

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN PAKISTAN'S JOURNALISM

Criminalizing Online Dissent through Legal Victimization



IMPUNITY AGAINST JOURNALISTS PROSECUTED UNDER THE PREVENTION OF ELECTRONIC CRIMES ACT (PECA)

ANNUAL IMPUNITY REPORT 2021

By ADNAN REHMAT and IQBAL KHATTAK

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*Tracking and examining the tyranny of the legal
system in providing justice to journalists facing legal
cases against their online journalism during 2019-21*

**International Day to End Impunity for Crimes
Against Journalists - 2021**

By ADNAN REHMAT and IQBAL KHATTAK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – Key Findings

In recent years independent journalism and critical expression – hounded across the legacy media spectrum in Pakistan – have found a refuge on the Internet with audiences also migrating online for greater freedom of expression and pluralisms. A state intolerant of criticism in legacy media has been increasingly taking measures to curb free speech online as well. In particular the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), instituted in 2016, has emerged as the primary legal instrument against journalists because it criminalizes online expression.

On November 2 every year, to mark the **International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists**, Freedom Network, a Pakistani media rights watchdog, produces an annual report analyzing the various types of crimes against journalists and other information practitioners in the country to gauge the level of impunity of crimes against them. This 2021 report analyzes legal cases and other forms of actions against journalists and information practitioners in Pakistan under PECA over the three-year period 2019-21 to determine the challenges of victims in defending themselves and the highhandedness of authorities, as well as evaluating the justice system's ability to provide justice to victims.

The findings of this report are based on 23 cases of victims of the PECA law invoked during the 2019-21 period in practice and over 50 types of specific information provided by them to us in a specialized and standardized impunity measurement template. While we are keeping the identities of the 23 journalists and digital information practitioners confidential as promised to them, we're using the data of their accumulative case studies to generate analysis on the various difficulties faced by victims of PECA at various stages of being victimized and challenges to receiving justice.

This report presents these insights related to only those categories of instances in which notices were issued by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to journalists and information practitioners under the PECA law for which we were able to get data.

This research and analysis report produced by *Freedom Network* is the fourth in a series of annual reports in Pakistan that seeks representative analysis in the backdrop of the level of impunity of persecution and prosecution against journalists. Our annual impunity reports receive widespread national and international coverage.

The answers and findings that this report showcases are startling and are derived analytically from an extensive exercise to collect data and information, based on a detailed **Impunity Index** developed by *Freedom Network*, from the victim journalists facing legal cases for their journalism work.

KEY FINDINGS

Categories of journalists most frequently targeted by PECA law: Journalists working for formal media or as freelancers are almost equally likely to be targeted under PECA law. Over a third of freelancers targeted under PECA law operate their own YouTube channels.

Journalists targeted by medium under the PECA law: Over half of the journalists targeted under PECA law worked for digital media platforms. Nearly twice as many journalists working for online platforms of print media publications got targeted under PECA law than broadcast media.

The riskiest regions for journalists in Pakistan targeted by PECA law: Punjab is the most dangerous region for journalists when it comes to being targeted under the PECA law. Despite being the smallest region, Islamabad is the second most-riskiest place for journalists facing action under PECA law.

Victims receiving notices/summons from FIA under PECA law: Three-fourths of the journalists pursued under PECA law were formally contacted by FIA of the Federal Ministry of Interior. Every fourth journalist pursued under PECA law was informally intimidated by the authorities with reference to grievances against them.

Notices served under PECA law based on formal complaints against journalists: Four-fifths of journalists receiving notices or summons under PECA law were on the basis of formal complaints against them while one in five journalists claimed they were served a notice without even existence of a third-party complainant against them.

Threat actors: Categories of complainants against journalists under PECA law: Two-thirds of the complainants invoking the PECA law against journalists are private citizens. Of the government departments initiating complaints against journalists the respondents identified FIA as the initiator of complaints.

Alleged crimes: Nature of allegations against journalists pursued under PECA law: Opinions or criticism of the military and the intelligence agencies is the most frequent complaint against journalists pursued under PECA law. Criticism in general – whether against executive (both civilian and military) or the judiciary triggered the most complaints against journalists pursued under PECA law. The prime nature of complaint is that of alleged defamation.

The most coercive section of PECA law invoked against journalists: Section 20, which criminalizes online defamation and carries a three-year jail term and up to one million rupees in fines, is the most frequently invoked part of PECA law against journalists. But even sections of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) were reported to have been invoked for alleged violations of PECA against journalists.

Called to account: Journalists pursued under PECA law appearing before FIA: Over three-fourths of journalists summoned by FIA were compelled to appear before it to answer charges against them under PECA law. Only less than one in four journalists ignored the summons.

Seeking justice: Journalists challenging in court FIA notices under PECA law: Over half of the journalists served notices by FIA under PECA law did not approach the courts to challenge them – and therefore are denied legal recourse to justice. Around a third of the journalists invoked the legal process to resist the summons and challenge the notices served to them under PECA law by FIA.

Relief: Outcome of legal challenge by journalists served notices under PECA law: Over half of the journalists mounting a legal challenge to notices served to them by FIA under PECA law got relief from the courts which suspended the notices while one in four journalists withdrew their petitions in apparent compromise with FIA.

Procedural tyranny: Outcome of inquiries against journalists under PECA law: Only about a third of the complaints registered against journalists pursued under PECA law resulted in inquiries that were completed in due time. Most inquiries dragged on and remain incomplete. Almost all journalists against whom inquiries were completed resulted in registration of legal cases against them and prompt arrests.

Criminalizing dissent: Post-inquiry registration of cases against journalists under PECA law: Criminal cases were registered against nearly two-thirds of all journalists pursued under PECA law. There seems to be an arbitrary exercise of the jurisdiction by FIA to register cases irrespective of whether inquiries against journalists are completed or not completed.

Expanding coercion: Invoking laws/sections other than PECA law in registration of cases against journalists: For nearly all journalists against whom charges under the PECA law were filed for prosecution, clauses and sections from additional laws were also invoked to strengthen cases against them.

Expanding criminalization: Commonly invoked sections of other laws against journalists charged under PECA law: A wide variety of sections of the PPC against journalists charged under PECA tends to be invoked; the most frequent PPC clauses being Section 500 (dealing with punishment for defamation), Section 505 (dealing with statements conducing to public mischief, for example statements that are intended or likely to incite fear among the public, mutiny in the military, or hatred among communities) and Section 109 (dealing with punishment of abetment).

Chaining dissent: Arrests made by FIA of journalists charged under PECA and other laws: Nearly half of all journalists formally charged under PECA law as well as the provisions of other laws were arrested by FIA.

Post-arrest developments for journalists charged under PECA law: Two-thirds of all journalists managed to secure bails after their arrest by FIA. Bail is secured only after spending time in custody, ranging from a few days to some weeks.

Crimes against journalists: Torture in detention of journalists charged under PECA law: Over half of all journalists charged under PECA law and arrested by FIA said they were tortured in custody. Journalists under remand and those released shortly after arrest both complained of being tortured.

Actions demanded by complainants against journalists charged under PECA law: Most complainants against journalists charged under PECA sought punishment rather than settlement. Two-fifths of the complainants against journalists charged under PECA sought written and published apologies.

This report was made possible with the assistance of **International Media Support (IMS)**, a Europe-based international media development organization, that seeks to improve media professionalisms and quality of journalism worldwide. They, however, do not necessarily endorse the findings of the report, which are the sole responsibility of *Freedom Network*. Legal expert **Muhammad Aftab Alam**, media analyst **Waqas Naeem** and researcher **Faiza Hasan** assisted in the production of this report. The analysis and findings of this report are solely based on data provided by 23 respondents.

Adnan Rehmat and Iqbal Khattak

November 2021

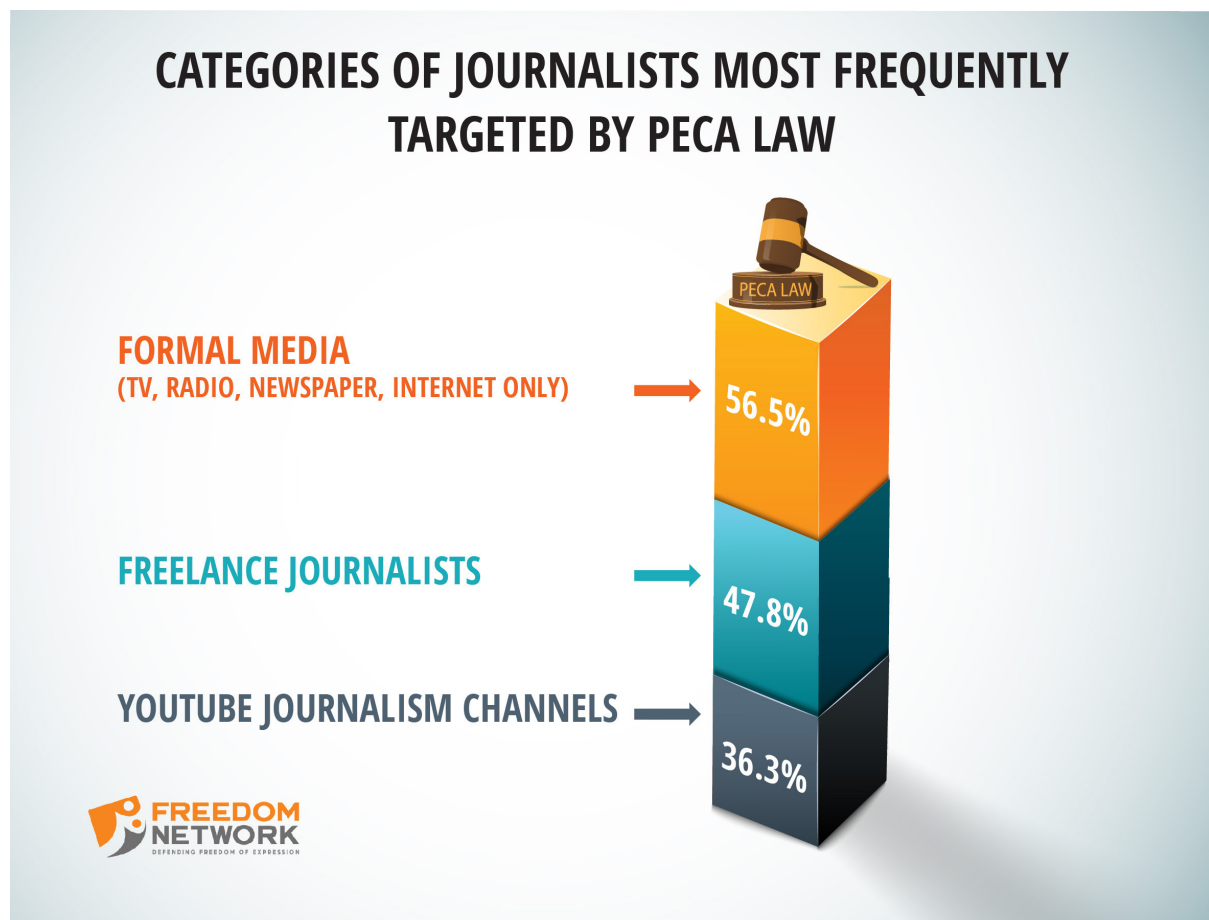
Islamabad, Pakistan

BACKGROUNDS OF VICTIM JOURNALISTS

This section looks at which categories of journalists working for which mediums tend to be most frequently targeted by the invocation of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016.

A1: Categories of journalists most frequently targeted by PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA in the three-year period 2019-21, at least 13 (or 56.5%) worked for formal media (TV channel, radio station, newspaper and/or internet-only journalism platform) while 11 (or 47.8%) worked as freelance journalists. Of the 11 that worked as freelance journalists, four (or 36.3%) operated their own YouTube journalism channels.



Key findings

- Journalists working for formal media or as freelancers are almost equally likely to be targeted under PECA law.
- Over a third of freelancers targeted under PECA law operate their own YouTube channels.

A2: Journalists targeted by medium under the PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, at least 14 worked for internet/digital media (60.8%), seven for broadcast [television or radio] media (30.4%) and 11 for print media (47.8%). The percentages do not add up to 100 because the respondents were allowed to pick multiple media types as some journalists worked for more than one medium or media organization being freelancers.

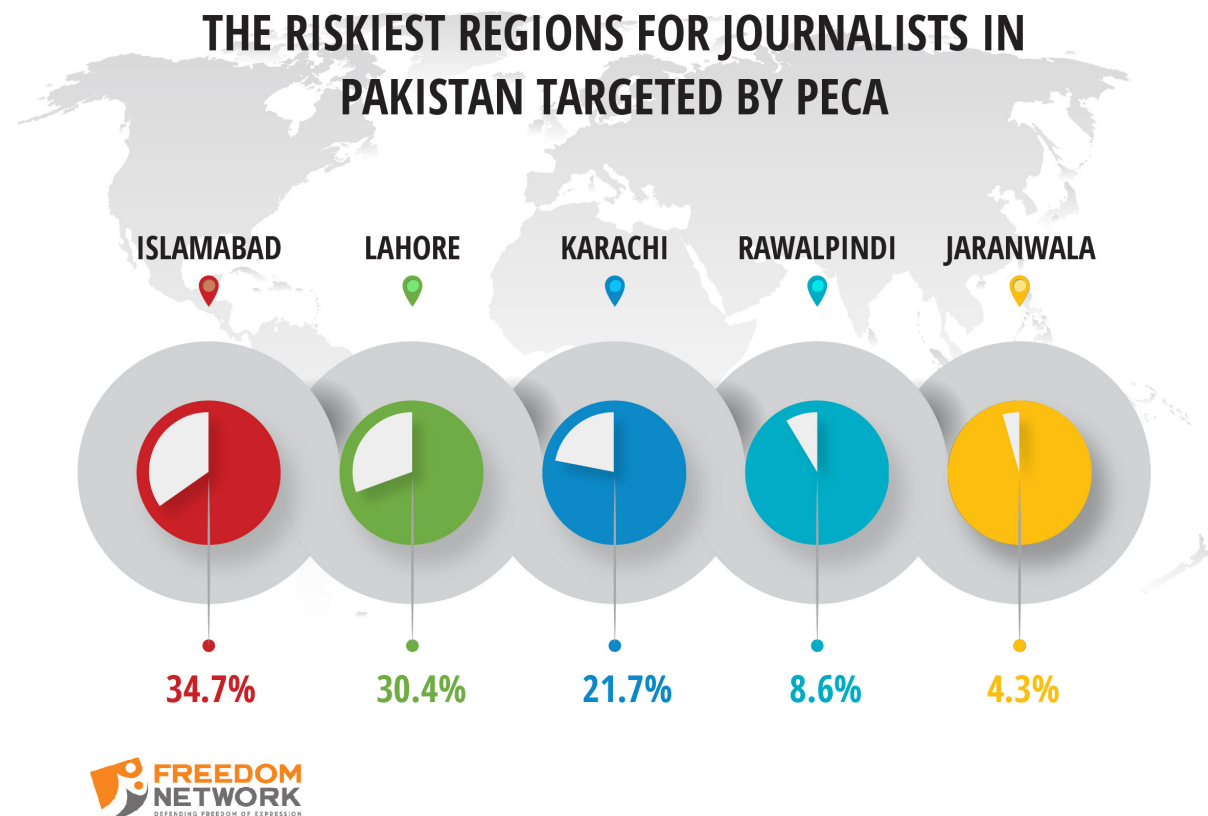


Key findings

- Over half of journalists targeted under PECA law worked for digital media platforms.
- Nearly twice as many journalists working for print media online got targeted under PECA law than broadcast media.

A3: The riskiest regions for journalists in Pakistan targeted by PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, eight (or 34.7%) were based in Islamabad seven (or 30.4%) in Lahore, five (or 21.7%) in Karachi, two (or 8.6%) in Rawalpindi and one (or 4.3%) in Jaranwala.



Key findings

- Punjab is the most dangerous region for journalists when it comes to being targeted under PECA with 10 (or 43.7%) being from Lahore, Rawalpindi and Jaranwala.
- Despite being the smallest region, Islamabad is the second most-riskiest place for journalists (34.7%) facing action under PECA law.

A4: PECA journalist victim members of press clubs

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 21 journalists provided answers indicating that 14 (or 66.6%) were members of a press club while seven (or 33.3%) were not members of any press club. The victims included members of National Press Club (Islamabad), Lahore Press Club and Karachi Press Club.

Victim members of press clubs

Press clubs	Yes	No
Membership of PCs	14	7
Percentage	66.6%	33.3%

Key findings

- Press club members are a distinct target of PECA law.
- Nearly two-thirds of all journalists targeted by PECA law are members of their local press club.

A5: PECA journalist victim members of journalists' unions

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 21 journalists provided answers indicating that 19 (or 90.4%) were members of a journalists' union while two (or 9.5%) were not members of any union. The victims included members of Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ), Punjab Union of Journalists (PUJ) and Karachi Union of Journalists (KUJ).

Victim members of journalists' unions

Journalists' unions	Yes	No
Membership of unions	19	2
Percentage	90.4%	9.5%

Key findings

- Journalists' union members are a distinct target of PECA law.
- Over four-fifths of all journalists targeted by PECA law are members of their local journalists' union.

COMPLAINTS AND INQUIRIES: PROCEDURAL TARGETING OF JOURNALISTS UNDER PECA LAW

This section looks at the procedure followed by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), the implementation law enforcement agency for the PECA law, in moving inquiries and cases against targeted journalists.

B1: Victims receiving notices/summons from FIA under PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 22 journalists provided answers indicating that 18 (or 81.8%) received formal notices from the FIA, while four (or 18.1%) did not.

Key findings

- Around three-fourths of the journalists pursued under PECA law were formally contacted by FIA of the Federal Ministry of Interior.
- Every fourth journalist pursued under PECA law was informally intimidated by the authorities with reference to grievances against them.

B2: Are notices served under PECA law based on formal complaints against journalists

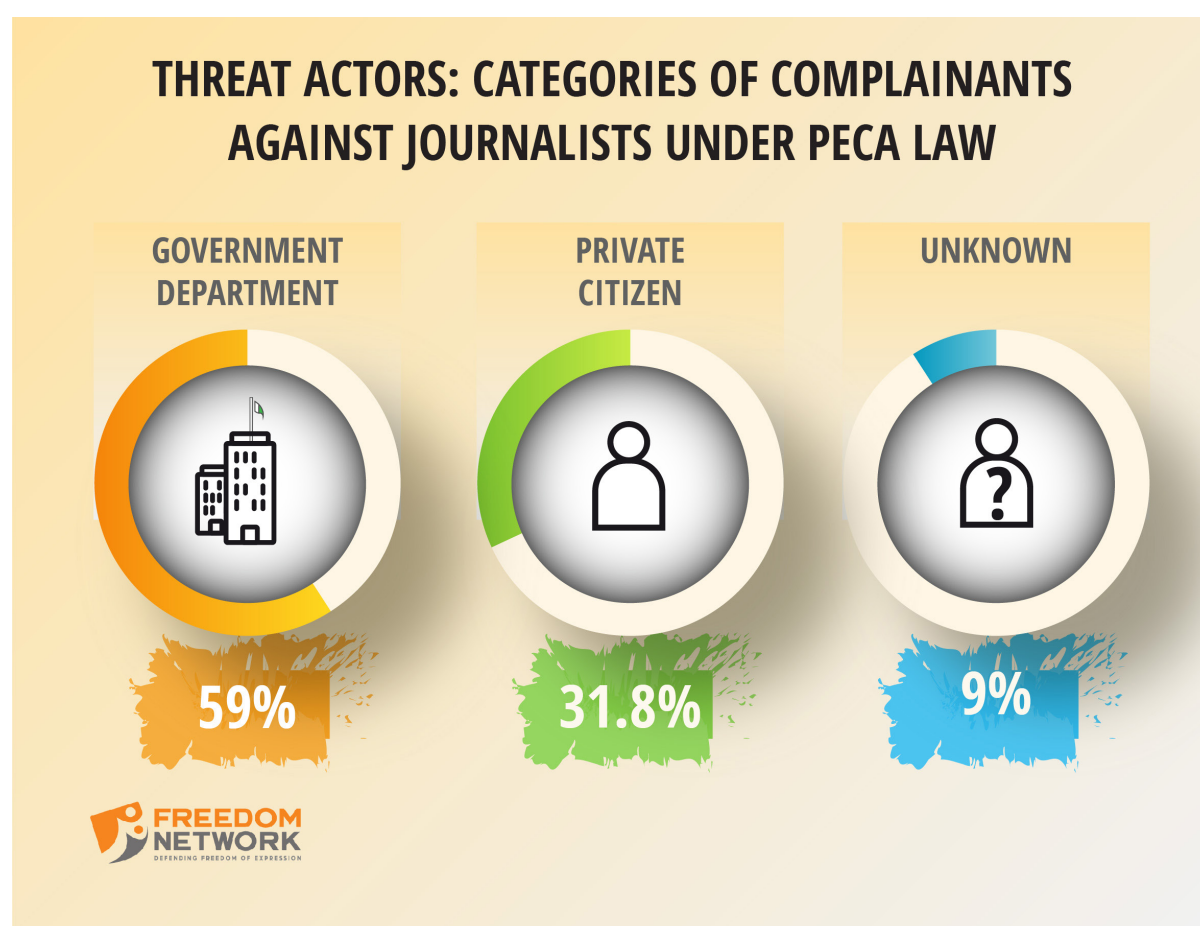
Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA in the 2019-21, a total of 22 journalists provided answers indicating that 19 (or 86.3%) received notices/summons from FIA based on complaints against them while three (or 13.6%) did not.

Key findings

- Four-fifths of journalists receiving notices or summons under PECA law were on the basis of formal complaints against them.
- One in five journalists pursued under PECA law was served a notice or summons without even existence of a third-party complainant against them – this might be on the basis of FIA's own perceived grievance against them.

B3: Threat actors: Categories of complainants against journalists under PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 22 journalists provided answers indicating that 13 (or 59%) complaints were filed by “private citizens” (including a former mayor of Karachi and a retired military official), seven (or 31.8%) by various government departments – including four by FIA itself – and two (or 9%) by persons whose identity the FIA refused to disclose.



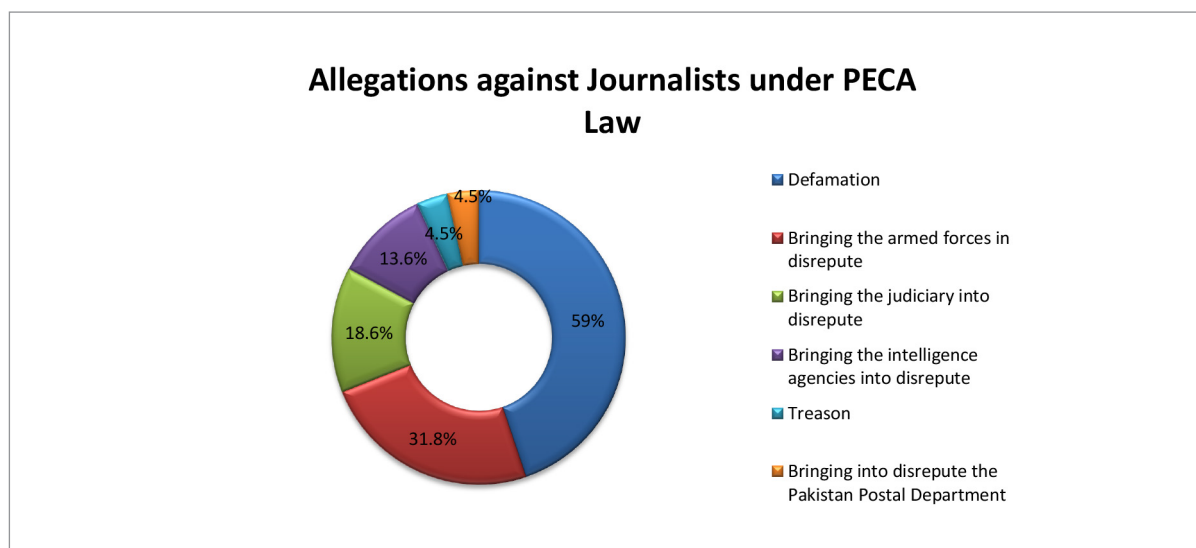
Key findings

- Two-thirds of complainants invoking the PECA law against journalists are private citizens.
- Of the government departments initiating complaints against journalists most tend to be from FIA itself.

B4: Alleged crimes: Nature of allegations against journalists pursued under PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 22 journalists provided answers indicating that 13 (or 59%) had complaints/allegations of “defamation” filed against them, seven (or 31.8%) had complaints of “bringing the armed forces in disrepute”, four (or

18.1%) “bringing the judiciary into disrepute”, three (or 13.6%) of “bringing the intelligence agencies into disrepute” and one (or 4.5%) each of “treason” and “bringing into disrepute the Pakistan Postal Department.” Since some journalists had more than one type of complaint against them, hence the category percentages do not add to 100%.



Key findings

- Opinions or criticism of the military and the intelligence agencies is the most frequent complaint against journalists pursued under PECA law
- Criticism in general – whether against executive (both civilian and military) or the judiciary triggered the most complaints against journalists pursued under PECA law.
- The prime nature of complaint is that of alleged defamation.

B5: The most coercive section of PECA law invoked against journalists

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 18 journalists provided answers to this question with 11 (or 61.1%) identifying Section 20 of the PECA law (dealing with “Offences against dignity of a natural person” or online defamation) mentioned in the notices against them, one (or 5.5%) each identified Section 10 of the PECA law (dealing with “Cyber terrorism”), and Section 160 of the Criminal Procedure Code (dealing with a police officer’s power to require attendance of witnesses) while 4 (or 22.2%) said there was no citation of any law in the notices they received.

Key findings

- Section 20 is the most frequently invoked part of PECA law against journalists
- Even sections of the PPC and CrPC can be invoked for alleged violations of PECA against journalists

B6: Called to account: Journalists pursued under PECA law appearing before FIA

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were

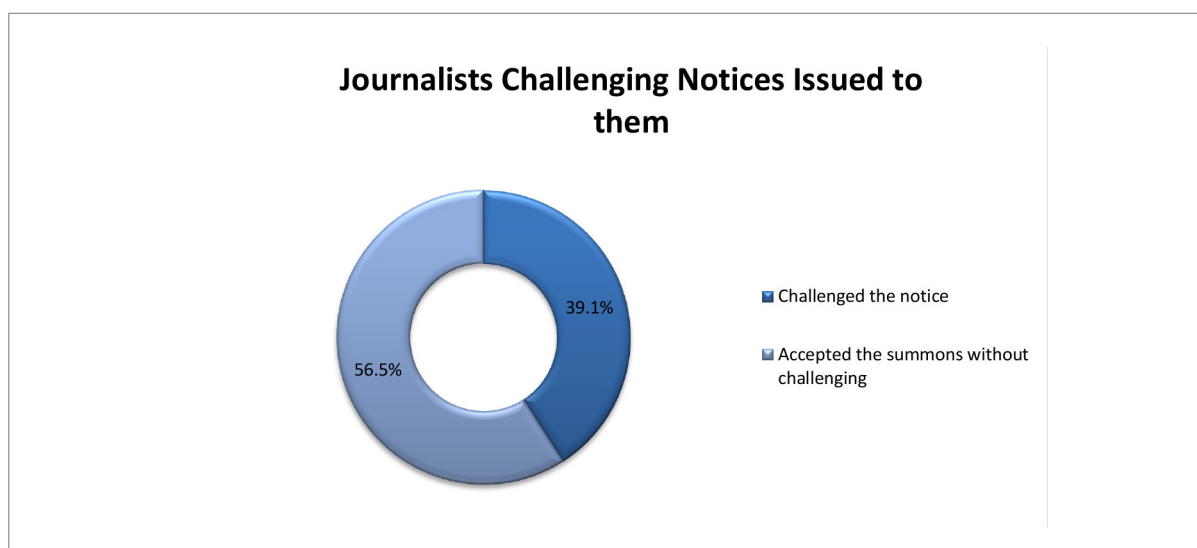
registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 21 journalists provided answers to this question with 17 (or 80.9%) answering summons to appear in person before FIA while four (or 19%) chose to ignore the summons or not to appear before FIA.

Key findings

- Over three-fourth of journalists summoned by FIA were compelled to appear before it to answer charges against them under PECA law
- Only less than one in four journalists ignored the summons.

B7: Seeking justice: Journalists challenging in court FIA notices under PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA in the 2019-21, a total of 22 journalists provided answers to this question with only nine (or 39.1%) choosing to challenge the notices issued to them while 13 (or 56.5%) choosing to accept the summons without legally challenging them.



Key findings

- Over half of the journalists served notices by FIA under PECA law did not approach the courts to challenge them – and therefore are denied legal recourse to justice.
- Around a third of the journalists invoked the legal process to resist the summons and challenge the notices served to them under PECA law by FIA.

B8: Relief: Outcome of legal challenge by journalists served notices under PECA law

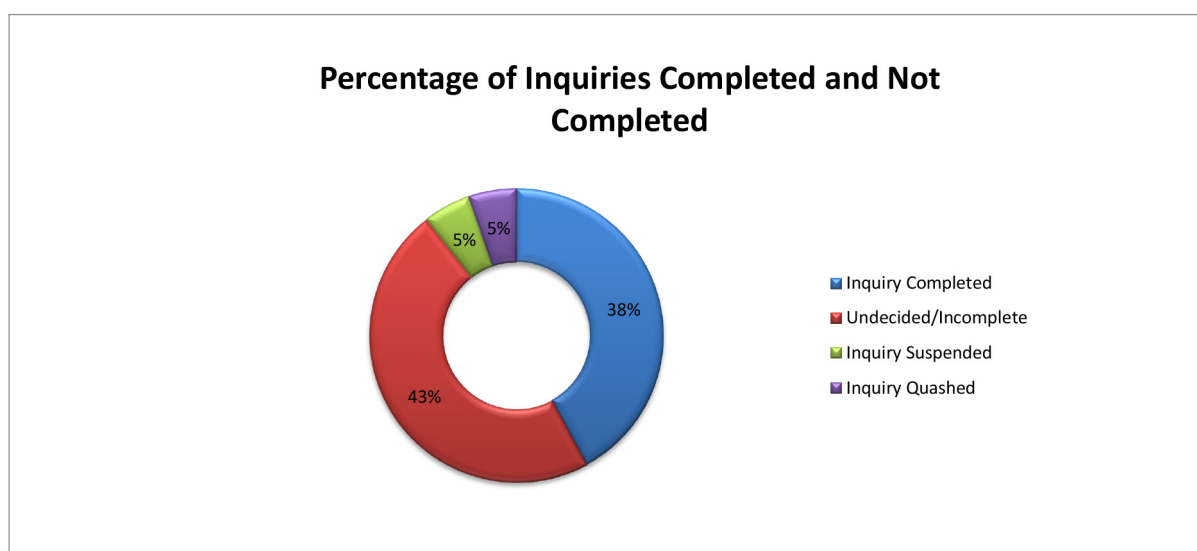
Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 22 journalists provided answers to this question with five of the nine journalists who challenged the notices provided relief by the courts (55.5% journalists received relief who approached courts). Two journalists withdrew their legal challenge while another two await court relief.

Key findings

- Over half of the journalists mounting a legal challenge to notices served to them by FIA under PECA law got relief from the courts who suspended the notices.
- One in four journalists filing cases against FIA for serving them notices under PECA law withdrew their petitions in apparent compromise with FIA.

B9: Procedural tyranny: Outcome of inquiries against journalists under PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 21 journalists provided answers to this question which indicated inquiry was completed in eight (or 38%) cases and remaining incomplete and undecided in nine cases. In one case a suo moto notice by Islamabad High Court suspended the inquiry. Significantly, in seven of the eight cases in which inquiry was completed, a formal case was registered against journalists who were arrested. In only one case the inquiry was quashed.



Key findings

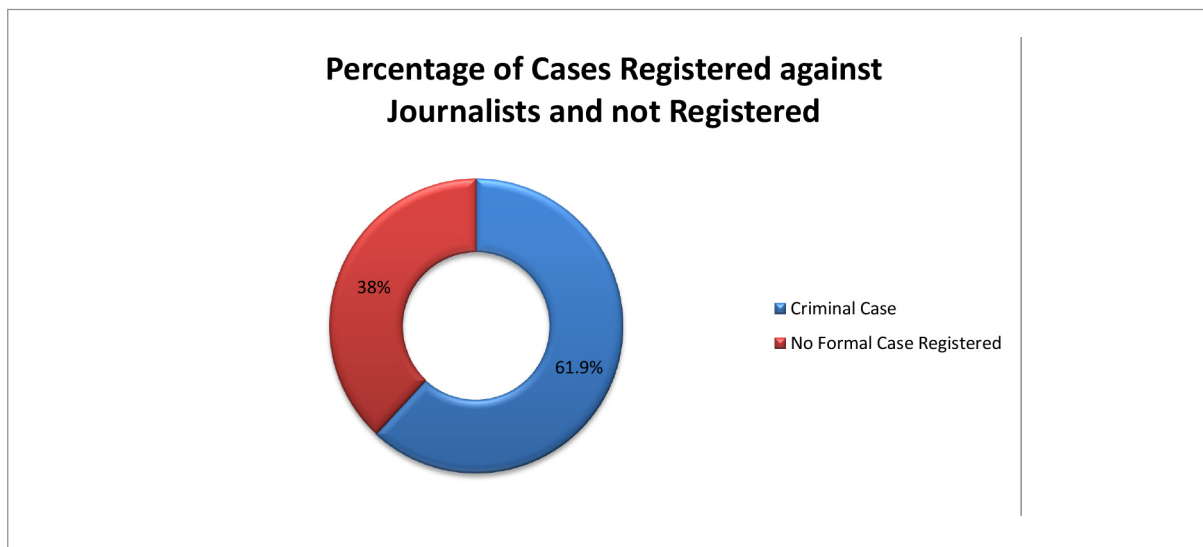
- Only about a third of the complaints registered against journalists pursued under PECA law resulted in inquiries that were completed in due time. Most inquiries dragged on and remain incomplete.
- Almost all journalists against whom inquiries were completed resulted in registration of legal cases against them and prompt arrests.

TRACKING IMPUNITY AGAINST JOURNALIST VICTIMS OF PECA LAW

This section looks at how the authorities use the PECA law against journalists and embellish the cases against them through recourse to additional laws and arrests and even alleged torture.

C1: Criminalizing dissent: Post-inquiry registration of criminal cases against journalists under PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 21 journalists provided answers to this question with FIA registering criminal cases against 13 (or 61.9%) journalists and no formal case registered against eight (or 38%) journalists. The outcome of the remaining remained in various stages of limbo.

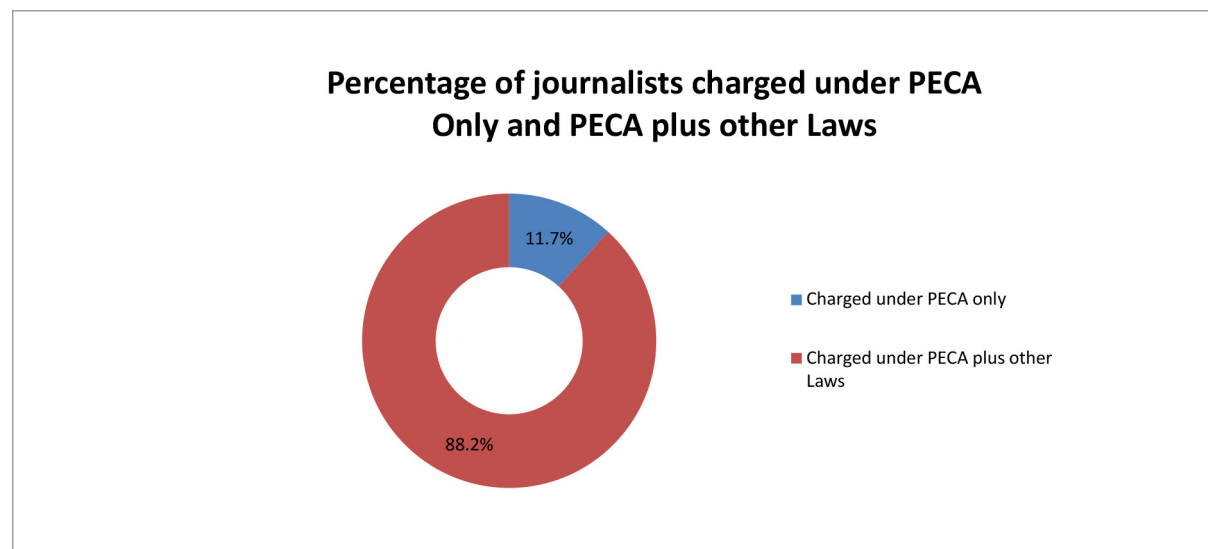


Key findings

- Criminal cases were registered against nearly two-thirds of all journalists pursued under PECA law.
- There seems to be an arbitrary exercise of the jurisdiction by FIA to register cases irrespective of whether inquiries against journalists are completed or not completed.

C2: Expanding coercion: Invoking laws/sections other than PECA law in registration of cases against journalists

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 21 journalists provided answers to this question with the question not applicable in cases of five journalists. For the 17 cases in which this question was relevant, additional sections of laws other than PECA against the charged journalists in 15 (or 88.2%) cases were invoked. In only two (11.7%) cases only PECA related sections were invoked against journalists.



Key findings

- Nearly all journalists against whom charges under the PECA law were filed for prosecution, FIA added clauses and sections from additional laws to strengthen its cases.
- For almost all journalists charged under PECA law, defense meant defending against a wider range of laws.

C3: Expanding criminalization: Commonly invoked sections of other laws against journalists charged under PECA law

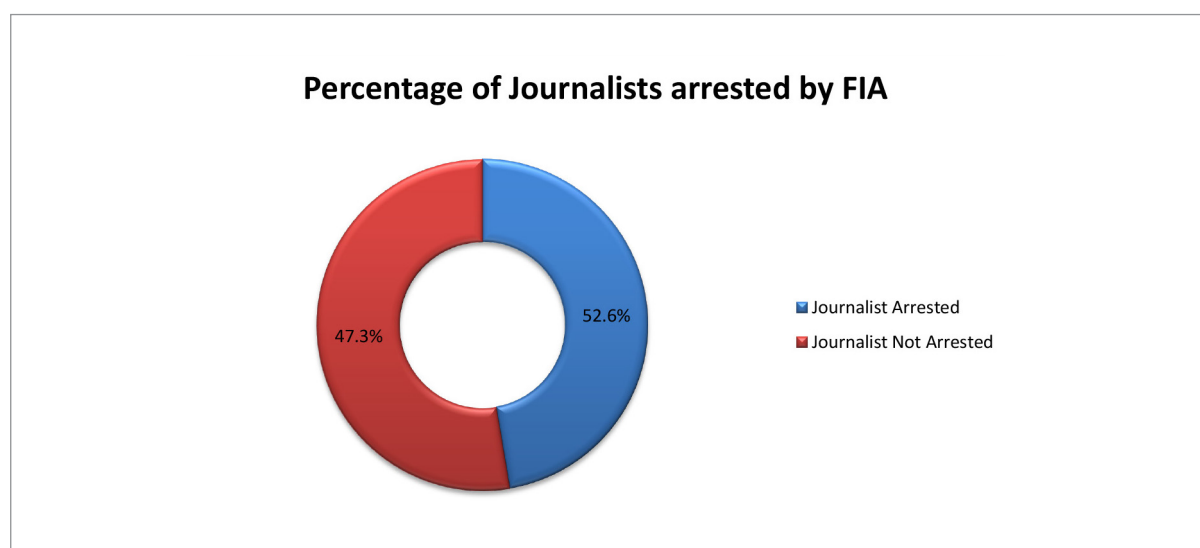
Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 22 journalists provided answers to this question with the question not applicable in cases of six journalists. In the 17 cases in which this question was relevant, the law enforcement authorities invoked at least 15 different sections of PPC including Section 34 (against two journalists), Section 109 (three journalists), Section 124a x 1 (one journalist), Section 131 (one journalist), Section 174 (two journalists), Section 384 (one journalist), Section 385 (one journalist), Section 420 (two journalists), Section 468 (two journalists), Section 499 (four journalists), Section 469 (one journalist), Section 471 (two journalists), Section 500 (five journalists), Section 501 (one journalist) and Section 505 (five journalists). In two cases, the CrPC Section 154 (one journalist) and Section 160 (one journalist) were invoked additionally.

Key findings

- FIA tended to invoke a wide variety of sections of the PPC against journalists charged under PECA.
- The most frequent PPC clauses invoked were Section 500 (dealing with punishment of defamation) and Section 505 (dealing with statement conducting to public mischief) and Section 109 (dealing with Punishment of abetment if the act abetted is committed in consequence and where no express provision is made for its punishment).

C4: Chaining dissent: Arrests made by FIA of journalists charged under PECA + other laws

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 22 journalists provided answers to this question with the question not applicable in cases of three journalists. In the 19 cases in which this question was relevant, the FIA arrested nine (or 47.3%) journalists.



Key findings

- Nearly half of all journalists formally charged under PECA law plus provisions of other laws were arrested by FIA.

C5: Post-arrest developments for journalists charged under PECA law

Of the nine journalists arrested, six (or 66.6%) managed to secure bails from courts after spending up to 60 days in judicial remand while three (33.3%) were released after initial interrogation.

Key findings

- Two-thirds of all journalists managed to secure bails after their arrest by FIA.
- Bail was secured only after spending from a few days to some weeks in custody.

C6: Crimes against journalists: Torture in detention by journalists charged under PECA law

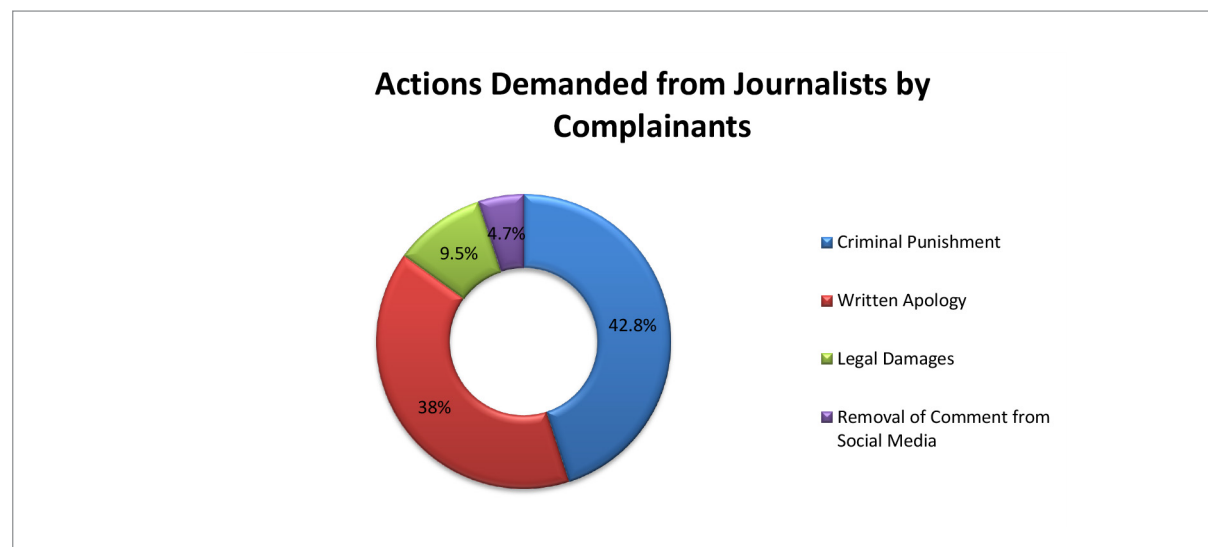
Of the nine journalists arrested, five (or 55.5%) said they were subjected to varying degrees of torture during detention. Four of these five journalists experiencing torture were those who underwent remand while one was among those who were released shortly after arrest.

Key findings

- Over half of all journalists charged under PECA law and arrested by FIA said they were tortured in custody.
- Journalists under remand and those released shortly after arrest both complained of being tortured.

C7: Actions demanded by complainants against journalists charged under PECA law

Of the 23 journalists and information practitioners surveyed against whom cases were registered or notices issued under PECA during 2019-21, a total of 23 journalists provided answers to this question with the question not applicable in cases of two journalists. From the remaining 21 journalists, the various complainants demanded criminal punishment from nine (or 42.8%) journalists, written apology from eight (or 38%) journalists, legal damages from two (or 9.5%) journalists and deletion of allegedly offensive social media comments from one (or 4.7%) journalist.



Key findings

- Most complainants against journalists charged under PECA sought punishment rather than settlement.
- Two-fifths of the complainants against journalists charged under PECA sought written and published apologies.

About Freedom Network

Freedom Network (www.fnpk.org) is a Pakistan-based media and development sector watchdog registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). The organization's core value is to protect freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet, and access to information and promote an informed society that sees media as a key partner in a democratic and pluralist Pakistan. In 2017, Freedom Network was awarded the prestigious global French Human Rights Prize 2017 by the Government of France for "its efforts for safety and protection of journalists and promotion of freedom of expression."

OUR MISSION:

To protect civil liberties, including freedom of expression and access to information, and promote an informed society that sees media as a key partner in a democratic and pluralist Pakistan.

OUR OBJECTIVES AND EXPERTISE:

- 1. To serve as a watchdog on the right to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet and of civil society**
 - a. Through monitoring of the rights to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and online
 - b. Through monitoring and documenting violations of freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet
 - c. Through researching the causes, symptoms and case studies of the violations of freedom of expression in all forms of media
 - d. Through monitoring violation of the right to expression of non-media sections of society such as human rights groups, development practitioners, and the performing arts industry.
- 2. To promote an ethical and professional media**
 - a. By promoting, supporting and conducting advocacy, research, analysis and training initiatives for media
 - b. By promoting, supporting and conducting initiatives to help civil society strengthen its stakeholding in a pluralistic, independent, open and professional media with emphasis on professional ethics and journalism best practices
 - c. By strengthening the interface between media and civil society by improving professional development communications within and for development sector organizations as well as for their supporters and donors
 - d. By promoting a culture of safety and security for journalists and media houses through advocacy, research and training on issues of safety and impunity against journalists

3. To serve as an advocate for freedom of expression and access to information as fundamental rights

- a. Through a broad range of advocacy, research and analysis initiatives
- b. By promoting and building synergies between and among media and civil society stakeholders
- c. By promoting citizens' participation on issues relating to freedom of expression and access to information
- d. By conducting assessment missions, studies, research, translations of resources in multiple languages on its own and for other organizations for wider national and international audiences

About Freedom Network

Freedom Network is a Pakistan-based media and development sector watchdog registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). The organization's core value is to protect freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet, and access to information and promote an informed society that sees media as a key partner in a democratic and pluralist Pakistan. It has the following mandate:

To serve as a watchdog on the right to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet and of civil society

1. Through 24/7 monitoring of the rights to freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and online
2. Through monitoring and documenting violations of freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and Internet
3. Through researching the causes, symptoms and case studies of the violations of freedom of expression in all forms of media
4. Through monitoring violation of the right to expression of non-media sections of society such as human rights groups, development practitioners, and the performing arts industry.

To promote an ethical and professional media

1. By promoting, supporting and conducting advocacy, research, analysis and training initiatives for media
2. By promoting, supporting and conducting initiatives to help civil society strengthen its stakeholding in a pluralistic, independent, open and professional media with emphasis on professional ethics and journalism best practices
3. By strengthening the interface between media and civil society by improving professional development communications within and for development sector organizations as well as for their supporters and donors
4. By promoting a culture of safety and security for journalists and media houses through advocacy, research and training on issues of safety and impunity against journalists

To serve as an advocate for freedom of expression and access to information as fundamental

1. Through a broad range of advocacy, research and analysis initiatives
2. By promoting and building synergies between and among media and civil society stakeholders
3. By promoting citizens' participation on issues relating to freedom of expression and access to information
4. By conducting assessment missions, studies, research, translations of resources in multiple languages on its own and for other organizations for wider national and international audiences