parts of Pakistan.
- April 23: A joint action committee (JAC) of the media and Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb agree to “enact legislation for curbing fake news”.
- April 23: PEMRA issues a show-cause notice to *ARY News* for airing “fake/unverified news” on informal sources.
- April 25: Shahbaz Gill harasses former RIUJ vice president Aun Shirazi.
- April 26: Gharida Farooqi files a complaint with FIA against a PTI worker carrying immoral placards against her at a rally in Lahore.
- April 28: Reports of Arshad Sharif facing harassment, including barging into his house.
- April 28: FIA denies harassing Arshad Sharif.
- April 28: IHC orders FIA to stop harassing Arshad Sharif and other journalists.
- April 30: PML-N activists torture *ARY News* reporter Chand Nawab and attack DSNG van in Karachi.
- May 1: *Dawn News TV* anchor Adil Shahzeb receives death threats on social media.
- May 1: Zoo security guard manhandles journalist Zeeshan Kakakhel in Peshawar.
- May 6: *Aaj News* Chakdara Bureau Chief Shah Faisal Afghani was assaulted by former KP minister Bakht Bedar.
- May 7: FIA submits petition against IHC order suspending Section 20 of PECA in Supreme Court.
- May 7: FIA petition against IHC order suspending Section 20 of PECA withdrawn, says Marriyum Aurangzeb.
- May 8: FIA initiates inquiry against *Bol* anchor person Sami Ibrahim.
- May 9: FIA warns overseas Pakistanis against “offensive and seditious” social media posts.
- May 16: PEMRA warns channels against airing malicious content against state institutions.
- May 19: *Daily Jammu and Kashmir* Bureau Chief Junaid Ansari was attacked by unknown persons in Mirpur.
- May 20: Criminal complaint registered against Sami Ibrahim by Attock Police.
- May 21: FIR registered against Arshad Sharif in Hyderabad.
- May 21: Case registered against *ARY News* anchor person Sabir Shakir in Mirpurkhas.
- May 22: FIR registered against Imran Riaz Khan.
- May 22: Photojournalist Iqbal Haider barred entry to; attacked by JUI-F party workers at a meeting in Peshawar.
- May 24: Maryam Nawaz removes *ARY News* mic before addressing a press conference.
- May 24: *Ausaf Digital* journalist Ahsan Wahid arrested by Islamabad Police.
- May 25: *ARY News* transmission suspended in parts of Pakistan.
- May 25: PTI workers disrupt live transmission by reporter Gohar Mehsood for *Mashaal Radio*.
- May 25: *Samaa TV* journalist ZamZam Saeed, Yasir Hussain and cameraperson Imran were injured in an attack by PTI supporters during Long March in Karachi.
- May 25: *Samaa TV* team attacked in Rawalpindi during PTI Long March.
- May 25: *Aaj News* DSNG van attacked; assistant DSNG operator attacked in Lahore during

PTI Long March.

- May 25: *AFP* photographer Asif Hassan was injured in Karachi during PTI Long March.
- May 25: *Aaj News* DSNG van, *Hum News* DSNG van, *Neo News* Peshawar team and DSNG van attacked in Islamabad.
- May 26: IHC summons Jang Group owner Mir Shakil ur Rehman for anti-judiciary ads published in *The News*.
- June 1: PEMRA issues show-cause notice to *ARY News*.
- June 2: PEMRA prohibits the broadcast of a rebroadcast of remarks by Imran Khan on Sami Ibrahim's show.
- June 7: JUI-F workers attack *Anadolu Agency* photojournalist Hussain Ali and video journalist Hasnain Ali at a protest rally in Peshawar.
- June 7: FIR registered against Iqbal ul Hassan by the Sindh government.
- June 8: *Naya Daur* YouTube channel was hacked.
- June 12: Journalist Yasir Hussain was attacked by PTI workers in the Chichawatni district.
- June 19: *Naya Kal* reporter Zamin Hussain receives death threats from a citizen while reporting electricity theft.
- June 21: 92 News reporter Sajjad Sheikh was stopped by Metro Bus staff from covering news about a sudden petrol price hike.
- June 27: Four journalists harassed by land mafias for coverage at Judicial Complex in Islamabad.
- June 30: Three cases were registered against Imran Riaz Khan.
- July 1: *GNN News* reporter Idrees Abbasi was harassed by guards of former NA deputy speaker Qasim Suri.
- July 1: *Dunya News* senior analyst Ayaz Amir was violently attacked while leaving his office in Lahore.
- July 5: Anchor person Imran Riaz Khan was arrested in Attock.
- July 7: *Dunya News* correspondent Pir Muhammad Kakar was arrested in the Loralai district.
- July 13: *Aaj News* assignment editor Nafis Naeem was abducted by unidentified individuals in Karachi.
- July 16: Social activist Nazar Baloch was attacked by relatives of the education minister.
- July 19: *ARY News* reporter Hassan Hafeez was verbally assaulted by Lahore CCPO.
- July 19: *GTV News* reporter Haider Sherazi was attacked by unidentified people during a session on press freedom in Islamabad.
- July 20: *Neo News* reporter Haneef Baloch was harassed and beaten by locals in Rajanpur.
- July 27: *Neo News* reporter Sheraz Ahmed Sherazi and cameraman Javed Aslam stopped from covering a PTI event.
- August 4: Photojournalist Faisal Khan was injured while covering a protest in Rawalpindi.
- August 5: *WION* Bureau Chief for Pakistan Anas Mallick goes missing in Kabul.
- August 8: PEMRA issues show-cause notice to *ARY*.
- August 9: Reports of removal of *ARY News* transmission.
- August 9: PEMRA issues directive to stop propaganda, misinformation and disinformation against state institutions
- August 9: Wajid Mughal of *24 News*, Arsalan Baloch of *Dunya News*, and Mudassar Javed of *Dawn News* were harassed by PTI workers in Islamabad.

- August 9: *ARY News* head Ammad Yousaf arrested in Karachi.
- August 10: Sindh High Court orders restoration of *ARY News*.
- August 10: PTI supporters “rough up” journalists outside Imran Khan’s residence in Bani Gala.
- August 10: Arshad Sharif leaves Pakistan.
- August 10: *ARY* CEO Salman Iqbal and anchor persons Arshad Sharif and Khawar Grumman have cases registered, including sedition charges.
- August 11: *ARY News* no-objection certificate (NOC) cancelled by the Interior Ministry
- August 12: *Express News* journalist Rizwan Ghilzai was assaulted by police outside court while covering Shahbaz Gill’s trial.
- August 13: *ARY News* team was kicked out from the PML-N party session.
- August 14: Sindh High Court suspends cancellation of *ARY* NOC
- August 18: Abusive trend shared on Twitter against Gharidah Farooqi.
- August 19: *Awami Awaz* reporter Ilyas Samoo was arrested in Thatta.
- August 19: *K21* reporter Mansoor Mani was threatened at gunpoint in Karachi.
- August 20: PEMRA bans live coverage of former prime minister Imran Khan’s speeches.
- August 21: Disruptions on access to YouTube during Imran Khan’s rally.
- August 21: *Aaj News* team faces harassment by PTI workers at Bani Gala.
- August 21: *Bol News* transmission is blocked in parts of the country.
- August 22: *Bol TV* anchor person Jameel Farooqi arrested.
- August 23: *Aaj News* journalist Abdul Baseer Qalandar was attacked by security staff while covering a young doctors’ protest in Lady Reading Hospital in Peshawar.
- August 23: Arif Hameed Bhatti was taken off-air from *GNN News*.
- August 24: Case registered against journalist Waqar Satti.
- August 27: *Daily Aaj* reporter Waqar Ali receives death threats.
- August 29: Islamabad High Court suspends PEMRA order banning live coverage of Imran Khan.
- August 30: *Koh e Noor*, two motorcyclists verbally threatened anchor person Anwarul Haq.
- August 31: *ARY News* parts ways with Arshad Sharif.
- September 5: PEMRA takes *Bol* off-air due to the failure of security clearance from the interior ministry.
- September 6: PEMRA warns against airing content against state institutions.
- September 7: *Awami Awaz* reporter Nasrullah Gaddani was arrested from his residence for coverage of Hindu flood victims’ rights.
- September 9: *Bol* unblocked under a Sindh High Court order.
- September 15: PEMRA suspends the broadcast of *ARY News* and *Bol News* for three days due to broadcast without a time delay mechanism.
- September 15: Digital rights activist Nighat Dad takes legal action after online attacks on her.
- September 17: IHC orders PEMRA to restore *ARY News*.
- September 21: Guards misbehave with photojournalists Raja Imran and Sunny Ghauri during coverage of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce elections.
- September 24: *7 News* Bureau Chief Mian Munawar Iqbal was assaulted in Faisalabad.
- September 25: *Abb Tak News* channel reporter Murtaza Roy and cameraperson Qazi Kamal were attacked by hotel guards in Islamabad.
- September 27: PEMRA fines *ARY News*, *Channel Five*, *Express News*, *Dunya News*, *Aaj*

News and Seven News.

- September 29: Hayatabad Medical Complex, Peshawar staff stop *Aaj News* journalists Malik Adil and Kashan Awan from reporting; try to manhandle them.
- October 6: IHC urges PEMRA to restore ARY News.
- October 6: PEMRA issues show-cause notice to *ARY News*.
- October 9: *A drug dealer in Haripur seriously threatened Nawai Waqt correspondent Bakht Zada Khan.*
- October 16: *Daily Wahdat* reporter Aatish Mehsud assaulted and threatened in South Waziristan.
- October 18: Imran Khan makes sexist remarks regarding *News One* anchor person Gharidah Farooqi.
- October 20: CPJ Senior Program Consultant Steven Butler was detained by FIA upon arrival in Lahore.
- October 23: Arshad Sharif was killed in Kenya.
- October 24: *92 News* senior photojournalist Sohail Shahzad pushed by security guards of Imran Khan.
- October 25: Maryam Nawaz reshares insensitive tweet following Arshad Sharif's murder.
- October 28: PEMRA bans live coverage of PTI's long march
- October 30: *Channel 5* reporter Sadaf Naeem was killed in an accident while covering Imran Khan's long march near Sadhoke in Punjab.
- October 31: Punjab government forms a fact-finding committee to investigate Sadaf Naeem's death.
- November 3: PEMRA bans coverage of a video address by Pakistan Tehreek I Insaf leader Asad Umar
- November 5: *Bol News* photojournalist Farman Kareem was harassed by the nursing staff of a hospital near Gilgit Press Club.
- November 5: Government tells PEMRA to reverse the ban on broadcast/rebroadcast of Imran Khan's speeches.
- November 6: Imran Khan attempts to implicate journalists to an assassination attempt on him.
- November 11: Information Ministry issues notification banning film Joyland.
- November 14: Government announces the formation of a high-level committee to review the ban on Joyland.
- November 16: Joyland was released by the Censor Board review committee.
- November 16: Sindh Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners established.
- November 19: *Geo News* crime reporter Rasool Dawar and team threatened to air a news package against police in Peshawar.
- November 23: PTI MPA Deedar Khan and Abdul Ghaffar Shah threaten freelance journalist Saifullah Khan during a press conference in Kohistan.
- November 26: PEMRA prohibits the broadcast of speeches, press conferences, and media coverage of Azam Swati.
- November 26: DHQ Hospital in Bajaur staff attack Khyber News reporter Zahid Jan.
- November 26: *Khyber TV* reporter Esar ul Haq Qadri was manhandled by a PTI member in Hangu.

- December 5: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif shares their resolve to facilitate the implementation of the media safety law.
- December 6: Islamabad police register FIR in Arshad Sharif's murder case.
- December 7: Fact-finding mission finds Arshad Sharif's murder was a "planned targeted assassination".
- December 8: Journalist Akbar Notezai receives legal notice from former senate chairman Sadiq Sajrani's brother.
- December 10: Aftab Iqbal's satirical show taken off-air.
- December 11: *Samaa News* reporter Mirza Waseem Baig receives threats from a gang member in Layyah.
- December 12: PEMRA requires private housing societies to obtain NOC before running ads.
- December 15: A group of individuals attack Sadiqabad Press Club.
- December 16: Daily *Sada-e-Watan* Bureau Chief Naseer Ghumman violently attacked in Sialkot.
- December 19: Neo News team manhandled by drug dealers in Farooqabad.
- December 24: Geo News reporter Rasool Dawar receives a threatening call from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Relief, Rehabilitation and Settlement Iqbal Wazir.
- December 31: Geo News team harassed by Frontier Works staff in Karachi.

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- January 3: *K2N* anchor person Saima Kanwal receives a threatening call.
- January 6: Bailable arrest warrants for Ammad Yousaf issued.
- January 14: *Bol News* journalist Shahid Aslam arrested by FIA.
- January 17: *Geo News* correspondent Sheeba Haider faces mistreatment from the polio campaign manager at Cantonment Hospital Peshawar.
- January 18: *Bol News* journalist Shahid Aslam was granted bail.
- January 25: *24 News* reporter Irfan Qureshi was harassed during Sheikh Rasheed's press conference.
- January 26: Journalist Fawad Ali Shah was found to be deported from Malaysia and under arrest in Pakistan.
- February 1: *Suno TV* correspondent Munibullah and cameraman Yaseen Khan were maltreated by the staff of the Chaman Passport Office.
- February 1: Wikipedia services degraded in Pakistan for 48 hours.
- February 1: Ameer Ali Kalhor was manhandled by an ASI police official.
- February 2: Anchor person Imran Riaz Khan arrested.
- February 3: Case against Imran Riaz Khan dismissed; Khan released.
- February 3: Wikipedia blocked across Pakistan.
- February 4: Bill prepared with five-year imprisonment for anyone who ridicules or scandalises the judiciary or Army.
- February 5: PEMRA prohibits coverage of F-9 Park rape in Islamabad.
- February 6: Wikipedia services restored in Pakistan.
- February 7: Journalist Javeria Siddique faces online trolling campaign.
- February 8: *Geo News* reporter Haider Sherazi was threatened by AJK PM.
- February 20: *The News* journalist Sher Ali receives threatening messages.

- February 20: PEMRA prohibits broadcast, rebroadcast or live coverage of terrorist attacks.
- February 20: Show-cause notice issued to *GNN*.
- February 25: *Capital TV* parliamentary reporter Akram Baloch was manhandled by Bilawal Bhutto's secretary.
- February 27: Scuffle between Imran Riaz Khan and police at Gaddafi Stadium.
- March 1: Multiple journalists were manhandled by the Islamabad High Court security staff during Imran Khan's court appearance.
- March 5: PEMRA bans addresses by former prime minister Imran Khan.
- March 6: *ARY News* transmission suspended.
- March 7: Sindh High Court orders restoration of *ARY News*.
- March 8: *Lok Sujag* Regional Editor Abid Mir goes missing.
- March 9: Journalists injured during Aurat March coverage in Islamabad.
- March 9: Lahore High Court suspends ban on coverage of Imran Khan.
- March 9: PEMRA bans the broadcast of any content about the conduct of sitting high courts and superior court judges.
- March 10: Shahid Masood's show on *GNN* was suspended by PEMRA for two weeks.
- March 10: Syed Fawad Ali Shah released on bail.
- March 10: PIMS staff manhandle 7 *News* media persons, Muhammad Anwar Abbasi and Naveed Satti.
- March 15: Journalists Kashif Mushtaq, Zeeshan Iqbal and Shahadat Baloch were injured while covering an anti-encroachment drive in Karachi.
- March 18: *Bol News* was taken off-air for live coverage outside the Judicial Complex.
- March 18: PEMRA bans live/recorded coverage of proceedings from Judicial Complex, Islamabad.
- March 18: Gohar Siyal was arrested during Imran Khan's court appearance.
- March 20: *Bol News* Islamabad Bureau Chief Siddique Jan picked up from outside his office in Islamabad.
- March 20: Lahore High Court annuls Section 124-A of the Pakistan Penal Code.
- March 22: Siddique Jan was discharged by an anti-terrorism court.
- March 22: *GTV* reporter Tanzeela Mazhar faces digital harassment.
- March 23: Muhammad Hassan Raza receives threatening calls from terror groups.
- March 27: *A fruit seller attacked Bol News photojournalist Syed Daniyal Ahmed*.
- March 27: PEMRA bans live/recorded coverage of any rally or public gathering in Islamabad.
- March 29: Special bench of the Supreme Court takes exception to the PEMRA prohibition order on judges' conduct.
- April 1: Fawad Chaudhry says preparing a list of journalists running a "paid campaign" against judges
- April 4: *Daily Tameel* crime reporter Raja Israr was threatened by Islamabad Electric Company's local contractor for asking questions regarding transformer installation.
- April 4: Senator Azam Khan Swati calls a journalist a 'pimp' for asking a question during a media talk.
- April 7: ECP issues Code of Conduct for the National Media 2023 for KP and Punjab elections.

- April 11: Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb claims the “four-year dark era” for the media is over.
 - April 13: Sahiwal-based journalist Sadia Mazhar receives a threatening letter from the Sahiwal Club secretary for filing an information request.
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