

PAKISTAN:

PRESS FREEDOM UNDER STRAIN

Journalists continue to
face harassment, arrests

PRESS FREEDOM VIOLATIONS IN PAKISTAN

(APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2022)



The election of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in April 2022 brought initial hopes for an improved climate for press freedom in Pakistan. However, journalists continue to face physical attacks, verbal threats, legal harassment, arrests, and censorship. While the Supreme Court struck down the highly controversial Section 20 of the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) that criminalized defamation and that was frequently used to punish critical journalists and political opponents, other laws including sections of the Pakistan Penal Code continue to be used to muzzle the press.

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IPI documented **at least 38 press freedom violations** between April and September 2022, which included cases of arrests and detentions, as well as physical and verbal attacks against journalists, and cases of censorship.

Of these incidents, 33 involved male journalists and two involved female journalists.



Arrests and detentions of journalists constituted the majority of press freedom violations identified in Pakistan during this six-month period. At least **20 journalists were arrested or detained** between April and September 2022. In April, three journalists were charged with sedition for criticizing state institutions. They were among numerous other cases of journalists who were charged under different provisions of Pakistan's criminal code, which is often used to punish journalists for critical, public interest reporting.

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At least **13 journalists experienced physical, verbal, or online attacks.** TV anchor Saleem Safi received death threats. Supporters of the political party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) attacked a group of reporters at a political rally, physically assaulting a female journalist. Female political journalist Gharidah Farooqi was the target of an intense online harassment campaign.

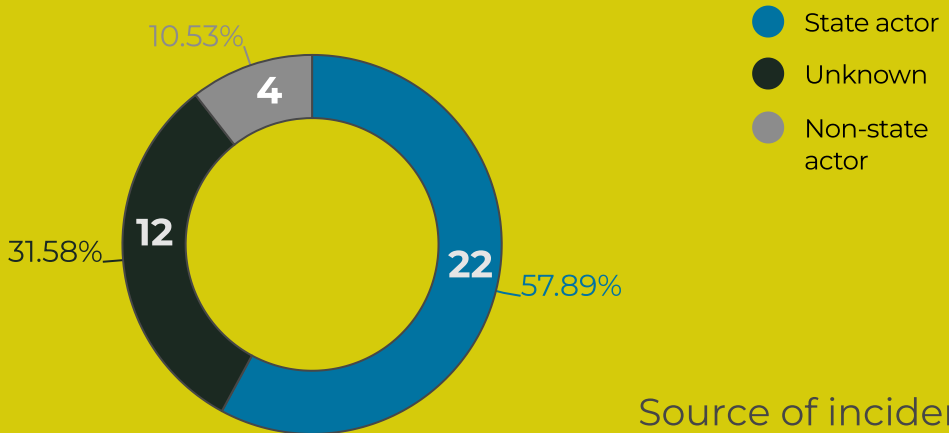
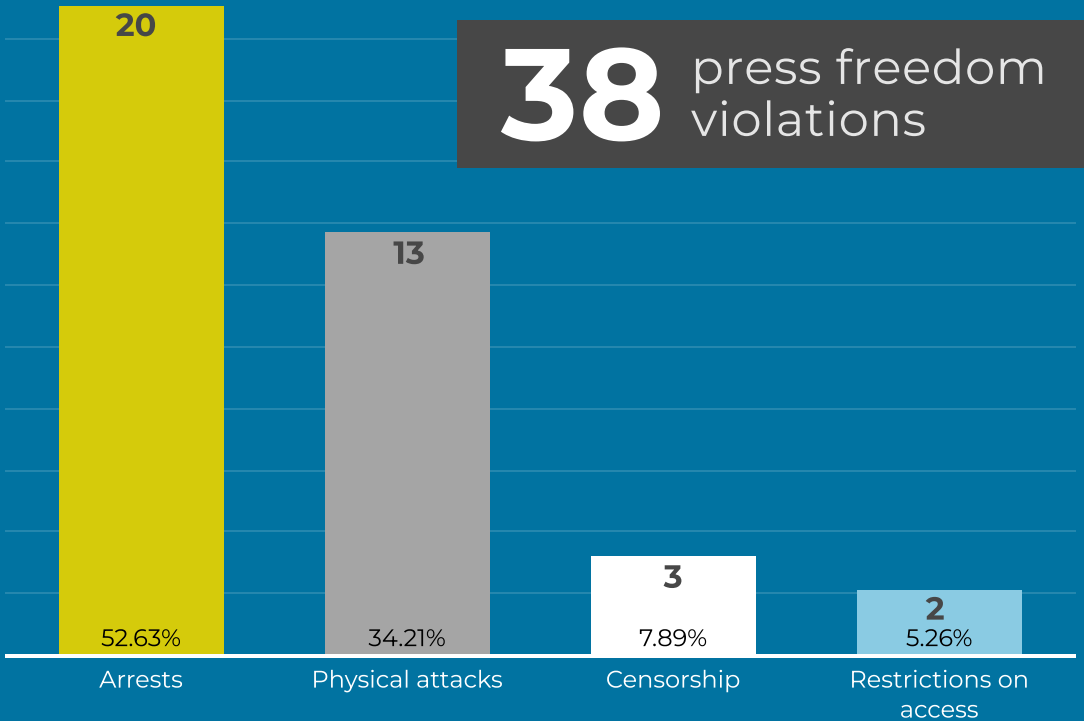
Several journalists were killed during this monitoring period but reports indicate that these cases did not relate to the journalists' work.

IPI also identified several cases of **censorship** during this period. In May, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) issued a warning to TV stations against publishing critical statements on key state institutions, such as the judiciary and the army, which PEMRA said would violate the PEMRA Electronic Media Code of Conduct 2015. In June, PEMRA banned a talk show after an interview with Imran Khan and also served ARY News a notice for airing "fake news" about the finance minister.



Section 505 of Pakistan's Penal Code prohibits the circulation of rumors or alarming news. It is often used to silence journalists and news outlets that expose corruption or cover stories critical of government policies.

38 press freedom violations



Source of incidents

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



To report a violation:
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