

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN PAKISTAN'S JOURNALISM WORLD

The Killing Fields: No Justice for Pakistan's Murdered Journalists



IMPUNITY OF CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS PAKISTAN REPORT 2022

By Adnan Rehmat and Waqas Naeem

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IMPUNITY OF CRIMES AGAINST JOURNALISTS PAKISTAN REPORT 2022

Tracking and examining the failure of the legal system in prosecuting and punishing killers of 53 journalists murdered in Pakistan during 2012-22

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes
Against Journalists - 2022

PAKISTAN'S IMPUNITY SCORECARD for 2012-22

(Ten years since UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity)

Journalists murdered during 2012-22 period: **53**

Police First Information Reports [FIRs] registered: **50** (94% of all murders)

Police challan [charge-sheet] filed in courts: **31** (62% of all FIRs)

Cases declared fit for trial by court: **26** (84% of all challans)

Prosecution and trial completed in cases: **12** (46% of all trials)

Killers convicted: **2** cases (4% of all murders)

IMPUNITY for killers of journalists: **51** cases (96% of all murders)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – Key Findings

Pakistan has consistently been ranked for several years as one of the most dangerous countries on the planet to practice journalism by international media watchdogs like *Reporters Without Borders (RSF)*, *Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)*, *International Press Institute (IPI)* and *International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)* and national watchdogs like *the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)* and *Freedom Network (FN)*. **Over 150 journalists and other media workers have been killed in Pakistan since 2000 and 53 in between 2012-22 in the years since the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.**

While the risky environment for journalists in Pakistan and the nature of attacks against them is well documented, there is little information available about whether the victims and families of these journalists murdered for their work have received any justice. And if not – indeed in almost all cases, none of the 53 killed during 2012-22 have – then **why is the legal system in Pakistan failing these journalists, why is the level of impunity enjoyed by their killers so high and who is to blame for failing to act on threats reported by the journalists before they were murdered?** This research and analysis report produced by *Freedom Network* seeks answers to these questions.

The answers and findings that this report showcases are startling, even shocking, and are derived analytically from data and information collected from the families of the journalists killed as well as from their news colleagues, local press clubs and unions of journalists, based on a detailed **Impunity Index** developed by *Freedom Network*, making this a rare extensive exercise. The data and information collected and analyzed was for the period 2012-22. Why this period? There are two reasons – first, Pakistan endorsed the *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity* in 2013 and was one of the five pilot countries for its early implementation, one year after the plan was launched so it made good sense to track Pakistan's pledge to combat impunity of crimes against journalists from this commitment onwards. The second is that 2022 marks 10 years since the UN Plan of Action was announced by UNESCO in 2012 and so serves as a reasonable timeframe to evaluate the due process of law and justice – from the registration of a murder case with the police to its complete investigation, its presentation before a court of law and a possible full prosecution, trial and conclusion.

The following are the **key questions** of this research on impunity of crimes against journalists in Pakistan:

CRIME: Threats and Threat Response

- Which actors threaten journalists in Pakistan?
- Which regions are the most dangerous to practice journalism?
- Are the threats tracked and reported by journalists?
- Are the media employers, press clubs, unions of journalists and state authorities informed of threats journalists face before they are murdered?

PUNISHMENT: Investigation and Trial

- Who takes responsibility of reporting murders of journalists to the police?
- How efficient is the police in completing investigations of the murders?
- How many cases of murdered journalists land in courts and declared fit for trial?
- In how many cases is the prosecution completed and the trial concluded?
- How many killers of journalists have been convicted and punished?

KEY FINDINGS

The **key findings** of this research on impunity of crimes against journalists in Pakistan based on the above questions for the period 2012-22 include the following:

Most dangerous mediums: The 53 journalists murdered for their work in Pakistan in the period under review worked for several types of media and some of them even held multiple news jobs across various media types. As many as 31 worked for print media either exclusively or as a second job. Similarly, 23 of the murdered media practitioners were associated with TV either exclusively or as a second job. Four murdered journalists were linked with digital media – all of them citizen journalists actively using social media. Another two killed journalists worked for radio. Around 58% of all journalists murdered in Pakistan in this period had links with print media, making it the most vulnerable medium even though print media is one of the smallest mediums in the country's news industry. TV journalists in Pakistan are also at a substantial risk of fatal attacks – 43% of the total 53 journalists had connections with TV news.

Most dangerous regions: Of the 53 journalists murdered for their work in Pakistan in the period between 2012-22, the highest fatalities were in Sindh followed by Punjab. Fifty of the journalists targeted in the line of duty were killed on the spot by their attackers while at least three were kidnapped and taken away before being killed.

Worst enemies of journalists: Mysterious, nameless and unidentified actors constitute the biggest threat actor to journalists in Pakistan during 2012-22 with 15 of the 53 journalists (or 28%) murdered in this period being targeted by them, according to the family members or colleagues of the victims. The second biggest threat source was organized crime – suspected of being behind the murder of 13 journalists (or 24.5% of the total) – while the third highest threat actor are various militant groups (10 journalists killed, or 19%) targeting journalists. Other key threat sources include political parties (11%), local influentials (7.5%) and state authorities (6%). In two separate cases, two women journalists were allegedly murdered by their husbands after they reportedly refused to quit journalism.

Deadly inaction: According to data available, more than half of the journalists apparently did not inform their media employers, press club, union or the local authorities about any threats to them (if they had received them). Less than 10% of all journalists who received death threats before being murdered informed their media employers, press club, union or the local authorities. Whether the journalists made serious threats to them public or not, it did not prevent the threats materializing into death sentences for the journalists. Even in cases where advance warning was available, the system and relevant stakeholders were unable to prevent murders. These were all preventable deaths.

Dead on whose behalf? Risk ownership: The media organizations or the employers of journalists in Pakistan never become the first party to the case of their full-time, part-time or assignment-based workers who get murdered assuming risks for their journalism work on behalf of media. In over two-thirds of the cases of journalists murdered, the process of invoking the law and justice system is left to their bereaved families to pursue and undertake, making the matter of seeking justice a private family affair instead of making the employers, on whose behalf the journalists assume risks, a party to the process. The state almost never becomes a party to the case of journalists murdered.

Incomplete investigation – police failures: The state shockingly fails in its responsibility to pursue justice for the murdered journalists and their families in the initial stages of the legal process by the failure of the police in completing a proper preliminary investigation without which the case cannot go to a court for trial. One in five journalists murdered in Pakistan for their journalism work are guaranteed to NOT get justice because their case never goes to a court for trial because of the failure of the police to complete investigation. Of the 53 journalists murdered in Pakistan in the period between 2012-22, information on whether the police completed a challan (investigation report) was available in 42 cases (79%). According to family members of these 42 journalists murdered, the police managed to investigate the case sufficiently enough to make the case file move to court in only 31 instances. In nine cases, the police failed to generate a final challan – or full investigation report – to submit to a trial court.

Incomplete trial – court failures: Less than half of the murder cases of journalists investigated by the police reached the court and were declared fit for trial which indicates that for every second journalist murdered, the race for justice ends at this early stage. For about two-thirds of journalists murdered in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, the path to justice is likely to never enter a trial stage making the incidence of impunity the highest in these two provinces in Pakistan. The chances for cases of murdered journalists to enter the trial stage are better in Balochistan and Sindh but not guaranteed for one-third of the journalists killed there.

Near zero punishment – justice failures: The level of impunity enjoyed by killers of journalists in Pakistan is near-complete. The killers of only two of the 53 journalists murdered in the period 2012-22 were convicted by courts – 4% of the total murders. For nearly all journalists murdered (51, or 96% of the total 53) the criminal justice system hopelessly failed to deliver when either FIRs were not registered, police investigations were not completed, cases were not declared fit for trial, trials were not completed, or alleged killers were not convicted or punished.

Due to poor investigation, the police fail to produce challans in many cases, killing the chances of justice at an early stage of the legal system. Due to the poor quality of prosecution, most cases never complete the trial process in the courts and even those few that do, fail to establish culpability of the accused who either walk free for lack of evidence or, in a quarter of the cases that reached the prosecution stage, strike an out-of-court settlement with the family of the victim thereby cementing impunity for their crimes.

These findings indicate that even though Pakistan became the first country in the world in 2021 to specifically legislate on safety for journalists through a federal law passed by the national parliament and a provincial law passed by the Sindh Assembly in 2021, largely with advocacy led by the Pakistan Journalists Safety Coalition (PJSC), managed by Freedom Network and supported by International Media Support (IMS), by the fall of 2022 neither of the two laws had been operationalized by instituting the safety commissions that are supposed to implement these laws. This effectively rendered them as mere texts in statute books. Not only these two laws need to be operationalized forthwith but also Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab need to pass their own provincial laws on safety for journalists and other media workers so that the high levels of impunity of crimes against journalists can be countered.

This research report examined data and information collected through a team of field researchers on the 53 journalists killed across Pakistan in the period 2012-22 based on an Impunity Index developed by *Freedom Network* centered on the Pakistani justice system as well as its regular tracking and analysis of attacks against journalists and media houses. This report was made possible with staff at Freedom Network, including **Iqbal Khattak** and **Faiza Hassan**, and the assistance of International Media Support (IMS), a Europe-based international media development organization, which 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* and the authors.

PART 1

THREAT MATRIX OF JOURNALISTS IN PAKISTAN

Which actors threaten journalists in Pakistan?

Which regions are the most dangerous to practice journalism?

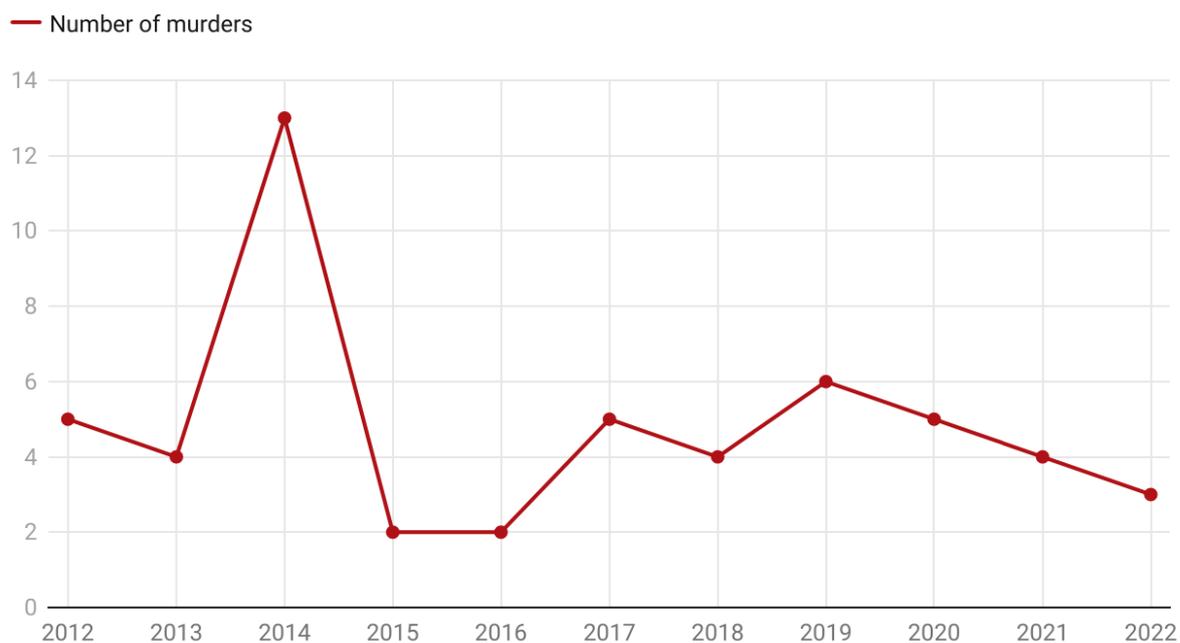
Are the threats properly tracked and reported by journalists?

Are the media employers, press clubs, unions of journalists and state authorities aware of risks journalists face?

TRENDLINE

The murders of journalists by year

Journalists and media workers killed from 2012 to 2022



Analysis

The reporting period for the data covers just over 10 years from January 2012 to July 2022. During this time, nearly five media practitioners, including journalists, were killed on average every year in Pakistan. The year 2014 was the most lethal with 13 journalists and media workers reported killed. The 2014 killings were spread out across the country and included two militant group attacks on DSNG vans of two separate media outlets in Karachi, in which four media practitioners lost their lives altogether.

Key findings

- Pakistan has not witnessed a single year since 2012 when a journalist was not killed in the country.
- On average, around five media practitioners have been killed in Pakistan every year from 2012 to 2022.

TYPES OF MEDIA

The most dangerous media to work for in Pakistan

Data – Types of media and number of fatalities

Print media	TV media	Digital media	Radio media
31	23	4	2

Analysis

Of the 53 journalists murdered for their work in Pakistan in the period between 2012-22, as many as 31 worked for print media either exclusively or as a second job, 23 for TV either exclusively or as a second job, four for digital media and two for radio. The subtotals exceed the total of 53 because some journalists held multiple jobs across different media types and were counted separately for each media category. The duplications include seven journalists, of which six worked for both print and TV and one worked for both TV and radio.

Key findings

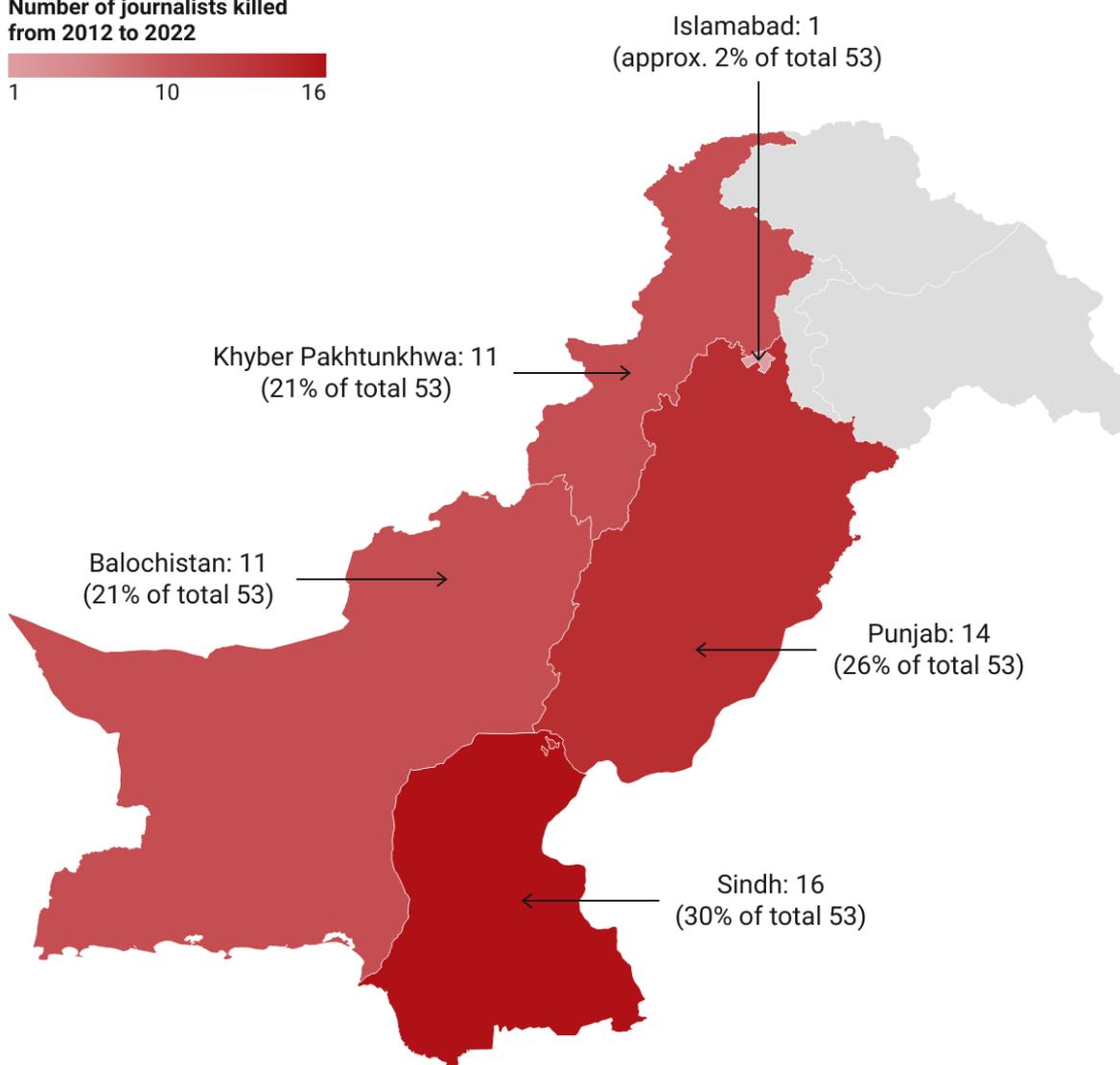
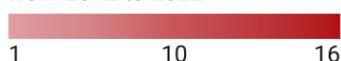
- Around 58% of all journalists murdered in Pakistan in this period worked for print media, making it the most vulnerable medium even though print media is one of the smallest of all mediums in the country's news industry.
- TV journalists in Pakistan are also at a high risk of fatal attacks – 43% of the total. Nearly four in 10 media practitioners murdered were associated with TV media.

PLACES OF MURDER

The most dangerous regions to practice journalism in Pakistan

Region-wise fatalities of Pakistani journalists

Number of journalists killed from 2012 to 2022



Of the 53 journalists murdered for their work in Pakistan in the period between 2012-22, the highest fatalities were in Sindh followed by Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Fifty of the journalists targeted in the line of duty were killed on the spot by their attackers while at least three were kidnapped and taken away before being killed.

Analysis

Sindh: At least 30% of the fatalities occurred in Sindh making the province percentagewise the most dangerous territory to practice journalism in Pakistan.

Punjab: At least 26% of the journalists murdered in Pakistan were from Punjab, making it the second most dangerous region to practice journalism percentagewise. Every fourth journalist murdered in Pakistan is from the country's most populous region with the highest number of journalism practitioners.

Balochistan: Around 21% of the fatalities occurred in Balochistan making the province percentagewise the joint third riskiest territory to conduct media practice in Pakistan. This means one in every five journalists murdered in Pakistan is from a region with the least number of journalists in the country.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Around 21% of the fatalities were documented in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa making the province percentagewise nearly as risky as Balochistan for journalists.

Key findings

- In Pakistan fatalities amongst journalists targeted for their work are the highest in Sindh – nearly every third journalist murdered in the country is from this region.
- Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa altogether account for the remaining nearly two out of three journalists murdered in the country.
- Islamabad appears to be relatively safest in terms of fatal threats to journalists although at least one murder has been documented there as well.

GENDER ANALYSIS

Breakdown of murdered journalists by gender

Data – Gender breakdown of media practitioners killed

Gender	Number
Men	51
Women	2

Analysis

Most of the 53 journalists murdered in Pakistan between the period 2012-22 were men. Two women journalists were also killed during this time. These two were Urooj Iqbal in Punjab and Shaheena Shaheen in Balochistan.

The two female journalists were killed in almost similar circumstances, within a year of each other. Urooj Iqbal's husband allegedly shot her dead in Lahore in November 2019. Urooj, 27, was a reporter and was in the process of launching her own news publication. She had previously filed a police complaint about the abusive behavior of her husband. According to a Reporters Without Borders investigation, Urooj's family believed the husband, also a journalist, wanted Urooj to drop the idea of her own newspaper and had threatened to kill her before the murder.

Shaheena Shaheen, 25, was murdered in Turbat, Balochistan, in September 2020. She was a TV anchorperson and the editor of a local magazine. According to the police report, Shaheena's family accused her husband of killing her. She had only been married for a few months at the time of the murder and had reportedly refused to quit her journalism after getting married.

While the disproportionate number of male journalists killed in Pakistan between 2012 and 2022 shows that men are highly vulnerable to lethal attacks from a variety of threat actors in response to their work, it should not be taken as an indication that women are safe from threats. Both women journalists were killed reportedly by people close to them to deter them from even working in the field of journalism. Pakistan already has low female participation in the news industry and the two murders are extreme examples of the sociocultural and existential challenges women have to face simply to work as journalists. Moreover, women journalists in Pakistan are regularly targeted with trolling, misogynist

abuse, workplace harassment, and gendered disinformation to discredit their work and malign their reputation. These threats and attacks may have physical and psychological repercussions for the journalists.

Key findings

- The journalists murdered in Pakistan due to their work are predominantly men.
- The murders of two women journalists indicate the harsh sociocultural conditions they must contend with to work in the news industry.

VICTIMS ASSOCIATION

Status of membership of press clubs and unions of murdered journalists

Murdered journalists who were members of press clubs and journalist unions

	Number of journalists murdered from 2012 to 2022	Number of murdered journalists with press club membership	Number of murdered journalists with union membership	Data not available about club or union membership
Balochistan	11	5	4	1
Islamabad	1	0	0	0
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	11	7	2	0
Punjab	14	12	2	2
Sindh	16	9	7	0
Total	53	33	15	3

Analysis

Press club membership: Of the 53 journalists murdered for their journalism work in the period between 2012-22 in Pakistan, at least 33 – or 62% – were members of their local press clubs. Data for one journalist on their press club membership was not available. At least 19 journalists – or 36% – were not confirmed as members of any press club.

Union membership: Of the 53 journalists murdered for their journalism work in the period between 2012-22 in Pakistan, only 15 – or 28% – were members of their local union of journalists. Data for two journalists on their union membership was not available. At least 36 journalists – or nearly 70% – were not confirmed as members of any union of journalists.

Key findings

- Whether they are members of a press club or union of journalists or not, journalists across Pakistan are equally vulnerable to the risk of being murdered.
- Nearly two out of three journalists murdered in Pakistan were members of press clubs and around three in 10 journalists murdered were members of a union.

TYPES OF MEDIA VICTIMS

The deadliest jobs for journalists in Pakistan

Breakdown of murdered media practitioners by type of media roles

	Total number of media practitioners murdered from 2012 to 2022	Number of professional journalists killed	Number of citizen journalists killed	Number of media workers killed
Balochistan	11	10	1	0
Islamabad	1	0	1	0
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	11	10	1	0
Punjab	14	14	0	0
Sindh	16	11	1	4
Total	53	45	4	4

Analysis

Of the 53 media practitioners – including professional journalists, citizen journalists and media workers – for their work in the period between 2012-22 in Pakistan, at least 45 – or a whopping 85% – were professional journalists (including reporters, editors, correspondents and photojournalists). Four of the 53 media practitioners murdered – or 7.5% – were citizen journalists (including bloggers and social media journalists) while another four – also 7.5% – were media workers (broadcast engineers, satellite technicians and crew).

Key findings

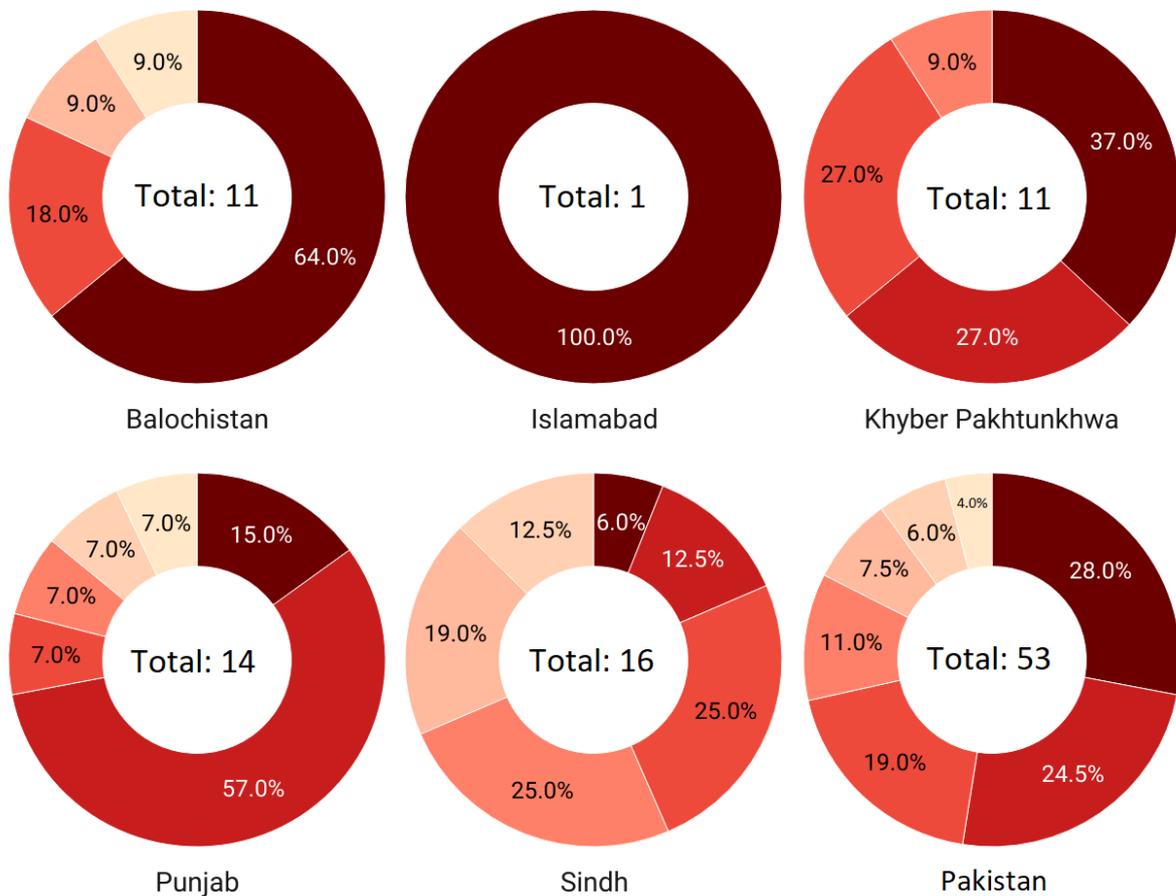
- Professional journalists are five times more likely to be targeted for deadly attacks than citizen journalists or non-journalist media workers.
- Punjab is the most dangerous place for journalists with 14 – or one in three – of all 45 murders of professional journalists across the country taking place there.
- Sindh is the deadliest place for non-journalist media workers in Pakistan with all four media worker murders taking place there.

THREAT ACTORS

The worst enemies of journalists in Pakistan

Suspected threat actors that target journalists

■ Unknown attackers
 ■ Organized crime
 ■ Militant groups
 ■ Political parties
 ■ Local influentials
 ■ State agencies
 ■ Husbands



Note: This dataset indicates threat actors as suspected by family members or colleagues of the murdered journalists.

Analysis

Mysterious, nameless and unidentified actors ('unknown attackers' in the graph above) constitute the biggest suspected threat actor to journalists in Pakistan during 2012-22 with

15 of the 53 journalists (or 28%) murdered in this period being targeted by them, according to the family members or colleagues of the victims. The second biggest threat source is organized crime – suspected of being behind the murder of 13 journalists (or 24.5% of the total) – while the third highest threat actor are various militant groups (10 journalists killed, or 19%) targeting journalists. Other alleged key threat sources include political parties (11%), local influentials (7.5%) and state authorities (6%). In two separate cases, two women journalists were allegedly murdered by their husbands after they reportedly refused to quit journalism.

Key findings

- Most murderous attacks against journalists in Pakistan come from threat sources that may be familiar to media practitioners while they are alive but remain mostly unidentified to their media organizations, families and the state after the target killings. The killers of almost a third of the murdered journalists remain unknown or unidentified.
- Nearly two-thirds of the journalists (62% to be precise) were murdered allegedly by non-state actors such as militant groups, criminal gangs, local influentials and functionaries of political parties.
- Militant gangs seem to be most active in Sindh, organized crime in Punjab and unknown attackers in Balochistan.
- Of the 53 journalists killed, two women were both murdered by their husbands allegedly for not agreeing to quit journalism in favor of homemaking.

THREAT KNOWLEDGE

Raising alarm over threats that result in murders

Data: Did the victims make threats to them public before being killed?

	Yes	No	Data not available
a. Informed media employer	8	23	22
b. Informed press club	6	22	25
c. Informed union	3	26	24
d. Informed authorities	4	22	27

Analysis

Adequate data is not available about whether most journalists received threats before being murdered or if they did, then did they make those threats public, especially to their media employers, colleagues (at either press clubs or unions) or to the local authorities such as the police. But there is some data available that shows there was little or no knowledge of threats to the journalists before they were murdered that could have possibly resulted in pre-emptive or preventive measures to safeguard their lives. Available data indicates the following:

- More than half the journalists apparently did not inform their media employers, press club, union or the local authorities about any threats to them (if they had received them).
- Less than 10% of all journalists who received death threats before being murdered informed their media employers, press club, union or the local authorities.
- Whether the journalists made serious threats to them public or not, it did not prevent the threats materializing into death sentences for the journalists.

PART 2

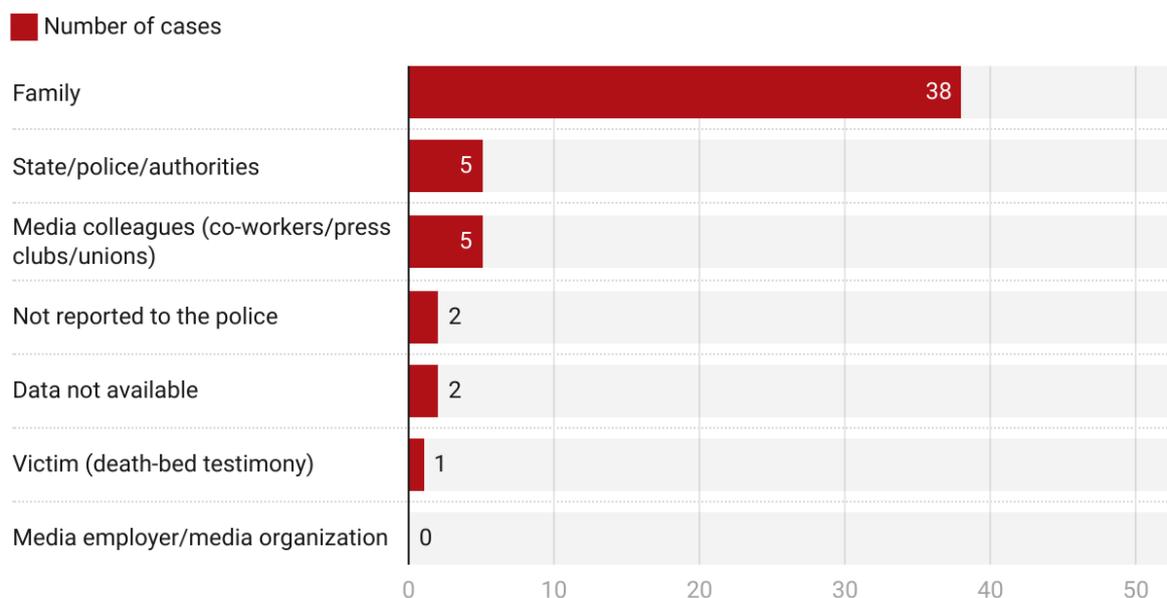
TRACKING FAILURES OF PAKISTAN'S JUSTICE SYSTEM FOR JOURNALISTS

How effective is the legal process in Pakistan in effectively investigating cases of target killing of journalists, producing cases that are fit for trial, completing prosecution in murder cases and convicting the attackers – and providing justice to the victims and their families?

REPORTING THREATS

Becoming party to the case

Who first reported the murder of the journalists to the police?



Analysis

According to the colleagues and family members of journalists and other media practitioners fatally targeted, the first respondent to the murder of the journalist in the process to invoke the legal justice system in an overwhelming majority of the cases – 38 out of 53, or 71.6%, was the family of the deceased. In five cases (9.4%), the colleagues of the deceased contacted the police first and in another five cases (9.4%) the police itself initiated the process. In one instance, the dying journalist himself gave a statement to the police before passing away while in two cases the families of the deceased refused to register a case. No media employer or the organization where the journalist worked became a party to the case of their murdered journalist.

Key findings

- The media organizations or the employers of journalists in Pakistan never become the first party to the case of their full-time, part-time or assignment-based workers who get murdered assuming risks for their journalism work on their behalf.
- In over two-thirds of the cases of journalists murdered, the process of invoking the law and justice system is left to their bereaved families to pursue and undertake, making the matter of seeking justice a private family affair instead of making the employers, on whose behalf the journalists assume risks, a party to the process.
- The state almost never becomes a party to the case of journalists murdered.

INVOKING THE LAW

Registration of FIR

Data: Was a FIR of the case formally registered with the police?

Yes	50
No	2
Data not available	1

Analysis

According to the family members of journalists murdered, an FIR was formally registered with the police in the cases of at least 50 of the 53 journalists murdered. In one instance the family refused to share information about their case and data on this was not available from alternative sources. In one case the family refused to register an FIR citing a lack of confidence in the justice system and the effort required to be associated with the long drawn administrative process. In another instance – in the erstwhile tribal areas, now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – the FIR was not registered because there was no police station in a large radius.

Key findings

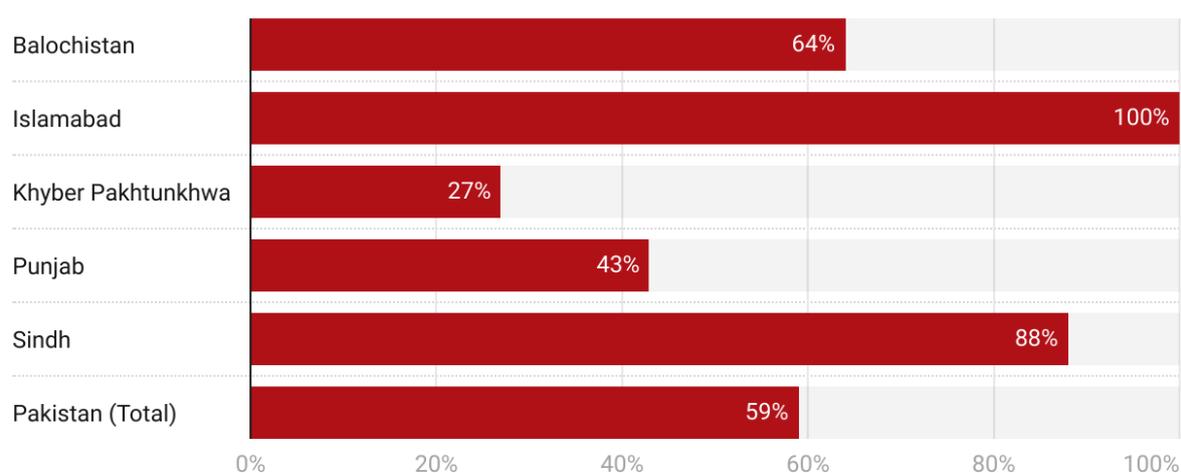
- The very first stage of invoking the legal process to seek justice was completed in 94% of the cases indicating that in almost all the cases the state became obligated to investigate the murder of journalists and find the attackers.

INVOKING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Reaching the judiciary

Was a final challan (police investigation report) submitted to the court?

■ Percentage of cases where final challans were submitted out of total murder cases for the region from 2012 to 2022



Analysis

Of the 53 journalists murdered in Pakistan in the period between 2012-22, information on whether the police completed a challan (investigation report) was available in 42 cases (79%). According to the family members of these 42 journalists murdered, the police managed to investigate the case sufficiently enough to make the case file move to a court in only 31 instances. In nine cases, the police failed to generate a final challan – or a full investigation report – to submit before a court for trial. For two other cases, the challan was not possible because there was no FIR registered about the murder previously.

In the cases where data was available, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab were the worst performing regions when it came to completing a challan while Sindh and Balochistan were the best. In the lone murder case in Islamabad, the police completed the challan and presented it in court, according to the victim's family. Sindh was the second best with challan completed in 88% cases (14 out of 16 journalists murdered in the province) and Balochistan was third best with 64% of cases generating challans (7 out of 11 journalists murdered in the region). Punjab could produce challans in only 43% of cases (6 out of 14 journalists murdered in the province) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in only 27% (3 out of 11 journalists murdered in the province).

Key findings

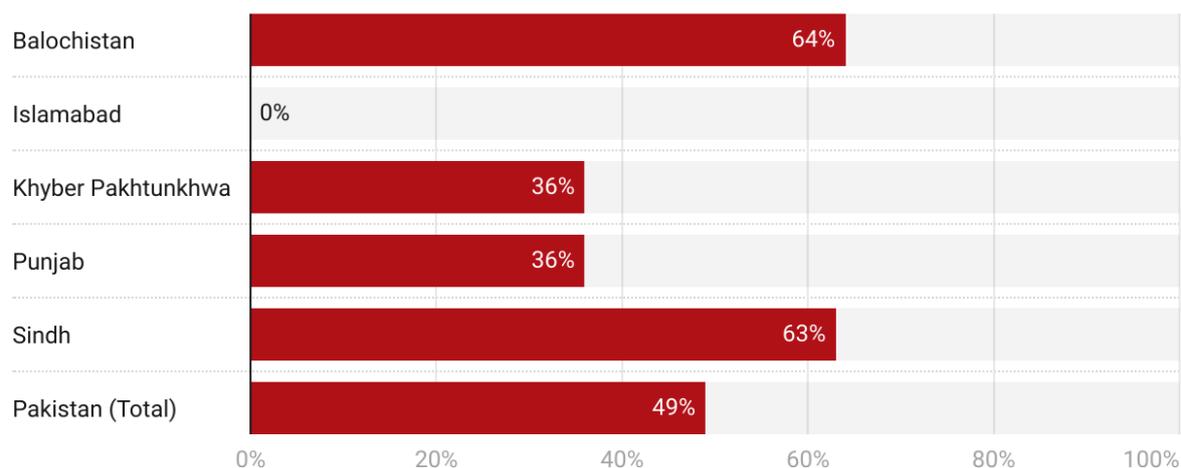
- The state shockingly fails in its responsibility to pursue justice for the murdered journalists and their families in the initial stages of the legal process by the failure of the police in completing a proper preliminary investigation without which the case cannot go to a court for trial.
- Nearly one in five journalists murdered in Pakistan for their journalism work are guaranteed to NOT get justice because their case never goes to a court for trial because of the failure of the police to complete investigation.

INVOKING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Case fit enough for trial

Did the prosecutor declare the murder case of the journalist fit for trial?

Percentage of cases where prosecutors declared the murder case fit for trial out of total murder cases for the region from 2012 to 2022



Analysis

Of the 31 cases where challans were filed (see previous section on challans), courts found police investigations adequate enough to declare 26 cases, or 84% of all challans, fit for trial for further prosecution. Police investigations into murder cases of at least 5 journalists – 16% – were found insufficient to proceed for formal trial. This shows that a majority of the cases (27 out of the 53 murders, or 51%) most likely never reached the stage of prosecution.

The most cases that were ‘fit for trial’ were noticed in Balochistan (7 out of 11 cases or 64%) and Sindh (10 out of 16 cases, or 63%) while the least cases that reached this stage were in Punjab (5 out of 14 cases or 36%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (4 out of 11 cases or 36%) and Islamabad where the lone murder case also did not reach this stage.

Key findings

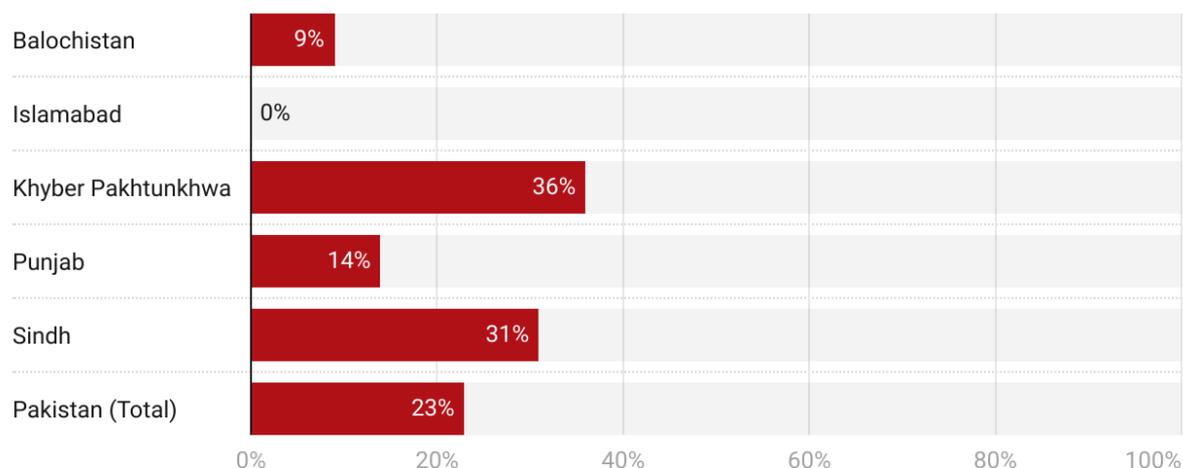
- Less than half of the murder cases of journalists investigated by the police reached the court and were declared fit for trial which indicates that for every second journalist murdered, the race for justice ends at this early stage.
- For about two-thirds of journalists murdered in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, the path to justice is likely to never enter a trial stage making the incidence of impunity the highest in these two provinces in Pakistan, as well as Islamabad which however by comparison had only one case during the reporting period.
- The chances for cases of murdered journalists to enter the trial stage are better in Balochistan and Sindh but not guaranteed for one-third of the journalists killed in these two provinces.

INVOKING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Completing the trial

Was the trial completed in the court?

■ Percentage of cases where trial was completed out of total murder cases for the region from 2012 to 2022



Analysis

Of the 53 journalists murdered in Pakistan during the period 2012-22 for whom data was available, the cases of only 26 were declared fit for trial by a court. Of these 26 cases that underwent prosecution, only 12 – or 46% – reached the completion stage. A majority of the cases declared fit for trial – 14 of 26 cases (54%) – did not reach completion to allow for a verdict to be reached.

Balochistan performed the worst among Pakistani regions related to prosecution of cases with only one confirmed case of a trial reaching conclusion out of 11 – or 9%. Punjab was second worst with only two confirmed cases of trials reaching conclusion out of 14 murder cases of journalists in the province. Even the best performance of a region – Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with four confirmed cases of trials reaching conclusion out of 11 – was only marginally better at 36% and Sindh with five confirmed cases of trials reaching conclusion out of 16, or just 31%.

Key findings

- Barely one in two cases of murdered journalists declared fit for trial in Pakistan completes prosecution in the court. The process of justice for more than half the journalists murdered whose cases manage to reach the court does not even conclude.
- Courts in Balochistan and Punjab are the slowest in completing trials of cases of journalists declared fit for prosecution and that too for less than one in seven journalists murdered.
- Courts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh are only marginally better and fail to complete trials for two out of every three journalists whose cases enter the prosecution stage in the justice process.

COMBATING IMPUNITY

Conviction of killers

Data: What is the final status of court trials of journalists murdered?

	Balochistan	Islamabad	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Punjab	Sindh	Total	%
Murders of journalists for their journalism work during 2012-2022							
Journalists murdered	11	1	11	14	16	53	-
Investigation process							
FIRs registered	9	1	10	14	16	50	94% of all murders
Prosecution process							
Police investigation completed	7	1	3*	6	14	31 out of 50 cases in which FIR registered	62% of all FIRs
Cases declared fit for trial	7	0	4	5	10	26 out of 31 cases in which challan completed	84% of all completed challans
Trial completed	1	0	4	2	5	12 out of 26 cases declared fit for trial	46% of all trials
Justice							
Conviction of accused	1	-	-	-	1	2 out of 12 cases in which trial completed	17% convictions out of all trial outcomes
Acquittal of accused	-	-	3	-	3	6 out of 12 cases in which trial completed	50% acquittals out of all trial outcomes
Re-trial ordered	-	-	1	-	-	1 out of 12 cases in which trial completed	8% retrials out of all trial outcomes
Compromise/ Out of court settlement	-	-	-	2	1	3 out of 12 cases in which trial completed	25% settlements out of all trial outcomes

*Note for table: In some cases, data with supporting evidence (such as copies of original police documents) was not available for the preliminary stages of the criminal justice process but was available for latter stages. In such instances, the research team did not make presumed logical corrections to previous entries retrospectively on the basis of subsequent information. Therefore, a few internal discrepancies in the data, such as the number of trial cases in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa being greater than the completed investigations, were noticed. For this particular example, this is simply because for one such case in the province the status of the police investigation was not clearly known but verified information was available about its trial separately.

Analysis

Of the 53 journalists, including media workers, murdered in Pakistan for their journalism work in 2012-22 for which data was available, trial was completed in only 12 cases and accused killers convicted for their crimes in only two cases (17%). In six cases (50%), the accused were acquitted. In three cases (25%), the families of the victims reached an out-of-court settlement with the accused murderers thereby letting them go scot-free for their crimes. In at least one case (8%), a re-trial was ordered by a high court on appeal of an acquittal thereby producing neither a conviction nor any acquittals.

The only convictions and punishment of accused came from Balochistan and Sindh and none from Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or Punjab. All six acquittals came from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh (three each) while out-of-court settlement came from Punjab (two) and Sindh (one). A re-trial case emerged in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Key findings

- The level of impunity enjoyed by killers of journalists in Pakistan is near-complete. The killers of only two of the 53 journalists murdered in the period 2012-22 were convicted (4%) by courts.
- For nearly all journalists murdered (51 out of 53 journalists, or 96%) the criminal justice system hopelessly failed to deliver when either FIRs were not registered, police investigations were not completed, cases were not declared fit for trial, trials were not completed, or alleged killers were not convicted or punished.
- Due to poor investigation, the police fail to produce challans in many cases, killing the chances of justice at an early stage of the legal system.
- Due to the poor quality of prosecution, most cases never complete the trial process in the courts and even those few that do, fail to establish culpability of the accused who either walk free for lack of evidence or, in one-fourth cases that reach the prosecution stage, strike an out-of-court settlement with the family of the victim thereby cementing impunity for their crimes.

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