

Freedom of Speech and Expression in Pakistan

Javed Rashid

School of Law, University of Okara, Punjab, Pakistan

Muhammad Sohail Asghar (Corresponding Author)

*Assistant Professor, School of Law, University of Okara, Punjab,
Pakistan*

Muhammad Sibtain Qamar

School of Law, University of Okara, Punjab, Pakistan

Muhammad Bilal Tabassum

School of Law, University of Okara, Punjab, Pakistan

Abstract

Due to Pakistan's diverse cultural and political landscape, essential democratic pillars like freedom of speech and expression remain challenging. This study investigates the status of free expression in Pakistan by qualitatively analyzing scholarly literature, legal papers, news stories, and interviews. In this study, we have discussed the fundamental right pertaining to free speech which is guaranteed in the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973. We also have Examined that how religious beliefs and political unrest are sociocultural elements affecting self-censorship. Online censorship regulations and surveillance provide additional issues in the digital world, which are explored in the paper. Critics of the have endured threats, harassment, and job losses, according to primary evidence gathered from interviews with journalists and legal experts. Although the Constitution of Pakistan promises the right to free expression, the results show that open debate and dissent have been severely limited over the years due to practical restrictions, and even more limits have just come into effect.

Keywords: Freedom of Speech, Expression, Media, Religious, Political, Censorship

Introduction

According to Hussain¹ and Khan², free speech and expression are essential to democracies and play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining democratic institutions. The safeguarding and exercise of this basic right have been under constant evaluation and change within the framework of Pakistan, a country characterized by a diverse and intricate sociopolitical environment. Examining the complex interplay between socio-cultural and political factors, this introduction offers a thorough overview by discussing the historical development of freedom of speech in Pakistan, analyzing constitutional and legal frameworks, and more.

Historical Evolution and Legal Framework

Starting with its express protection in Article 19 of the constitution of 1973, freedom of speech in Pakistan has a long and rich history. The boundaries of free speech have been significantly shaped by judicial rulings and seminal instances.³ Free expression is safeguarded by the legal system, with the constitution serving as the principal source. However, because of the dynamic character of social mores and technical developments, it is necessary to critically assess the efficacy of these legislative requirements.⁴

Cultural and Political Influences

There is a complex web of political, cultural, and social factors influencing the right to free expression in Pakistan. According to Khan,² the complicated terrain of free expression is influenced by cultural norms, religious factors, and societal attitudes. Pakistani society's dynamic and varied character is reflected in how these factors interact to determine the limits of permitted discourse. Periods of political instability, government transitions, and national security concerns affect the level of scrutiny and restrictions on dissenting voices, impacting free speech. As people and media organizations try to balance free speech and possible consequences, self-censorship is more noticeable at these times.

Challenges in the Digital Age

Freedom of speech has faced new threats and opportunities with the rise of the digital era. While digital communication channels, online forums, and social media have increased the number of ways people can express themselves, they have also brought new difficulties. Several complicated issues arise when discussing the internet, including the need to regulate material, the spread of false information, and the possibility of government spying.⁵ Issues over the balance between online safety and the protection of fundamental rights have been highlighted by recent government moves to restrict online content, purportedly to address issues of hate speech and disinformation.⁶

Research Objectives

By pursuing these goals, this study hopes to provide light on the state of free speech in Pakistan:

1. **A Historical Perspective:** Considering constitutional provisions, legal precedents, and societal norms, analyze the historical evolution of freedom of speech in Pakistan.
2. **The Role of the Judiciary:** Examine historic cases and their consequences to determine the judiciary's role in interpreting and protecting free speech.
3. **The Role of Media:** Examine the censorship and other factors faced by media during freedom of speech and expression in Pakistan.
4. **Examine the Effects of Socio-Cultural Factors:** How religious beliefs and general public opinion affect the right to free expression.
5. **Political Dynamics:** Analyze how changes in leadership, policies, and worries about Pakistan's national security have affected press freedom.
6. **Digital Difficulties:** Investigate the difficulties and possibilities given by the digital era, considering the dynamics of social media, the regulation of online information, and the consequences of democratic debate.

In light of these goals, this study hopes to shed light on the complex nature of free speech in Pakistan, paving the way for more educated debates on policy, changes to the law, and the spread of democratic principles.

Literature Review

The literature on freedom of speech and expression in Pakistan reveals a multifaceted exploration of constitutional, legal, cultural, and technological dimensions. Scholars such as Ahmed⁷, Akhtar³, Hussain¹, Khan², and Raza⁵ have contributed significantly to understanding the historical evolution, legal frameworks, and socio-cultural influences on freedom of speech in Pakistan. Ahmed's work emphasizes the importance of expression, highlighting legal aspects in Pakistan's context.⁷ Akhtar delves into the judicial role in enforcing freedom of expression, emphasizing the significance of landmark cases.³ Hussain's exploration of democracy and freedom of expression provides insights into the broader political context.¹ Khan's work delves into the dynamics of free speech, emphasizing the complex interplay of cultural norms, religious factors, and societal attitudes.² Raza's exploration of digital media sheds light on the challenges and opportunities posed by the digital era.⁵ Within some limitations such as the "grace of Allah," "rule of law," and "state defense," the right to free expression is guaranteed to all individuals in Pakistan's 1973 Constitution under Article 19. A person's freedom of expression includes their right to freely choose and practice their beliefs, access to media, freedom from intolerance, freedom to exercise their unconstrained democratic freedoms, and the ability to talk freely. Unfortunately, these freedoms are not well-protected under the current authoritarian legal structure. Abbasi argues that privileged people are more likely to challenge the status quo when they live in a society like Pakistan, where gang mentality and a lack of room for independent debate stifle creativity and new ideas.⁸

Unrestrained speech cannot be wholly preserved as a right because of its historical association with anarchy and unpredictability. The potential for violence incitement, disinformation dissemination, profanity promotion, and discrimination can be mitigated through the control and limitation of the extent of free speech. Newspapers in Pakistan still have a voice when criticizing the government. However, efforts are afoot to stifle that voice by the government, parliamentarians, security agencies, and courts. According to a Freedom Group report, Pakistan has one of the worst records for press and journalism in the country in 2014 alone, with 14 journalists, news workers,

and a writer murdered. Tragically, human rights campaigner Sabeen Mahmud passed away not long ago, adding to the "increasing impact of extremist ideology and the diminishing room for political dialogue" in our world. According to the rules of conduct established by the (PEMRA) in 2015, journalists are not permitted to discuss certain subjects during live broadcasts. Security protocols, hijackings, terrorist assaults, provocative religious rhetoric, and so on are all examples of this. People, in general, are meant to be protected by these rules, according to Gannon.⁹ Famous Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir, who is still working at a major media outlet after surviving a terrorist attack in 2014, voiced his displeasure with the limitations imposed on his company in an interview.¹⁰ Some former commanders have requested we not speak out against their government positions. We are compelled to speak out on human rights violations in specific regions of Punjab. Those against free speech and the media say every news story contradicts popular opinion. He asserts that numerous media-covered occurrences were factual and not made up. People are always on edge because they fear violent retaliation from the government, activist groups, or even terrorists if they voice their opinions on political issues, religion, or civil rights. Society in Pakistan, he says, has grown "academically bankrupt, ethically foolish, and Islamophobic" because of Terrorism. Based on his experiences, he believes people should be able to share their thoughts without worrying about consequences.⁹

A new danger to the right to free speech guaranteed by the constitution of Pakistan is the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016. This computer security law was passed not long ago in Pakistan. Article 31 of the law addresses a significant problem by granting the authority to remove or prevent data from any channel if it is deemed imperative to do so in safeguarding the grandeur of Islam, the welfare of the populace, Pakistan's independence, security, and defense, amicable relations with other countries, public integrity, ethics, or morality, or in reaction to an uprising, unlawful conduct, or threats of unlawful conduct by a legislator. We can use this section of the law to ban anything we want on digital platforms, such as periodicals, social media, or review sites, and there are many different reasons

to do it. Detractors of the measure have labeled it "restrictive," saying that it targets morally reprehensible ideas rather than concrete wrongdoings.¹¹

Freedom of Speech & Media in Pakistan

The foundation of a democratic system is the right to express one's ideas and beliefs freely; in theory, democracies should not censor their citizens or critics. Since most democracies have passed laws restricting hate speech against any particular group, ideology, school of thought, religion, or institution, it is clear that this is a very difficult issue for all democracies to resolve.¹² Pakistan's 1956 and 1962 constitutions specifically acknowledged the right to free speech. Article 19 of the 1973 Constitution discusses the scope and nature of the right to free speech. Under reasonable legislative constraints safeguarding Islam, Pakistan's integrity and security, good relations with other nations, public order, morality, decency, and the rule of law, everyone is assured the right to freedom of expression and the press.¹³

Pakistan is ranked 145th out of 180 nations in 2021 regarding free speech. The United States government is cognizant of the limitations imposed on Pakistani media and civil society, which, according to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, "undermine the country's image and ability to progress" due to its censorship policies. Press freedom in Afghanistan, which the Taliban currently governs, is higher than in Pakistan, which has fallen 12 points in a year, according to Dawn.¹⁴ Democracy and good government depend on the public's active engagement in the media, which teaches people about important issues, allows them to voice their opinions, and encourages them to be tolerant of others. If the media can report the news without intervention, the public will be more inclined to support progressive democracies. More people are inclined to participate in government in countries where the press is unrestrained.¹⁵ As Van points out, the government intervenes to limit free expression whenever it conflicts with other rights.¹⁶

When it comes to necessary criticism of government policy, the media plays an active and progressive opposing role. The availability of modernism, tolerance, and progressivism depends on free and vigilant media. Without a doubt, a democratic state is represented by its courageous and resilient media. According to Parveen and Bhatti, the independence of the media determines

how a society views progress, freedom, and innovation.¹⁷ Maintaining unfettered information and communication flows is crucial for a resilient and adaptable society.¹⁸

Censorship facing by Media in Pakistan:

Censorship has kept the public in the dark about the country's past, therefore it's important to maintain an eye on morality and stifle dissent.¹⁹ To maintain popular ignorance, democracies and dictatorships that were suffering turned to censorship.²⁰ Unfortunately, the idea of free and government-supported media exists only in theory, and most people are unaware of the importance of a free press in many parts of the world.²¹ Pakistan has seen parliamentary, presidential, martial rule, and democratic administrations throughout its 75 years of independence. The press was vulnerable when pioneering dictator General Ayub Khan adopted the "Press and Publication Ordinance" on September 2, 1963. Under this decree, General Ayub Khan allegedly took over the publishing houses of "Pakistan Times," "Imroz," and "Lail o Nahar".²² Under General Yahya Khan's administration, which started with implementing a second martial law in 1969, the 1970 election campaign was characterized by cordial behavior toward the media as soon as state-run media sources gave complete coverage of the subject and allowed opposition party leaders to speak without interruption. Censorship was resumed in East Pakistan after the unexpected election results, just before the military crackdown started.²³ The Ayub or Yahya, Pakistan's democratically elected government, upheld the country's long-established policy of restricting press freedom. After Ziauddin Ahmad Suleri was removed from office, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's relationship with the press swiftly deteriorated, despite an initially pleasant relationship upon entering power in 1971. The show cause notices sent by the Bhutto administration included "Nawa e waqt" among other published articles. In 1977, General Muhammad Zia ul Haq took over following a slew of severe authoritarian actions by the Bhutto administration against the press, such as the nationwide prohibition of "Dawn" advertisements.²⁴ General Zia ul Haq initially extends his cordial intents towards the press, as have all previous regimes. However, this amicable relationship between the press and administration did not endure long, and

on May 12, 1978, General Zia arrested eleven journalists and flogged four others for speaking out against him. Zia imposed the weapon of "censorship" on his subjects during his eleven years in power in an effort to preserve Islamic principles. Nine high-ranking journalists from "Imroz," Mashriq, and Pakistan Times were fired by Zia. Plus, he instituted a slew of Islamic regulations pertaining to the press.¹⁷

By virtue of article 58(2)b, Muhammad Khan Junejo's administration was disbanded in 1988. According to (Ali & Khalid, 2012, pp. 43-48), the relationship between the Junejo government and the press was friendly and amicable. Even the famous Musawaata newspaper came under fire during this time and had its printing halted.²⁵

General Zia abolished the administration of Muhammad Khan Junejo, Pakistan's tenth prime minister, in 1988 in accordance with article 58(2)b, due to Junejo and Zia's disagreement over Zia's autocratic actions. The dictatorship of Junejo maintained a cordial relationship with the press.²⁶ However, during this time, the well-known journal "Musawat" encountered difficulties in its publication.²⁵ The first female prime minister of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto, inaugurated a new age of media liberalism in 1988. The government granted permission to both print and electronic media in order to ensure balanced reporting. While during her rule, Sindhi-language newspapers had fresh opportunities to report on and bring attention to societal issues, the MQM terrified the Sindh press on a regular basis. Even though Pakistan's free press flourished during her rule, the government's amiable demeanor quickly deteriorated, and the country reverted to its old practice of biased reporting.²⁷ The licensing system for newsprint was reinstated when Muhammad Nawaz Sharif assumed control of the government in 1990. In 1992, the government of Pakistan utilized several tactics to subdue journalists who were critical of their autonomous press. During the "Long March" protests against the administration of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto and her alliance, security agents brutally attacked and tortured journalists.²⁷

In 1996, Benazir Bhutto was overthrown for a second time while serving as prime minister. After stepping down as prime minister in February 1996, Nawaz Sharif remained in office for another 2.5 years. Similar to their first

term in office, the Sharif government continued to be brutal to the media, punishing numerous journalists for speaking out against the regime.¹⁷ Arrested under questionable circumstances on the charge of treason during the Sharif government, the veteran journalist who founded and edited the English newspaper Friday Times was detained.²⁸

The modernization of Pakistan's media occurred in 2002, when General Pervaiz Musharraf authorized private media stations to begin broadcasting. Still, Musharraf follows in the footsteps of his critics by ignoring the media whenever they speak out against his harsh rule. While in power, he was responsible for the harassment and punishment of numerous journalists, as well as the reported raids on media offices and the deaths of journalists.²⁹ To oversee the activities of private media in Pakistan, the Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was established in 2002 during the Musharraf dictatorship. As part of the PEMRA Amended Law 2007 legal movement, the government was able to confiscate the assets of private channels that had violated the guidelines. The media backed the lawyer movement from 2007 to 2008, and as a result, news anchors were banned from the industry. Both the benefits and drawbacks of the lawyer movement's use of electronic media were discussed in (Shah, Basit & Azhar, 2017)³⁰ research. Following Asif Ali Zardari's inauguration as president in 2008, following Musharraf's resignation, the country's lawyers took to the streets in a renewed zeal for the Lawyer Movement since Zardari was hesitant to restore the judiciary. The campaign was kicked up by Geo TV using prior interview clips featuring members of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) discussing the restoration of the judiciary. The Zardari government suspended broadcast of Geo TV as a result of the massive impact of a campaign.³¹ Protesting the imposition of restrictions on the media, Information Minister Sherry Rehman resigned from her position.³² According to Schoemaker and Emrys, even cable companies were compelled to cease transmitting various private channels nationwide in 2010.³³

In 2016, Pakistan was named the fourth worst journalist country and one of the worst for digital freedom globally.³⁴ In Pakistan, free expression was severely restricted between May 2017 and April 2018. In the final year of the

PML-N government, 157 violations were filed against journalists and media organizations.³⁵ The Nawaz government upheld this pledge till 2018. Under the guise of national security, abductions and psychological and physical abuse of journalists have grown commonplace in Pakistan, and the involvement of non-state actors is pervasive in the country's politics.³⁶ Notable journalists Cyril Almeida in 2016 and Hamid Mir in 2014 both suffered attacks. Reporting on a civil-military dispute called the "Dawn Leaks," Almeida was "barred from leaving the country" afterward.³⁴ According to Geo News, a senior correspondent from "The News International" named Ahmad Noorani was violently assaulted while he was out of his vehicle on a busy route.³⁷ Regarding 2018 general elections in Pakistan, there was a serious allegation of interference by the military establishment. There was a palpable sense of censorship under Imran Khan's administration. Talat Hussain, a prominent Pakistani journalist and presenter of a current events show on GEO TV, was censored from discussing political matters and critiquing the ruling party and establishment.³⁸ Several times, Talat Hussain's shows were taken down, he claimed. "Any hint that the 2018 elections were manipulated or that Imran Khan's army was involved in the administration was deemed unacceptable," I was informed.³⁸

After the PTI administration shut down the investigative news magazine Herald, another writer, Ali Haider Habib, voiced his alarm, stating, "I feel journalism is under threat more than it has ever been in Pakistan."³⁸ Attacks against Asad Ali Toor and Absar Alam, as well as the incarceration of Matiullah Jan, are only a few instances of the undemocratic interference and pressure on media proprietors that occurred throughout the 3.5 years of Imran Khan Niazi's administration (August 2018–April 2022).³⁹ As reported by Hamid Mir, "I have only been told by Geo management that I will not be hosting the show," he was among the numerous journalists who were let off as a result of manipulation. Following last week's protest remarks, they brought up the fact that there is much pressure. The identity of the source was left out. Hashim mentioned the year 2021.⁴⁰ Employees Shahzeb Jilani, Talat Hussain, Nadeem Nusrat, Murtaza Solani, and Matiullah Jan were all fired. Many well-known Pakistani journalists, including Babar Sattar and

Ammar Masood, are censored for publishing stories that challenge the government's narrative.⁴¹ International Journalists Iqbal Khattak, Pakistan's spokesperson, said, "Journalists who are critical of the government policies are under pressure, and those who are saying that 'everything is fine,' they have no issues as far as their security and safety are concerned".⁴⁰

In terms of free speech, Pakistan is in a terrible position; the country has failed miserably. Authorities have detained at least ten members of the media in 2020, while at least eight have died and 36 have been assaulted in the line of duty.⁴² The subject of journalists and their families receiving continual threats has been brought to the attention of national and international media. The media and internet regulating authority in Pakistan imposed new restrictions on free speech and digital material in 2020. Police in Pakistan have taken a totalitarian stance toward the media by, among other things, banning certain stations, suspending transmission of others, and limiting access to social media.¹⁸ Censorship devastated the media, leaving journalists and others in the industry fearful of the digital, legal, and physical dangers they face on the job. There have been several reports of police brutality and threats directed towards journalists who are carrying out their jobs.⁴³ The government both exerted censorship on Pakistani journalists in 2021, leading to an increase in violent incidents.⁴⁴ Article 59 states that on April 10, 2022, the no-confidence movement against Prime Minister Imran Khan was successful, making him the first prime minister in Pakistan to be ousted from office in this way.⁴⁵ As a result of Khan's removal from leadership, the Pakistani media became ideologically divided. Those who criticize the military establishment for Khan's ouster also have to deal with the fallout. Midnight, a prominent social media figure and journalist known as "Arsalan Khan" was apprehended from his residence.⁴⁶ Ayaz Amir, a famous journalist, was reportedly attacked by masked gunmen while out on the town.⁴⁷ Notable journalists who have been detained for criticizing the country's institutions include Jameel Farooqi, Imran Riaz, and many more.⁴⁸ Arshad Sharif, a renowned investigative journalist His accusations that the military was involved in Mr. Khan's dismissal in April 2022 led to the ban of his TV program and possible provocation charges before he fled Pakistan, shocking

the journalism community with his shooting death in Kenya.⁴⁹ Reporting on PTI's March in the Hangu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has exposed the pervasive culture of journalist exploitation. Reporter Aisarul Haq was assaulted, beaten, and kicked by a member of the PTI.⁵⁰

In addition to these considerations, the PEMRA has also implemented a parallel approach, with one of its most common tactics being the restriction of the transmission of various news channels through cable companies. On multiple occasions, PEMRA has blocked Geo News, ARY News, and Bol News. "Pakistan does not want to wrap behind as far as seeking full control over the media by means of PEMRA and cyber laws".⁵¹ Popular news channels in Pakistan have been frequently blocked, drawing criticism from the public and the PEMRA.⁵¹

This literature review aims to synthesize these perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics surrounding freedom of speech and expression in Pakistan. The research identifies the constitutional protection of free speech, analyzes its historical evolution, explores the role of the judiciary, and considers the impact of socio-cultural and political factors. Additionally, it investigates the challenges presented by the digital age, particularly the dynamics of social media and online content control.

Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative research approach to examine the state of free speech in Pakistan from multiple academic perspectives. The mixed-methods strategy comprised interviews, case studies, and content analysis.

Content Analysis

Understanding historical changes, constitutional provisions, landmark decisions, sociocultural influences, and issues in the digital era requires a thorough content study of academic literature, legal documents, news stories, and policy papers. The judiciary's role, cultural and political dynamics, internet sphere difficulties, and the evolution of free expression were all discussed in peer-reviewed academic publications.^{1,2,3,7} Alam¹³ and Shah⁴ used official papers and secondary sources to study constitutional provisions and legal precedents. Censorship, dangers to journalists' safety, and limitations on dissident voices have been extensively covered in news articles and

investigative pieces.^{8,39,1435,37,40,42} Various research studies and policy articles provided detailed explanations of the difficulties encountered by the media and the obstacles to democratic principles.^{51,11,36,15,17,33,30,16}

Case Studies

Case studies of important court decisions,³ assaults on well-known journalists,^{39,37,40} censorship,^{14,35} and the effects of new laws (Baloch, 2016¹¹; PEMRA Amended Law 2007) offered concrete examples to examine the consequences of free speech restrictions in the real world.

Interviews

Two legal professionals and five Pakistani journalists were interviewed using a semi-structured interview technique to gain first-hand experience of the problems they had experienced. In order to prevent any consequences, interviewees were guaranteed anonymity. The material was supplemented by insights gained from interviews with journalists Iqbal Khattak,⁵¹ Talat Hussain,¹⁰ and Hamid Mir.⁴⁰

The findings on the complex dynamics influencing freedom of speech in Pakistan's multifarious environment were strengthened by the triangulation of findings through multiple data sources, made possible by the mixed-methods methodology.

Results

Several vital conclusions on Pakistan's free speech and expression were drawn from content analysis of scholarly articles, court records, news articles, and policy papers:

1. The freedom to freely express oneself is guaranteed in Article 19 of the constitution of Pakistan. Nevertheless, several administrations have used exceptions concerning religion, national security, public morals, and order to silence criticism.
2. Over the years, landmark court decisions have bolstered and eroded free speech safeguards. Hudood Ordinances (1979) upheld civil freedoms, while the Pakistan Times (1963) strengthened censorship powers. The role of the judiciary is still significant.
3. Self-censorship has been promoted by socio-cultural variables such as orthodox religious values and political instability. Media freedom and

the ability to express dissent were severely curbed under times of military administration.

4. New types of censorship have emerged alongside new forms of expression due to the advent of digital media. Cybercrime laws and PEMRA regulations provide extensive authority to filter online content and keep tabs on digital platforms.
5. Critics of the government or military nevertheless confront physical threats, legal harassment, censorship, and the loss of their jobs. More than 150 recorded violations of press freedom were in 2017 and 2018.
6. Censorship of the media and harassment of journalists have escalated since 2018 under the present administration of Imran Khan, according to recent occurrences.

The findings were further supported by interviews with journalists and legal professionals, who gave first-hand experiences of the media's struggles with censorship, harassment, legal disputes, and self-imposed limits.

Discussion

While the constitution of Pakistan provides free expression in theory, both secondary and primary sources show that, in reality, the restrictions are much more severe. Each administration has been able to silence its critics and dissenters for reasons connected to politics, culture, and national security. The limits of censorship have been expanded and contracted by landmark judicial decisions. The advent of digital media was a boon at first, but recent legislation has given authorities far-reaching authority to monitor and regulate what people may access online. Tragic threats to the safety of journalists persist as they carry out their democratic duty to expose the powerful. Censorship, layoffs, lawsuits, and exile are all signs that the room for alternative media and criticism has become even more constrained in the last several years. A more forceful judicial interpretation of Article 19, in conjunction with democratic reforms, has the potential to fortify constitutional safeguards. However, significant challenges persist due to deeply ingrained cultural conservatism and intervention from politics. There will be progress toward media freedom once we eliminate immediate dangers

to journalists and reform too restrictive legislation. Despite formal guarantees of free speech, both offline and online media in Pakistan are reporting an increasingly oppressive climate.

Conclusion

Despite constitutional guarantee of free speech, political and cultural factors have significantly restricted this right in Pakistan. Press freedom has been both bolstered and hindered by landmark court decisions. Societal conservatism and volatility have contributed to a rise in self-censorship. Authorities now have extensive new powers to restrict internet content because of new digital media legislation. Threats, court fights, firing, and exile are serious relations that journalists and critics still face today. Despite legal safeguards, established and emerging media outlets have documented a more hostile climate to reporting the news, particularly in the last several years. There is a long way before judicial, legislative, and cultural reforms can protect journalists from direct threats and reinforce constitutional protections. Extending the breadth of open debate and dissent in Pakistan will be challenging without tackling the climate of fear and entrenched constraints that independent voices face.

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