

Challenges for Independent News Media in Pakistan

A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance

By Sherry Ricchiardi

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The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), at the National Endowment for Democracy, works to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of independent media development throughout the world. The Center provides information, builds networks, conducts research, and highlights the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development. The Center was one of the of the main nongovernmental organizers of World Press Freedom Day 2011 in Washington, DC.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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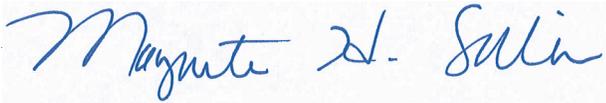
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Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance at the National Endowment for Democracy is pleased to publish *Challenges for Independent News Media in Pakistan*. The report examines the current media landscape in Pakistan with a particular emphasis on the physical safety of journalists working in some regions of the country.

CIMA is grateful to Sherry Ricchiardi, a journalist and journalism trainer who teaches at Indiana University School of Journalism, for her research and insights on this topic. We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts.



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Executive Summary

For two years running, Pakistan has been ranked by international media monitors as the most dangerous place on earth for journalists. Media workers have been kidnapped, tortured, and beaten to death for delving into the nation's potent military apparatus and spy agencies. Bodies have been found with throats slit and flesh punctured with electric drills by Islamic militants, political extremists, and gangsters who take umbrage at what they write.

Underpaid and untrained, Pakistani reporters in the lawless tribal belts have become the eyes and ears of the world for news from this part of the country, covering Taliban insurgents and the terrorism networks in their backyard. They provide information from territory where journalists working for the Pakistan's mainstream media and foreign correspondents dare not travel alone.

These journalists count al-Qaeda leaders, tribal chieftains, religious fanatics, and armed militants among their sources. Many of the journalists have had to flee to safe houses to wait out threats from self-proclaimed enemies.

Mukarram Khan Aatif, the first journalist murdered in Pakistan in 2012, was gunned down at a mosque near his home at Shabqadar, a small town in the tribal region. Aatif was a reporter for Voice of America's Pashto language radio and a correspondent for Dunya news channel. The Taliban claimed responsibility and warned that others would be targets in the future.¹

"The tribal journalists are heroes," said Umar Cheema, an award-winning investigative reporter for the English-language *News International* in Islamabad. "Without them, there would be no media voices from this part of the country."

Pakistan's press system is a work in progress. From the most powerful metropolitan newspapers and TV channels to small radio stations in impoverished rural villages, it has been a whirlwind decade for the country's journalists. The renaissance began in 2002 when then-President Pervez Musharraf freed up the broadcast laws and set in motion a media market boom that revolutionized how news was reported.

At the time, there was one television news channel, and it was state-run. Today, there are around 90 privately owned stations. Independent radio has blossomed. Through their newfound freedom, journalists have affected national politics and foreign policy, including United States-Pakistani relations. They have held powerbrokers accountable in ways unimaginable under former despotic military regimes.

Reporters have exposed corruption, scandals, and abuses that once had been swept under the rug, highlighting issues, setting trends, and amplifying the voices of average citizens. Their numbers have grown from 2,000 journalists at the beginning of the boom to around 20,000 today, according to the Pakistani research organization Intermedia.

Pakistanis are getting more news from more sources than ever before and giving journalists high marks. A June 2011 Pew Research Center poll found that 76 percent of those surveyed believe the media have a good effect in their country.² Noted journalist Huma Yusuf is emphatic: “Pakistan’s media have unprecedented power. In terms of access to information, it is a high point in our history.”³

But there is a dark side of Pakistan’s information revolution. For two years straight, the Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Pakistan the world’s deadliest country for media. Seven journalists were killed in the line of duty in 2011, and eight in 2010. Four were murdered in May 2012, bringing the total to six as of mid-year, according to Reporters Without Borders.

The rigid censorship of past military regimes is gone, but state agencies still exercise a heavy hand when the media delve into forbidden territory: al-Qaeda’s infiltration of the military, for instance, or counterterrorist activities. The government has shut down private TV channels and used the courts to stop critical media coverage.

Shoddy journalism also casts a shadow on Pakistan’s media landscape. While investigative reporters like Syed Saleem Shahzad have paid with their lives for probing powerful state institutions, other media professionals foment divisive and deadly rumors.

On November 5, 2009, a Pakistani daily, *The Nation*, published a front page story accusing *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Matthew Rosenberg of being a spy. The report contained no evidence and only unnamed sources. Rosenberg fled the country.⁴

Pakistan’s media are a prism through which its citizens view America and the world. It is particularly troubling when inflammatory conspiracy theories and misinformation fill airwaves and news pages. Rumor, reported as fact, is epidemic in Pakistan. The media are feeding the nation’s paranoia as relations between the United States and Pakistan sink to their lowest point in years.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton addressed the issue during a visit to Pakistan in May 2011, following the killing of Osama bin Laden. “America cannot and should not solve Pakistan’s problems; that is up to Pakistan,” she told reporters. “But in solving its problems, Pakistan should understand that anti-Americanism and conspiracy theories will not make problems disappear.”⁵

Even as the United States has given Pakistan upwards of \$20 billion in aid since 9/11 and looked to the Islamic nation as a strategic partner in the war on terrorism,⁶ mutual distrust has grown rampant, with media on both sides fueling the debate. Rice University professor Rebecca Goetz pointed to the negative portrayal of Pakistan in America’s media during a July 2012 conference on Pakistan-U.S. relations in Islamabad. She noted the American public had been terrified by images of Pakistan as the most dangerous country in the world.⁷

In September, the *New York Times* reported on the anti-American sentiment. “Such is the media frenzy and warmongering that popular talk show hosts have even begun discussing possible

scenarios of how Pakistan should react if the United States attacks the country. One television news channel has even aired a war anthem,” *Times* reporter Salman Masood wrote from Islamabad. ⁸ A video with the words to the song has been posted on YouTube.⁹

There is a far more positive side to Pakistan’s media, one that speaks of incredible bravery. It holds fast to the highest principles of journalism in a country where suicide bombings, ethnic and sectarian clashes, and killings by the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and their allies target nearly every sector of Pakistani society, from religious minorities and elected officials to media workers.

If journalists poke too deeply into the big three subjects—the military, intelligence agencies, or the religious-militant nexus—the risk factor heats up. Some have survived vicious attacks; others have given their lives for the cause of press freedom.

International media monitors have weighed in on the deteriorating situation for Pakistan’s press:

- Pakistan’s media are on a “tight leash” when it comes to covering military and intelligence agencies, according to a 2011 report by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. The coverage is “narrow, the reporting of sensitive security and human rights stories limited, and coverage in general tends to follow the official line ... Pakistan’s powerful army ... still dictates the broader terms of what Pakistanis can read and watch.”¹⁰
- The 2010 U.S. State Department human rights report criticized government oppression of the media, citing the shutting down of private TV channels and blocking media outlets from broadcasting. It noted that journalists and their families had been arrested, beaten, kidnapped, and intimidated by militants and criminal elements, leading to self-censorship. It singled out the military and intelligence agencies as being off limits to the press.¹¹
- Freedom House ranked Pakistan’s media as “not free” for the sixth straight year. The report noted attempts by key officials in the military, intelligence agencies, and the higher judiciary to silence critical reporting and concluded that physical attacks and threats against the media stifled journalists’ work.¹²

Pakistani journalists cover a nuclear-armed nation, typecast as the cradle of contemporary terrorism and the epicenter of the U.S.-led fight against al-Qaeda and its offshoots. Pakistan has been described as America’s most dangerous ally and foreign policy nightmare. In light of this political intrigue and perpetual state of crisis, how the media cope and whether they adhere to high standards of journalism matters a great deal to their own citizens and the world community.

Pakistan's Media Landscape

On a balmy May evening in 2010, Imtiaz Alam sat on a veranda of the Lahore headquarters of the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) describing what it was like to practice journalism under siege. Every morning he kisses his children goodbye and sends them off to school wondering, “Will I see them again?” In Lahore, “anything can happen at any time,” Alam said, pointing to the day’s events to underscore his point.

That very afternoon Taliban gunmen armed with AK-47 assault rifles and grenades had launched simultaneous raids on two mosques of the minority Ahmadi Islamic sect in Lahore during Friday prayers, killing at least 90 people and wounding dozens more.

Alam is general secretary of SAFMA, a regional media organization that promotes collaborative projects on such topics as nuclear armament, the Kashmir dispute, and other conflicts. At times, militants have taken issue with the group’s activities.

In 2009, a gang attacked Alam on his way home from work. They smashed the windows of his car trying to get at him. Afterwards, he made a decision: “I keep a gun in my car. I have security at home and at the office,” he said during the interview that night. The entrance to the SAFMA office looks like a bunker. There are red and white tank traps in front and a high wall with an armed guard.

Alam blames factions of the Taliban for the 2009 attack and subsequent threats. His greatest fear is for his loved ones.

One morning the journalist answered his phone and heard the words, “We know your daughter is on her way to school.” The voice described the exact route she was taking. After that, he sent the teenager off each day with a bodyguard. “Fear is part of our reality. The hostilities are never far away,” said Alam, as he gestured toward colleagues watching reports of the latest bloodbath on their computers. He refers to his homeland as a “ticking time bomb.”¹³

Historical Perspective: 2002-2012

The evolution of Pakistan’s press system has been highly convoluted, with setbacks over the years from strict military censorship to unconstitutional curbs on free expression. This report deals with major turning points that have impacted media development over the past decade.

Until the early 1990s, the state-owned channel Pakistan Television (PTV) dominated the media scene. Pakistanis turned to illegal satellite dishes and illegal channels to circumvent censorship and religious repression. The real awakening began in 2002 when President Pervez Musharraf broke the state’s monopoly on broadcast media, giving new life to electronic journalism.

The retired four-star general was not making a noble gesture on behalf of press freedom. The military's experience during two past confrontations with India apparently spurred the move. One was the Kargil War from May to July 1999; the other the hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight by Pakistani-based militants that same year. Each time, the Pakistani military felt it had lost the media propaganda war to India.

According to a 2009 report by the Danish NGO International Media Support (IMS), the government, intelligentsia, security agencies, and the military believed Pakistan was left with

In November 2007, Musharraf declared a state of emergency, curbing press freedom through decrees that barred publishing or broadcasting "anything which defames or brings into ridicule the head of state, members of the armed forces, or executive, legislative, or judicial organs of state."

no means to respond because its electronic media were inferior to India's. They reasoned that a modernized media could be used to counter threats from the country's archenemy, and thus the broadcast laws were liberalized.¹⁴

For the next few years, the Pakistani public enjoyed a boom in independent TV channels and radio stations like they'd never seen before. Print media also operated with fewer restrictions. This slackening in state control was short-lived.

Musharraf moved to counter growing opposition from the country's Supreme Court, political parties, and hardline Islamists. The Supreme Court was about to rule on the legality of Musharraf running for reelection.

In March 2007 Musharraf fired Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, sparking the

Lawyer's Movement and grassroots protests that brought tens of thousands into the streets to oppose his interference with the judiciary. TV's non-stop coverage, political commentary, and raucous call-in programs helped fuel public opinion, posing a public relations nightmare for the regime.

During this time, the government's tactics in attacking media shifted: Rather than targeting individual journalists as it had in the past, it began aiming at media companies, "harassing them legally, financially, and through attacks on their facilities," according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

CPJ reported that on March 16, 2007, "riot police used tear gas and batons as they swept through the Islamabad offices of the Jang Group, which houses Geo TV, Pakistan's leading private TV station, along with newspapers the *Daily Jang* and *The News*. The raid came less than a day after the government ordered Geo not to air coverage of street protests sparked by the chief justice's ouster."¹⁵

On November 3, 2007, Musharraf declared a state of emergency, suspending the constitution, dissolving the supreme court, and curbing press freedom through decrees that barred publishing or broadcasting “anything which defames or brings into ridicule the head of state, or members of the armed forces, or executive, legislative or judicial organs of state.”

The ban included any information that would “jeopardize or be prejudicial to the ideology of Pakistan ... incite violence or hatred or create inter-faith disorder or be prejudicial to maintenance of law and order.” Media were forbidden to air live coverage of key political events.¹⁶

When the emergency bans were lifted, the repression of media didn’t end. Legislative elections were set for February 18, 2008, and Musharraf left in place restrictions to thwart pre-election coverage. Two days before the vote, Human Rights Watch warned that “threats and censorship against the independent media, pro-government bias in state television, and a widespread prohibition on live broadcasting limited the public’s right to information as Pakistanis headed to the polls. Restrictions prohibited live coverage of election rallies, protests or any activities that portrayed the government in a negative light.”

State-controlled PTV, with a wider reach than private channels, was heavily biased in favor of the Musharraf-backed Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-e-Azam and its loyalists. On February 11, PTV prominently reported a rally in Islamabad attended by “thousands” of Musharraf supporters. Other media portrayed it as a minor rally with about 400 participants bused in from far-flung villages on the promise of visiting a religious shrine.

A few days earlier, PTV ignored a rally of lawyers and their supporters in Islamabad that police brutally dispersed with water cannon, tear gas, and baton charges, injuring and arresting several protestors.¹⁷

Despite the curbs on the media, the opposition Pakistan Peoples Party delivered a crushing defeat to the president and his allies. Musharraf resigned on August 18, 2008, as Parliament prepared for impeachment proceedings on charges that he violated the constitution. The newly elected government lifted the media restrictions. Musharraf had become a victim of his own media revolution.¹⁸

Media Overview

Pakistan’s media receives high marks for opening up a society long shrouded by political, military, and religious censorship. A July 2009 article in England’s *Prospect* magazine described the media’s newfound clout as rivaling “politicians, generals, spies and mullahs in shaping events in the country.”¹⁹ The press system often is described as lively, competitive, and profitable. It is also fraught with problems.

The Infoasaid *2011 Media and Telecoms Landscape Guide* depicts Pakistan’s media as “beholden to various political and military factions.”²⁰ A 2010 study funded by the European Union supported the finding of cronyism.

Various special interest groups, particularly the military, found for-sale journalists willing to produce or withhold stories. Media workers interviewed for this report blamed low salaries, lack of benefits such as health or injury insurance, poor job security, and lax professional standards for fostering “blackmail journalism” in Pakistan’s media market.

Reporter Salman Siddiqui posted a blog about bribes after an incident he experienced when he covered a conference in Karachi last year. After he arrived, Siddiqui was passed what appeared to be an attendance sheet. Soon after he signed, an envelope was handed to him. Inside was 5,000-rupee note, worth around U.S. \$55.

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“I saw others around me smiling approvingly and accepting the offerings. Before I left the venue after throwing the envelope back at the NGO people’s face, I wondered how exactly one assesses which journalist gets how much,” Siddiqui blogged on January 11, 2011.

“What’s even more disgraceful, I feel, is that many among us actually demand it. It seems as though these journalists hang a price tag, not a press card, around their necks. Like good moneychangers, they offer competitive rates in exchange for writing one sided reports.”²¹

Pakistan’s media scene reflects the country’s social and political divide.

A study by IMS described Pakistan’s newspaper industry as “one in which language also defines coverage.” The IMS report found that Urdu newspapers were more popular and most influential among the general public, particularly in rural areas. The coverage was more “conservative, folkloristic, religious and sensational.” The English-language newspapers were described as “urban and elitist, more liberal and more professionally-oriented. They tended to have more influence on opinion makers, politicians, and business owners.”²²

“The overwhelming idea emerging from the Urdu-language press is that the Pakistani state should stand up against pressures of the outside world, in this context specifically the West,” media scholar Luv Puri wrote in a May 16, 2011, article for *Foreign Policy*. Puri is the author of *Across the Line of Control*, based on fieldwork in Pakistan and Pakistani-administered Kashmir.²³ He noted at the time that the prominent English paper *Dawn* sold 138,000 copies a day; the leading Urdu newspaper *Jang* had a daily circulation of 800,000.²⁴

That alone would not be troubling, but Urdu media often are a source of conspiracy theories that feed public fear and paranoia. Writing for the blog Pak Tea House, C.M. Naim, professor emeritus of Urdu at the University of Chicago, surveyed three Urdu newspapers, *Jang*, *Nawa-i-Waqt* and the *Express*. Naim concluded: “Conspiracy theories naturally abound in these columns, with three dependable conspirators: America, India, and Israel. The labels may change

and become CIA, RAW, and Mossad, or Nasara (Christians), Hunud (the Hindus), and Yahud (the Jews), but their axis of evil remains unchanged. The alliteration [sic] of the last two—hunud and yahud—makes them a favorite and indivisible pair. They generate an assertion that no one questions in Urdu in Pakistan.”²⁵ (RAW stands for Research and Analysis Wing, India’s foreign intelligence agency.)

Two main resources were consulted for the following segment of this report on the breakdown of Pakistan’s media scene: Infoasaid *2011 Media and Telecoms Landscape Guide* and AudienceScapes’ communication profile on Pakistan.

Television

Television is the most popular and dominant source of news in major cities and densely populated areas of the countryside.

The state-run Pakistan Television Corporation has an official monopoly of terrestrial free-to-air television stations, giving it a large share of the national TV audience, especially in rural areas without access to cable and satellite channels. Despite the influx of private TV stations, state television remains hugely influential. It operates from five main centers: Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Quetta, and Peshawar.

According to Gallup, Pakistan had 86 million television viewers in 2009, with 48 million—more than half—being terrestrial viewers who could watch only PTV channels. The United Nations Human Development Report for 2011 estimated poverty at almost 50 percent of Pakistan’s 190 million population, which would affect TV viewership.²⁶

Pakistanis have access to around 90 private cable and satellite channels. Geo News, Dawn News, and Express News are considered heavy hitters for news reporting and current affairs programming. The more than 20 foreign channels include CNN, BBC, and al-Jazeera, and there are at least five Islamic religious TV channels, the most popular being Quran TV.²⁷

Television audiences remain small in conflict-affected and religiously conservative locales, particularly the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). During a survey by the Community Appraisal and Motivation Programme (CAMP), respondents in the FATA were asked which stations they watched regularly. Forty-two percent said, “None.” Less than two percent said they valued TV as a source of information.

Many Islamist insurgent groups denounce television, destroying TV sets in people’s homes and ripping up cable networks. The CAMP study found that professional standards on Pakistani

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television overall were low. Many of the reporters assigned to cover major national events had little or no training. Commentaries on news and current affairs often were ill informed and amateurish.²⁸

The latest BBC national survey of TV viewership measured the most popular TV channels in terms of the percentage of respondents who had watched them the previous week. The most popular were:²⁹

- PTV channels 1, 2, or 3: 56 percent
- Geo News: 36 percent
- PTV News: 31 percent
- Geo TV, an entertainment channel: 26 percent
- Quran TV: 20 percent

Geo became the first private channel in 2002. It is part of the Independent Media Corporation, owner of the influential Jang group of newspapers. It broadcasts two of Pakistan's most popular TV channels, Geo TV and Geo News, Urdu channels, distributed by satellite and cable from the network's headquarters in Dubai. The media empire was founded by late Mir Khalil-ur-Rehman nearly 60 years ago, and is run by his son, Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman. Jang Group has some of the country's top journalists.

Infoasaid reported that ARY Digital TV Network is a subsidiary of the ARY Group, a Dubai-based family owned holding company founded by businessman Abdul Razzak Yaqoob. His initials make up the group's name. This network includes Quran TV channel that broadcasts programs related to Islam hosted by religious scholars and intellectuals. Yaqoob is a wealthy Pakistani businessman based in Dubai. He owns ARY Group of Companies, which deals in everything from food to textiles.

Express News TV, owned by the Lakson Group, is an industrial and commercial conglomerate that also owns the newspaper *Daily Express* and *Express Tribune*. Express News TV was launched in 2008 and is an Urdu language channel that ranked second in popularity as a source of TV news after Geo TV. Hasan Ali Karabahi founded the Karachi-based company in 1954. The company's portfolio includes tea, toothpaste, detergent, textiles, and a fast-food chain.³⁰

Dawn News TV was founded in 2007 as a 24-hour English language channel based in Karachi. In February 2010, it shifted to broadcasting in Urdu. It is a subsidiary of Dawn Media Group, which also owns the newspaper *Daily Dawn* and *The Herald*, a current affairs magazine. The group's news website www.dawn.com claims over 10 million page views per month and is one of the most popular in Pakistan.

Besides Urdu, there are local language TV channels, such as Sindh TV News and AVT Khyber, a Pashto language channel based in Islamabad.

Radio

Radio plays a crucial role in the least developed parts of Pakistan where electricity is spotty or non-existent, cable TV is not available, and the terrestrial signal of state-run PTV often is weak. People in rural and tribal areas are likely to be living in poverty.

AudienceScapes, an online media research program at the nonprofit Intermedia, reported that in tribal areas, citizens are exposed to a steady stream of propaganda from illegally run radical radio. A 2009 annual report by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) found 100 illegal stations run by mullahs or religious extremist groups in FATA alone. Alternatives are government controlled FM stations.³¹

The development of radio continues to be hampered by licensing rules. According to the Infoasaid report, Pakistan Broadcasting Corp. (PBC) runs the state radio network and retains an official monopoly on broadcasting national and international radio news. Private FM stations are not allowed to produce and broadcast their own news under the terms of their radio license, although many find ways to get around it.

PBC allows private radio stations to pass on its news bulletins and programs, and to a limited extent, the BBC Urdu service and Voice of America. FM stations have another disadvantage. PEMRA imposes a maximum coverage radius of 50 kilometers on private FM station transmitters. This restriction gives state-run PBC a monopoly of rural radio audiences that their private competitors can't reach.

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Newspapers and News Agencies

Newspaper circulation has taken a nosedive in recent years with competition from television, news websites and Internet taking a toll as well as a dismal economy. Pakistan's Federal Statistics Bureau places the number of daily newspapers at 252, with 139 weeklies and 279 monthlies. The bureau reported a combined daily sale of 6.1 million copies.

Three media groups dominant the newsprint market: Jang, Dawn, and Nawa-Waqt. Each has invested in English and local-language newspapers, and each is seen to have its own political slant. The Jang Group is Pakistan's largest media company; it publishes the Urdu-language *Daily Jang* and is considered to have a moderately conservative perspective.

The Dawn Group is the second largest media organization and publishes the English-language *Dawn* newspaper, considered to have a secular liberal slant. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation, founded the paper soon after independence in 1947.

Nawa-Waqt publishes the Urdu daily *Nawa-i-Waqt*, along with the English-language *The Nation*. Both are considered to be conservative.³²

Pakistan has three leading news agencies:

- The government-controlled Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) publishes news in English, Urdu, Sindhi, Pashto, and Arabic.
- Pakistan Press International was established in 1956 as a private company to provide an alternative to the APP monopoly. It publishes news in English and Urdu and produces social programs on such topics as human rights, women’s empowerment, literacy, and family planning.
- United Press of Pakistan is based in Karachi and supplies news by fax to newspapers across the country in English and Urdu.

Telecommunications

More than half of all Pakistanis own a mobile phone and use text messaging extensively.

According to a report by Pakistan’s Telecommunication Authority (PTA), there were 102.8 million mobile phone lines in the country in December 2010. The average Pakistani mobile phone subscriber sends 128 SMS messages per month, compared to a global average of 105. That high number exists even though the country’s illiteracy rate is 50 percent.³³

Eleven percent of Pakistan’s population uses the Internet. According to www.alexa.com, a website that analyzes Internet traffic, the most popular websites in order of usage are Google, Facebook, YouTube, Yahoo, Blogger.com, Wikipedia, and Twitter. The most popular media sites are Geo TV, Jang Group, and BBC.

The government has restricted access to certain websites on political and moral grounds. In May 2010, the PTA temporarily blocked Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, and other websites along with Blackberry mobile services citing “material deemed blasphemous.” The move came a day after a court order to block Facebook over “Everybody Draw Mohammed Day,” an online competition that encouraged users to post images of Islam’s Prophet. Most Muslims regard depictions of the prophet, even favorable ones, as blasphemous.³⁴

Pakistan has thousands of bloggers, many grouped by aggregator sites, such as www.bloggers.pk and www.pakblogging.com. An online diary posted on the BBC Urdu website in 2009, “Diary of a Swat Schoolgirl,” attested to the power of blogs. A 7th grader in the northwestern Pakistani district of Swat began posting daily entries after Taliban militants issued a ban on girls’ education and ordered schools to close. Before the ban was lifted, 150 schools were destroyed in one year. The girl’s online narrative proved so popular it was translated into English.³⁵

How Free is Pakistan's Media?

As it has for the past half-dozen years, Freedom House rated Pakistan's media as "not free" in its 2012 Freedom of the Press report, with a score of 63. It ranked 144th out of 197 countries, down from 134th the previous year.

In the words of Freedom House:

Media freedoms worsened in 2011 as journalists faced an unprecedented level of violence and threats from a range of sources, including the military and intelligence services, as well as Islamist separatist groups. The constitution and other legislation, such as the Official Secrets Act, authorize the government to curb freedom of speech on subjects including the constitution, the armed forces, the judiciary, and religion. Harsh blasphemy laws have occasionally been used to suppress the media. Under the 2004 Defamation Act, offenders can face minimum fines of 100,000 rupees (\$1,700) and prison sentences of up to five years ... Since 2010, broadly defined contempt laws were increasingly used by the judiciary to curb reporting on particular cases or judges, with a number of print and television outlets threatened with judicial contempt charges during the year ...

Political actors, government officials, and military and intelligence officers regularly complain about critical coverage, and some attempted to exert control over media content through unofficial "guidance" to newspaper editors on placement of front-page stories and permissible topics of coverage. Fear of reprisals caused some journalists to refrain from being overly critical or to overstep unspoken boundaries, particularly concerning military or intelligence operations. Self-censorship also occurs with regard to coverage of sensitive social or religious issues ...

The physical safety of journalists remains a key concern. Intimidation by intelligence agencies and the security forces—including physical attacks and arbitrary, incommunicado detention—continue to take place.

Online media were used as an organizing tool during the Lawyer's Movement and protests against President Musharraf in 2007 and 2008. Information about demonstrations was disseminated through e-mail lists, SMS, and YouTube. During devastating floods in 2010, Pakistanis used the Internet and social media to raise funds for victims. Images and videos were posted on YouTube, Facebook, and blogs, and information about the most devastated areas disseminated online.³⁶

Media's Conspiracy Culture

Pakistan's conspiracy culture was thrust into the global spotlight when a prominent newspaper accused *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Matthew Rosenberg of being a "chief operative" for the CIA, Israeli intelligence, and U.S. contractor Blackwater in a November 5, 2009, front-page story.

In protest, 21 international media organizations signed a letter to Pakistan's minister of information and broadcasting expressing outrage over the article in the English-language daily *The Nation*. "We strongly support press freedoms across the world. But this irresponsible article endangered the life of one journalist and could imperil others. It is particularly upsetting that this threat has come from among our own colleagues," said the letter signed by BBC, Agence France Presse, Al Jazeera, and CNN, among others.³⁷

The Nation's reporter Kaswar Klasra wrote the page one story titled, "Journalists as Spies for FATA?" Kaswar provided no factual support for calling a fellow journalist a spy. He even accused Rosenberg of trying to hire locals, and when they refused, threatening them with "dire consequences."³⁸

The day after the story ran, an advocacy group, Pakistan Media Watch, posted a blog under the title, "*The Nation* Inciting Murder?"

"If any harm comes to Mr. Rosenberg, *The Nation* will be in part responsible. Kaswar Klasra and his editor, Shireen Mazari, will have the blood of a fellow journalist on their hands," the blog post warned.³⁹

The Nation provides a textbook example of how Pakistan's conspiracy theories work.

A story in *The New Republic* described *The Nation's* editor, Mazari, as well known for her "hawkish nationalism—and deep suspicions of India and the United States." When Pakistani journalists inquired about the Rosenberg story, Mazari defended, it saying the headline ended in a question mark, meaning it wasn't a statement of fact, just speculation.⁴⁰

Mazari would not be cowed. The Committee to Protect Journalists reported that on November 20, 2009, the newspaper ran a picture of an unidentified journalist at the scene of a bomb blast in Peshawar, identifying him as a CIA spy. He turned out to be Daniel Berehulak, who works for the international photo agency Getty Images.⁴¹ The headline on the story: "Mysterious U.S. Nationals."⁴² Mazari has since left *The Nation*.

In a first person story, *Time* correspondent Aryn Baker told of the conspiracy theories she heard while reporting in Pakistan. Two of the most common: Americans were assisting the Taliban in Afghanistan to secure a Central Asian foothold against China, and the persistent myth that

The Nation provides a textbook example of how Pakistan's conspiracy theories work.

Israel's Mossad and the CIA were behind the 9/11 attacks. Pakistan's media were reinforcing the nation's paranoia at a critical time, Baker wrote in May 2009.⁴³

There is no shortage of examples. Zaid Hamid, a right-wing TV personality who rose to fame on one of the country's 90 private TV channels, uses Google searches to support his theory that India, Israel, and the United States are conspiring to destroy Pakistan, according to a *New York Times* story headlined "United States Is a Top Villain in Pakistan's Conspiracy Talk."

In the story, *Times*' reporter Sabrina Tavernise reported, "The problem is more than a peculiar domestic phenomenon for Pakistan. It has grown into a narrative of national victimhood that is a nearly impenetrable barrier to any candid discussion of the problems here. In turn, it is one of the principal obstacles for the United States in its effort to build a stronger alliance with a country to which it gives more than a billion dollars a year in aid."

Tavernise quoted a Pakistani diplomat as saying, "People want simple explanations, like evil America, Zionist-Hindu alliance. It's gone really deep into the national psyche now."⁴⁴

That mentality showed up in the news coverage of Osama bin Laden's death. Many Pakistani TV talk shows focused on what Pakistan should do about America's violation of its sovereignty. TV channels brought on religious politicians who were sympathetic to bin Laden and contentious toward the United States for taking him out, reported Bashir Ahmad Gwakh, a broadcaster for Radio Free Europe's Radio Mashaal in Pakistan.⁴⁵

"The problem is more than a peculiar domestic phenomenon for Pakistan. It has grown into a narrative of national victimhood that is a nearly impenetrable barrier to any candid discussion of the problems here."

— Sabrina Tavernise,
New York Times

Some media made up their own account of events at Abbottabad on May 2, 2011. The daily *News International* reported that one of bin Laden's guards, not the Americans, killed him. According to their version, as the fighting raged, bin Laden reminded the guard of the oath he had taken not to let the al-Qaeda leader be captured alive. Here's how the death scene was reported in the *News*:

When Ahmad [the guard] replied in the affirmative, Osama pulled out his pistol and gave it to Ahmad who fired a shot at Osama's chest. Osama fell down and pointed a finger at his head. Ahmad then shot Osama in the head. In the meantime, U.S. soldiers entered and grappled with Ahmad. They beat him up and took him along with them.⁴⁶

One newspaper put Pakistani troops at the scene alongside the Americans. *The Nation* reported that around 200 Pakistan Army personnel provided ground support with four Pakistan Army helicopters hovering over the fortress-like hideout of the al-Qaeda chief and Pakistani troops securing the perimeter of the compound.⁴⁷

Huma Yusuf writes commentary for the newspaper *Dawn* on security, terrorism, foreign relations, and human rights. She is writing a book analyzing the impact of Pakistan’s independent media over the past 10 years. She described how easy it is for an outlandish remark to become part of “breaking news” in Pakistan.

“I could make a statement on television tomorrow that President Obama called and told me America is coming to steal our nuclear weapons in the next 12 hours. I would suffer absolutely no repercussions for having told such an outlandish lie. Instead, everyone in the media would be echoing what I said. The American Embassy [in Islamabad] would be saying, ‘What the hell?’ and issuing denials.

“Other journalists would repeat it without contacting me to ask what I meant, or how I happened to be talking to Obama, or to check my cellphone for proof of the call. Conspiracy theories in my country take on a life of their own. It’s always a sinister plot,” Yusuf said in an interview.⁴⁸

For Female Journalists, a Steep Climb

During a media ethics workshop in Islamabad, a female reporter complained about a lack of women’s issues in the news. Several men in the room rolled their eyes as she spoke passionately about topics being ignored—domestic violence, rape, forced child marriage, honor killings, reproductive and other female-related health issues among them.

“We face many social and cultural barriers. There will be no change without them,” she said, with a sweeping gesture toward her male colleagues. A handful of the men spoke up, agreeing that women were not given a fair shake in the newsroom or in news content.

Findings of a 2011 study by the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) confirms the steep climb for Pakistan’s female journalists.

The study concluded, “News companies in Pakistan appear to present an unwelcoming workplace for women journalists. Few are getting in, with men outnumbering women five to one. Neither can women look to company policies to assure their day-to-day well-being.”

IWMF’s *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media* surveyed 10 Pakistani news companies—four newspapers, five TV stations, and one radio station. Among the findings:

- Women who are hired find themselves in tiny numbers at all levels of the organization.
- Few companies surveyed have a gender equity policy, none has a sexual harassment policy, and fewer than half have a maternity leave policy. None has a policy to return women to their same jobs after maternity leave.

- Women were nearly missing in the important decision-making role of top management. Only 2 of 50 of those positions were held by females.
- At middle and senior management levels, women’s participation is 16.7 percent and 13.8 percent respectively. Men fill nearly all editor-in-chief, bureau chief, managing editor, and similarly important administrative posts.
- One positive finding—most of those few women on the inside are able to secure full-time jobs with benefits. Salaries appear to be comparable at the lower levels, but less so in the average high range.¹

Despite their diminished status, some women become role models. When Osama bin Laden was killed, Pakistani journalist Nadia Bokhari rushed to Abbottabad to report for the Indian TV station AAJ Tak. “I was the only female there for three days and three nights,” she said.

Bokhari views herself as proof that women can handle heavy-duty assignments, not just the light fare that often is tossed their way. Women are “capable of competing in all fields of life, and especially the communication media, provided chances are given to us,” she wrote in November.²

The problems that Bokhari and her colleagues face go far deeper than their journalism careers. A 2009 report produced by Uks Research Center for Internews found that gender inequality in Pakistan is so severe, pervasive, and deeply rooted in cultural and institutional constraints that women are prevented from playing a role in the development of society. “Women’s presence in the public sphere is condemned by cultural and religious values, thus, making their contributions outside the home difficult, if not impossible,” the report said.³

Fauzia Shaheen, director of the Women’s Media Center, sees signs of progress. There is more serious reporting from women on such topics as defense, economy, courts, and commerce. “They are doing hardcore journalism alongside male journalists,” she said. “As far as women journalists are concerned, I think their voice for their rights is being raised louder than ever day by day.”

1. *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media*, International Women’s Media Foundation, 2011, <http://iwmf.org/pioneering-change/global-research-on-women-in-the-news-media.aspx>.
2. Nadia Bokhari, Pakistani journalist, interview with author, November 16, 2011.
3. “From Classrooms to Newsrooms: Promoting media as a career option for women in Pakistan,” Uks Research Center, March 2009. <http://uksresearch.com/PublicationsPDFs/from%20classrooms%20to%20newsrooms.pdf>.

Pakistan's Journalists Under Fire

Pakistani journalists are free to do their reporting as long as they don't cross the imaginary "red line." Once they venture into forbidden territory they risk ending up like Syed Saleem Shahzad, a well-known investigative reporter who disappeared on May 29, 2011. His body was found floating in an irrigation canal two days later. He had been beaten to death.

Shahzad, 40, a correspondent for the Hong-Kong-based *Asia Times Online*, covered national security and terrorism. He was murdered soon after he wrote a two-part article about al-Qaeda's infiltration deep into the Pakistani navy and shortly after his book *Inside the Taliban and Al-Qaeda: Beyond bin Laden and 9/11* was published.

The Pakistani press reacted to Shahzad's murder with shock, fearing the military had thrown down the gauntlet—poking into the military's activities could be a death sentence. Shahzad had received numerous threats from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the country's chief spy agency.

Pakistani journalists are free to do their reporting as long as they don't cross the imaginary red line.

"In Pakistan, journalists remain at high risk for torture sessions to remind them where the red lines are. Some result in death," Hisham Wyne, a commentator with Pakistan's *Express Tribune* wrote in August 2011.⁴⁹

For the beleaguered press corps, there is no relief in sight. For the second year in a row, the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders have named Pakistan the deadliest country in the world for media. Of the seven journalists killed in 2011, five were targeted murders; all remain unsolved. Six had been killed as of mid-2012, with four murders in May, according to Reporters Without Borders.

A 2011 CPJ report offered a grim appraisal of the hostile environment Pakistani journalists face:

If you cover politics, corruption, or war, you're more likely than any of your colleagues to be victimized at the hands of the military or paramilitary or intelligence groups. You may also become a victim of one of the two sides in Balochistan's escalating ethnic strife or of militants operating in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas, or of political factions, criminal groups, or feudal leaders vying for power.

If threats and harassment don't force you to quit journalism, then perhaps you'll flee your home. If this fails, you may be killed. And if you are killed in the line of duty, it is likely that those who perpetrated the crime will walk away, given Pakistan's near perfect level of impunity.⁵⁰

“There is no protection for them; they are twisting in the wind,” said CPJ Asia program coordinator Bob Dietz. “They know more than they are willing to risk writing about. For instance, there is a tremendous Sunni/Shia battle going on [in some areas of Pakistan]. Roads are closed; villages are under siege. Every once in a while it bubbles up, but there’s not much reporting about it. If it looks like their coverage favors one side or the other, they risk retaliation. They have learned not to dig too deeply.”⁵¹

Some journalists are willing to defy the odds. On May 19, 2012, about 30 reporters from the rugged tribal areas of Pakistan filed into a conference room and settled into chairs around a U-shaped table. A media workshop in the air-conditioned Marriott Hotel in Islamabad provided a brief respite from the oppressive heat and “the shooting gallery,” as one of them described his village in the mountainous landscape of northern Pakistan.

These tribal scribes serve as a pipeline to areas of Pakistan that have become a nesting ground for al-Qaeda fugitives, Taliban leaders, and other militant operatives. They receive meager pay for filing information to major media organizations in their own country and Western news outlets that otherwise would have no contacts in these forbidding badlands.

Reporter Azmat Ali Alizai lives in the village of Parachinar that hugs the border with Afghanistan. In February 2012, a suicide bomber killed and injured dozens of people there. One headline labeled the area “death valley.” Alizai is a correspondent for Associated Press of Pakistan and an officer in his local press club with a membership of 12. He operates with bare necessities.

His well-worn mobile phone manages to pick up a signal some of the time, and electricity in the area is sporadic. He doesn’t own a computer. When he is ready to file copy, he switches on a fax machine and sends his handwritten stories.

The reporter has been kidnapped, beaten, and held at gunpoint by men who torture and kill for a living. He survived a car bombing meant “to wipe me out,” he said. He regularly receives threats by fanatics who take issue with his coverage. He has been accused of being a spy for the CIA.

Alizai stood surrounded by colleagues as he talked about why he does this dangerous work. “If I am stopped from doing journalism, it’s like being killed. They will never silence our tongues or our pens. If they kill one of us, more will come,” he said, as the others nodded in agreement.

Earlier in the day, a young reporter, Essa Khan Khel, whose brother Musa, a reporter for GEO TV, was shot and killed in February 2009 while covering a rally by a pro-Taliban cleric in Swat Valley, underlined Alizai’s words. “I now am a journalist in his place,” he told the group.

“If I am stopped from doing journalism, it’s like being killed. They will never silence our tongues or our pens. If they kill one of us, more will come.”

— Azmat Ali Alizai
Associated Press
Pakistan Correspondent

A Deadly Calling

The list of fallen Pakistani journalists from 2011 and through the end of May 2012 compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) provides evidence that the journalists are targeted from every direction. The following was taken from CPJ reports.

Deaths in 2011:

- *Geo TV* reporter Wali Khan Babar was shot in the head and neck on January 13, in Karachi. A state official told *Geo TV*'s managing director that operatives of Muttahida Qaumi Movement, or MQM, was responsible for the murder. MQM is the third largest political party in Pakistan and is known for its hostility toward journalists. Pakistan media reported that four witnesses to the killing had been killed, as well as the brother of the police officer who was leading the investigation.
- Nasrullah Khan Afridi of Khyber News Agency and state-run Pakistan Television Corporation died when a remote-control device planted in his car was detonated in Peshawar on May 10. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists said Afridi was in Peshawar fleeing threats from militant groups. Agence France-Presse reported that a warlord, Mangal Bagh, had threatened Afridi for his reporting. The journalist was described as a popular figure in the tightly knit journalism community in the treacherous area along the Afghan border.
- Terrorism expert Syed Saleem Shahzad vanished on May 29; his body was found two days later. For months, the journalist had been telling friends that he had been warned by intelligence agents to stop reporting on sensitive security issues.
- Shafiullah Khan, a reporter trainee at the daily *The News*, died six days after suffering extensive burns in a June 11 double bombing in Peshawar that took the lives of more than three-dozen people. The first, small blast went off at a market, drawing a large crowd, including journalists such as Khan who were covering the story. A second, larger explosion, apparently a suicide bomb, went off after the crowd had grown. Khan died in a burn treatment center.
- Asfandyar Khan, a reporter for the newspaper *Akhbar-e-Khyber*, also was killed in the June 11 attack. Seven other journalists suffered minor injuries. The bombing took place near the city center, in an area where military facilities are concentrated and where many major Pakistani media organizations have their offices. No group claimed responsibility for the bombings, and it was not clear if journalists or military personnel were the targets.
- The body of Faisal Qureshi, a reporter for *The London Post*, a political news website, was found outside his home in Lahore on October 7. His throat was slit and there were signs of torture. His brother, Shahid Qureshi, who also writes for the

London Post, told CPJ that they both received death threats from men who claimed to be from MQM. The website they worked for was widely recognized as anti-MQM.

- Javed Naseer Rind’s body was found on November 5, nearly two months after he had been kidnapped in a southern Balochistan province. He had been shot in the head and chest and his body showed multiple signs of torture. Rind was an editor and columnist with the Urdu-language *Daily Tawar*, known for its coverage of the conflicts between rival groups and the government. It was reported that Rind was part of a separatist group in violence-plagued Balochistan.

Deaths through May 2012:

- On January 17, reporter Mukarram Khan Aatif was shot as he was leaving a mosque after evening prayers in the town of Shabqadar in Pakistan’s tribal belt. Aatif was a correspondent for the private TV station Dunya News and worked for Deewa Radio, a Pashto-language service of the U.S. government-funded Voice of America. A Taliban spokesman said Aatif had been warned “a number of times to stop anti-Taliban reporting.”
- The body of prominent editor and writer Murtaza Razvi, the senior editor and head of magazines at Dawn Media Group, was found in a friend’s apartment in a relatively wealthy residential area of Karachi on April 19, according to news reports. His body bore torture marks and his hands were tied, the English-language daily *Dawn* reported, adding that the journalist “had apparently been strangled to death.” Razvi, a columnist and political analyst for Dawn Media Group, had worked as a journalist for more than 20 years.
- The body of Tariq Kamal, a crime reporter for a local Sindhi-language paper was found on May 9 with multiple gunshot wounds and what local papers said were signs of torture. Kamal’s body was found with that of his friend, Fawad Sheikh, a small-business owner, in Pak Colony, a part of the city of Karachi that is often the scene of shootings and turf warfare between political and criminal gangs.
- On May 19, the body of Razzaq Gul was found in Turbat, a city in southwest Balochistan. News accounts said that Gul, a 10-year correspondent for Express News TV, had been shot in the head and chest at least 15 times. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists reported that the journalist had been abducted near his home, but his body was dumped in another part of the city. The union also said the family mentioned no recent threats and that Gul’s colleagues were unaware of any threats against him as well.
- On May 28, men on motorcycles in Balochistan gunned down Abdul Qadir Hajizai, a middle school principal who reported part-time for the private Balochi-language WASH-TV channel. The motive for the killing was not clear. That same day, the house of the local press club president was peppered with gunfire.

More than 200 journalists attended workshops in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi in May, despite a constant presence of ISI spies at every stop. The drill was the same: One agent sat inside the room, listening, taking notes, and occasionally talking on a mobile phone. Another kept watch outside. A reporter in Lahore noted, “For us, this is common. They are everywhere.”

Pakistan’s journalists are vulnerable to fanatics of every stripe.

During a media workshop in Lahore in May 2012, M. M. Alam, a reporter with the *Pakistan Observer*, described his kidnapping by a criminal gang. “They put a black hood over my head. It smelled of vomit, sweat, and blood. They dragged me into a room and took my shoes off. I lost all track of time. They didn’t even remove the hood ... when they beat me.” Alam said he realized the next victim would inhale the odor of his blood and sweat.

“I raise a voice for the poor, deserving, and helpless people. I highlight injustices and the cruelty of political parties who are supporting armed militants. In Karachi, there is no way to be safe, but I will not let them run me out of this profession.”

— Mushtaq Sarki
Shindh TV reporter

His fellow journalists praised his bravery for speaking publicly about the incident since acts of vengeance are common in Lahore. Alam noted that he had been kidnapped three times over the years.

Mushtaq Sarki, a reporter in the violence-plagued city of Karachi, still doesn’t know which criminal gang held him captive for 26 days in December 2005, forcing him to march through hilly countryside, living on a bread, water, and boiled potatoes.

“I asked my captors, ‘What is my guilt? What did I do against you?’” recalled Sarki, a reporter for Shindh TV who covers the crime, politics, and social injustice beats. He was released with a warning “to leave my job and leave Karachi.” He was working for a Sindhi newspaper at the time of the kidnapping.

During a May 2012 interview in Karachi, the reporter flipped open his mobile phone and displayed a photo of himself in a hospital bed, his face wrapped in bandages. “I was sitting on the roof top of my cousin’s home when six armed men burst in, firing their pistols. They beat me and broke my nose,” Sarki said.

The gunmen told him they were from a political party that didn’t like the “bitter” questions Sarki asked during press conferences. They ordered him to stay away from writing about their leader or risk death. That attack occurred in 2010. His nose was broken a second time during a beating by thugs last year.

Why does he still practice journalism? “I raise a voice for the poor, deserving, and helpless people. I highlight injustices and the cruelty of political parties who are supporting armed militants. In Karachi, there is no way to be safe, but I will not let them run me out of this

profession,” said Sarki, who visited the United States earlier this year as part of a study tour for Pakistani journalists.

Some journalists view the attacks as inevitable. “After one does a controversial story, for example, something that ticks off an intelligence agency or a political party known to have a massive militant wing, no matter what precautions you take, one can’t really escape their dragnet,” said reporter Salman Siddiqui, who covers the politics and terrorism beat.

His parents and fiancée pester him about finding another line of work. “I feel very passionate about what I do and the risks that come along the way don’t seem to matter much in the end,” wrote Siddiqui in an email.

He singles out “heroes” like Wali Khan Babar, a Geo TV reporter killed in Karachi by militants affiliated with a political party in January 2011, and Saleem Shahzad, the terrorism expert murdered in May of that year. “There are so many other journalists in Pakistan today who continue to face threats but still carry on with their job and do what they do best: bring out the truth no matter what,” said Siddiqui.⁵²

One of those is Umar Cheema, a soft-spoken investigative reporter who has stared down terror and emerged as a symbol of defiance in Pakistan’s journalism community. Cheema was driving home around 3 a.m. after meeting friends in an Islamabad cafe. Suddenly his car was forced off the road and men in black commando uniforms placed him under arrest on a fabricated hit and run charge.

He was hustled into a black land cruiser, handcuffed, and driven with his eyes covered to an abandoned building. There he was stripped naked, hung upside down and whipped. His hair, eyebrows, and moustache were shaved, leaving deep gashes.

One of his tormentors asked, “Have you ever been tortured before?”

“No,” Cheema replied.

“These marks will stay with you forever, offering you a reminder never to defy the authorities,” his assailant told him.

They videotaped him naked in humiliating positions and warned that the images would be posted on YouTube if he told of the attack. One of the ringleaders taunted him: “If you can’t avoid rape, enjoy it.” Cheema was sexually assaulted before being dumped on a roadside 100 miles outside of Islamabad with a final warning to remain silent. The attack occurred on September 4, 2010.

“There are so many journalists in Pakistan today who continue to face threats but still carry on with their job and do what they do best: bring out the truth no matter what.”

— Salman Siddiqui
Reporter

Danger From Within

Pakistani journalists gathered for a roundtable at the Lahore Press Club one evening in May 2010. Controversy had been simmering over a court ruling to block Facebook after a Seattle-based cartoonist posted an online competition called “Draw Muhammad Day.” The conversation that night turned to Pakistan’s harsh blasphemy laws. (It is a capital crime to say anything derogatory about Islam.)

Suddenly, an older club member rose to his feet and loudly proclaimed that those who insult the Holy Prophet “should be killed, they should be hung, they should be butchered.” The other journalists shifted uneasily in their chairs, but not one responded to the outburst.

Afterward, some of the journalists came up to me to say they didn’t share their colleague’s views, but they weren’t willing to speak out for fear of stoking a hornet’s nest. Their caution was not without merit.

Nine months after that meeting, Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer was shot by one of his bodyguards in Islamabad. The assassin told police that he killed the governor because of his opposition to the blasphemy law. Taseer was from Lahore.

While many Pakistanis mourned Taseer, others built a social-media shrine on Facebook to the gunman, lavishing praise on him. A Taliban commander told *Newsweek*: “The guard who killed Taseer should try to escape after shooting [him] to Taliban territory, and we would love to kiss his holy hands [and] gun trigger finger.”¹

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1. “Blasphemy Backlash,” January 6, 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/01/06/pakistan-more-attacks-may-follow-killing-of-salmaan-taseer.html>.

Still smarting from the torturer’s whip, Cheema went on television and told of the assault. Photos of the gashes and welts on his body and the sordid details of his captivity made headlines in Pakistan’s media and quickly hit the blogosphere.

“Silence was never an option. I had done nothing wrong. If I had remained silent, I would have regretted it my whole life,” Cheema, 34, said during lunch in an outdoor restaurant outside of Islamabad in May. His wife, Sara, sat at his side. “When he doesn’t answer his phone I panic. I am afraid for him,” she said quietly as their son and daughter played nearby.⁵³

A *New York Times* editorial noted that Cheema had “done all Pakistanis a favor by refusing to be intimidated.”⁵⁴ He was a Daniel Pearl Fellow at the *Times* in 2008. Pearl was the *Wall Street Journal’s* correspondent abducted in January 2002 while on assignment in Karachi and beheaded

by his captors.

By speaking out, Cheema brought worldwide attention to the climate of fear that permeates Pakistan's media.

Cheema works for the *News International*, Pakistan's largest English language daily. He has reported about corruption among high-ranking officials and written stories critical of the army and intelligence agencies. After the attack, he told the *New York Times*, "I have suspicions and every journalist has suspicions that all fingers point to the ISI." Prior to the attack, he had been warned by ISI operatives to cut back on his coverage. Once, an ISI officer summoned him to a coffee shop in Islamabad and warned him to fall into line.⁵⁵

The torture session has taken a psychological toll. He stopped jogging for fear that "someone would pick me up again," he said. He works mostly from home, only ventures out "for serious business," and always returns before dark. "I am living under self-imposed house arrest," the journalist said at lunch that day. "If they come to get me again, they will not bring me back alive. I made history by speaking up. This is something they never expected."

In November 2011, Cheema traveled to the United States to accept the CPJ's International Press Freedom Award.

Syed Saleem Shahzad didn't survive to tell of the pain he endured. Laborers stumbled across his battered body in an irrigation ditch 48 hours after his abduction.

The journalist disappeared on May 27, 2011, two days after he reported in *Asia Times Online* that al-Qaeda had attacked a naval base in Karachi after talks had broken down between the Pakistani navy and the terrorist organization. Shahzad wrote that al-Qaeda had carried out the attack in retaliation for the arrest of naval officers suspected of links with the terrorist group.⁵⁶ He often covered the infiltration of militants in the country's armed forces.

On July 4, 2011, the *New York Times* reported that new classified intelligence obtained before Shahzad's disappearance showed that senior ISI officials directed the attack against him in an effort to silence his critical reports. Obama administration officials called the intelligence "reliable and conclusive."⁵⁷ Shahzad knew he was being targeted.

On October 19, 2010, he sent an e-mail informing Human Rights Watch that he had been threatened two days earlier during a meeting at the ISI's Islamabad headquarters with the director-general of the media wing of the ISI, Rear Admiral Adnan Nazir, and another ISI official, Commodore Khalid Pervaiz.⁵⁸ The meeting ended with a comment from Nazir, which Shahzad construed as a death threat: "I must give you a favor. We have recently arrested a terrorist and recovered a lot of data, diaries, and other material during the interrogation. The terrorist had a list with him. If I find your name in the list, I will certainly let you know."

Shahzad wrote an account of the meeting and e-mailed it to Human Rights Watch, the president

of the All Pakistan Newspapers Society, *Asia Times Online*, and the English-language newspaper *Dawn*. He asked that it be released if anything happened to him or his family.

Shahzad’s autopsy report showed he “died slowly and painfully, his rib cage smashed on both sides, his lungs and liver ruptured. Someone, apparently, had intended to send a message by killing him,” correspondent Dexter Filkins wrote in the *New Yorker*. Filkins met with Shahzad in Islamabad nine days before he was abducted. At that time, the reporter told him, “Look I am in danger. I’ve got to get out of Pakistan.”⁵⁹

A special judicial commission was appointed to investigate Shahzad’s death. After six months they reported no success in finding the perpetrators. The ISI has denied involvement.

In her book *Playing with Fire: Pakistan at War With Itself*, the *Washington Post*’s Pamela Constable described the ISI as honing its reputation as “a force to be feared by anyone who falls into its bad graces.” The agency “floats rumors of horrific punishments and secret prisons, where men are said to be thrown into dungeons and tormented by rats, snakes, or staving dogs.” Pakistan’s media tends to treat ISI with kid gloves, wrote Constable, who has covered Pakistan.⁶⁰

The ISI operates beyond the reach of Pakistan’s criminal justice system, said Bruce Riedel, an expert on South Asia at the Brookings Institution. The civilian leadership has “virtually no control” over the army and the ISI.⁶¹

Over the years, Pakistan’s countrywide network of press clubs has served as a safe haven for journalists to relax and talk shop. Now many have become armed encampments.

Over the years, Pakistan’s countrywide network of press clubs has served as a safe haven for journalists to relax and talk shop. Now many have become armed encampments.

To enter the Lahore Press Club, visitors pass scrutiny from guards cradling automatic weapons. A sniper stares down from the roof. When asked why there was so much firepower, a club member responded, “You have no idea how many threats we have had.”

In December 2009, a suicide bomber struck the Peshawar Press Club, killing four people.⁶² Ten months after the Peshawar bombing, Misri Khan, head of a local journalists association, was gunned down as he entered the press club building in Hangu, a town near the Afghan border. Khan was a reporter for the Urdu-language dailies *Ausaf* and *Mashriq*, in Peshawar. There were reports he had received threats from militant groups.⁶³

In June 2011, the Internet was abuzz with rumors that the Taliban had a hit list of press clubs. The list couldn’t be confirmed, but the damage was done.

The Asian Human Rights Commission noted that “the Taliban’s main intention is to intimidate

the media, the journalists, and their institutions so that they stop reporting and commenting on their activities and their ultimate aim, which is to create an Islamic society. The other motive of targeting the press clubs is to create a psychosis of fear in general and suppress those who firmly believe in the freedom of speech, of the media and the freedom of thought.”⁶⁴

On top of the physical and psychological risk factors, the conditions for Pakistan’s media within their news organizations are far from ideal. A 2009 International Media Support study found they varied greatly depending on four factors:

- Form of media, electronic/print.
- Audience, urban/rural.
- Language, English/Urdu.
- Size, local/national.

TV and print journalists had the biggest salary gap, with fulltime TV employees at major stations earning up to 100,000 rupees a month, the equivalent of \$1,105 as of the exchange rate in February 2012. The minimum wage at newspapers is officially 10,000 rupees a month or \$110.50. At larger papers, a regular employee would typically earn up to 25,000 rupees per month, or \$276. Salaries at national newspapers tend to be higher. Other findings of the IMS study:

- According to Mazhar Abbas, general secretary of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, up to 80 percent of the print journalists have no contracts, and media houses invent scams to avoid paying higher salaries. One large paper contracts journalists through a subcontractor in order to deflect complaints about wages directed at the newspaper itself.
- Owners of some rural newspapers tell reporters there are no salaries, but they can make money by selling advertising. Many rural journalists work part time for the local paper and freelance for larger urban or national media.
- Training varies greatly. Some rural journalists have no education or journalism training. Journalists able to read and write English are more likely to make a decent salary.⁶⁵

During workshops in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi in May 2012, around 200 journalists discussed the state of media in their country. When it came to obstacles they faced, the group spoke with a unified voice: Physical safety, financial security, and lack of professional training were the big three. They also talked about how special interests of media owners tainted the quality and content of news coverage.

For many Pakistani journalists, suicide bombings, assassinations, and ethnic/sectarian clashes have become routine assignments. But they also cover stories about medical malpractice and patient

abuse, cricket betting scams, the impact of poverty, illiteracy, gender discrimination, child labor, honor killings, forced child marriage, and women’s health issues.

They spoke with pride about a competitive media scene with the power to influence public discourse on critical issues—U.S.-Pakistan policy, the economy, and social injustice. Every one of them was aware of the dreaded red line. If they cover safe topics, they can sleep at night.

In a column for the *New York Times*, Umar Cheema pointed out that Pakistan’s news media are at a crossroads. “In a situation of doom and gloom, Pakistani journalists offer a ray of hope to their fellow citizens and they have earned the people’s trust. Even former Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain has admitted that people who once went to the police with complaints now go to the press,” he wrote in the *Times*.⁶⁶

Balochistan: Pakistan’s Wild West

In a photo, Lala Bibi is wrapped in a shawl, revealing only her eyes. She stares into the camera, hoping that someone on the outside might take notice. There are two small pictures on the table in front of her. One is her murdered son Najibullah; the other a cousin who is missing and feared dead. Her father, turbaned and grim-faced, and a surviving son, stand like sentries behind her.

On assignment for London’s *Guardian*, reporter Declan Walsh snapped that picture during an interview for his article “Pakistan’s secret dirty war.” Bibi, her hands trembling, described seeing her son’s badly tortured body. “He had just two teeth [left] in his mouth,” she told Walsh, who documented a pattern of atrocities in the blood soaked province of Balochistan.

Walsh led his article with a grisly account of a “kill and dump” tactic that has become common in this barren, impoverished land:

The bodies surface quietly, like corks bobbing up in the dark. They come in twos and threes, a few times a week, dumped on desolate mountains or empty city roads, bearing the scars of great cruelty. Arms and legs are snapped; faces are bruised and swollen. Flesh is sliced with knives or punctured with drills; genitals are singed with electric prods. In some cases the bodies are unrecognizable, sprinkled with lime or chewed by wild animals. All have a gunshot wound in the head.

“This gruesome parade of corpses has been surfacing in Balochistan, Pakistan’s largest province, since last July,” Walsh wrote in March 2011.

The reporter was describing scenes from what he called “Pakistan’s greatest murder mystery in decades.”⁶⁷ Walsh is one of a handful of foreign correspondents to venture into this lawless province, situated along the western borders with Afghanistan and Iran. Human Rights Watch has tagged Balochistan “one of the world’s most dangerous places.”⁶⁸

The array of perpetrators is dizzying, from The Frontier Corps, a paramilitary force in charge of security, to intelligence agencies, armed religious zealots, tribal warlords, pro-separatists, and anti-nationalist groups.

Ali Dayan Hasan, a senior researcher in Human Rights Watch Asia division, describes Balochistan as a “toxic mix of armed nationalist, sectarian, and Taliban actors on the one hand and the trigger-happy military authorities on the other ... Illegal detention, torture, disappearances and targeted killings by the military are commonplace. Abuses by nationalist militants also are on the rise.”⁶⁹

Journalists face threats from at least 15 groups, said Malik Siraj Akbar, a Baloch journalist who recently was granted asylum in the United States after receiving death threats. “It is guerrilla warfare in Balochistan,” he says.

A senior researcher in the Human Rights Watch Asia division describes Balochistan as a “toxic mix of armed nationalist, sectarian, and Taliban actors on the one hand and the trigger-happy military authorities on the other.

During his career, Akbar covered rocket attacks, bombings, disappearances of Baloch doctors, lawyers, and other civilians and political assassinations. In 2008, he landed an interview with Bramdagh Bugti, Pakistan’s most wanted separatist leader. A year later, he founded *Baloch Hal*, the first online English newspaper in Balochistan. Security agents stalked him and intercepted calls to his mobile phone.

“I would answer a call and they would say, ‘Oh, you have a nice new haircut,’ or ‘Those are nice jeans you are wearing.’ They were across the street watching, and they wanted me to know,” Akbar said from Arlington County, Virginia, where he resides.⁷⁰ He

remains in contact with sources in Balochistan and continues to write for *Baloch Hal*.

Baloch separatists want their own territory. The Pakistani army has been brutal in its efforts to quell the revolt for obvious reasons. Balochistan is home to the largest single source of domestic energy reserves in Pakistan, yet the Baloch population ranks among the poorest in Pakistan.

The literacy rate is low; so is life expectancy. There is little evidence that the Balochi people have benefitted from the riches in their own backyard.

Still, few outsiders know the extent of the festering violence or the “kill and dump” policy that is common throughout the province. “If you have not heard of this epic killing spree, don’t worry: neither have most Pakistanis. Newspaper reports from Balochistan are buried quietly on the inside pages, cloaked in euphemisms, or, quite often, not published at all,” the *Guardian’s* Walsh wrote in March.

In his petition for asylum, Akbar wrote, “My friends, colleagues, and I lived with the knowledge

that yesterday it was him that disappeared; today it is someone else; tomorrow it could easily be me.” A 2010 report by InterMedia documented numerous cases of journalists in Balochistan being “picked up by security forces, arrested on trumped up charges, or just disappeared.”⁷¹ Akbar was in the United States on a Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship when he sought asylum in August 2011 and in 2012 was a Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy. He had word from home that another friend had been killed. If he returned, he felt he could be next. When he phones his family in the provincial capital of Quetta, his mother tells him she misses him very much, “but I don’t want you dead. Don’t come home.”

His mother has reason to worry. In August 2011, Muneer Shakar, 44, correspondent for the *Online News Network* and Baloch TV Sabzbaat, was shot by men on motorcycles on his way home from a local press club. He had been covering a general strike that had been organized by a Balochi separatist group.

The Baloch Armed Defense Army has threatened journalists who cover events that support Balochi separatism. *Online News Network’s* Quetta bureau chief told the media the murder was linked to Shakar’s reporting, not to political activism.

In October Akbar wrote a guest blog for CPJ. The accompanying photo showed a crowd of Balochi journalists protesting over lack of safety. Akbar reported that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, (LeJ) an Islamic extremist group, demands that newspapers publish its press releases word for word. A newspaper editor in Quetta told Akbar that journalists would invite trouble if they dared omit derogatory language about government from statements militants issue.

“It’s scary how much these organizations already know about each reporter’s family, home address, and travel routes. They say if they can kill top army officers, then journalists can’t escape either,” the editor told Akbar. Reporters who have spoken to LeJ representatives on the phone say the organization insists that it has a “religious responsibility” to warn reporters at least three times before killing them.⁷²

Media Resources and Development

Fauzia Shaheen sent an e-mail on November 30, 2011, apologizing for not responding sooner to an interview request. Her reason: She was conducting journalism workshops in the rural area of Khairpur, in Sindh Province, and “we do not always have good access to the Internet.” Shaheen is founder and executive director of the Women’s Media Center (WMC) in Karachi, a nonprofit organization that provides skills training and promotes gender equality in newsrooms.⁷³

The center has helped to train more than 1,000 female journalists since its inception six years ago. Many WMC trainees are working in mainstream media holding key positions, said its founder.

Local journalism organizations like Shaheen’s are the driving force behind media development in Pakistan. They work to raise professional standards, improve skills, and promote fact-based reporting. Their outreach extends to lawless tribal territories and impoverished rural areas where media workers are largely ignored. They train trainers so that others can carry on.

Local journalism organizations work to raise professional standards, improve skills, and promote fact-based reporting. Their outreach extends to lawless tribal territories and impoverished rural areas where media workers are largely ignored.

The Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) and the NGO InterMedia are among the leaders in upgrading the quality of journalism in their country. They partner with local press clubs, press unions, media groups, and universities that offer journalism studies. Workshops focus on special needs, from how to write fair and balanced political stories to reporting on ethnic/sectarian clashes, and safety training for hostile zones. Much of their funding comes from groups in Europe and the United States.

23 workshops that covered such topics as reporting wrongdoing and fraud and legal challenges over election results. A handbook on election coverage was posted on InterMedia’s website and is distributed at workshops.

In January 2011, InterMedia launched a countrywide project on election coverage funded by the European Union. Local media workers took a leading role in

With UNESCO backing in 2010, InterMedia provided training on covering conflict in FATA, where outsiders dare not go. Through a network of press clubs, 210 media practitioners, 30 from each of the seven tribal agencies, participated in training sessions. The UNESCO grant helped supply computers, editing tools, digital voice recorders, cameras, and Internet connectivity where possible. The ultimate goal of the program: leave behind alumni to facilitate networking, skills training, and safety measures for media in the region.

InterMedia, supported by UNESCO and the UK’s Department for International Development, has supplied manuals on such topics as conflict reporting and covering humanitarian disasters.

The Karachi-based Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) has been on the cutting edge of media development. During a 2007 pilot project, PPF coordinated information sharing between rural radio stations and the nation's press clubs for elections held in February 2008. According to a report by the International Freedom of Expression Exchange, it was the first time radio stations in small towns were able to air live coverage of a national event in Pakistan.⁷⁴

PPF general secretary Owais Aslam sees the broad network of local press clubs as a key to media development in outlying areas. "They are the only place journalists have to meet and talk," Aslam said.

Last year, PPF partnered with the Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship to train 14 journalists in conflict and investigative reporting, dedicating the program to Daniel Pearl and Syed Saleem Shahzad.

Funded by the United States Embassy in Islamabad, participants attended five days of training, covering such topics as interviewing techniques to elicit information from hostile sources and establishing newsroom safety protocols. Adnan Rashid, 30, a senior producer with IMEDIA in Pakistan, was named the first Pearl-Shahzad Fellow and will do an internship in the United States in 2012. Rashid works with radio journalists in the federal tribal areas.

U.S. investment in Pakistan's media development scene has been relatively small. That doesn't surprise some Pakistan observers. "I would agree, there's not a whole lot going on, and you know what, probably for the right reasons," said Sheldon Himelfarb of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). "It's not as if Pakistan has a shortage of knowledgeable, talented journalists. To throw money at media training the way we have in Afghanistan would be a mistake."⁷⁵

In 2011, the U.S. State Department provided \$2.2 million for an exchange program between Pakistani and American journalists run by ICFJ in Washington, DC.

Pakistani media scholar Huma Yusuf sees another reason: She feels it might appear that the United States government was trying to co-opt the Pakistani media by pouring money into training. "That may have driven some of those decisions," said Yusuf. "I see the United States going more toward an exchange model [for media] rather than a training model in Pakistan."⁷⁶

In 2011, the U.S. State Department provided \$2.2 million for an exchange program between Pakistani and American journalists run by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) in Washington, DC.

The three-year, multi-phase program will bring 128 Pakistani media professionals to America and send 30 American journalists to Pakistan. "This is the largest exchange we've ever done in terms of bringing this number of people to the United States," said Patrick Butler, ICFJ vice president for programs.

So far, four groups of Pakistani journalists, a total of 50, have spent three weeks in newsrooms across the country. Among hosts: McClatchy's Washington Bureau, the *Evansville (Ind.) Courier and Press*, the *Miami Herald*, KGW NewsChannel in Portland, Oregon, and WBEZ in Chicago.

Dispelling stereotypes and myths on both sides is part of the mission, Butler said. In May 2012, Adeel Ahmad Aamir, a broadcast journalist from Lahore, wrote a blog for Portland's KGW NewsChannel 8 about how his views have changed after three weeks in the newsroom.

Aamir wrote that he was "astonished" that no one asked about Pakistan's role in terrorism. "I could not find a single person in 25 days who tried to group us together in the nasty context of Osama bin Laden," Aamir wrote in his column.⁷⁷

That squares with what Butler has heard from other Pakistanis who have participated in the exchange.

"I've really been astounded at how consistently their impressions of Americans changed. That doesn't mean they have changed their view on United States policy toward Pakistan, and that is not at all the point of this program. They expected people to be aggressive, disdainful of foreigners, intolerant of Islam, immoral. They were amazed to find the opposite," Butler said.⁷⁸

Over the years, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) has helped fund the Pakistan Press Foundation and other groups working with media development. Since 2004, PPF has received eight grants totaling \$913,000. The focus has been on increasing information sharing and cooperation between rural journalists and local civil society groups.

NED has helped fund the Women's Media Center since it started six years ago with a total of \$443,000. The grants went toward workshops and conferences to train women on issues of good governance issues and in technical skills related to broadcast journalism.

Pakistan's UksResearch Centre, another NED grantee, has received four grants totaling \$273,000 since 2007. The center promotes dialogue between the public and journalists, editors, and media owners about media content. It encourages debate about freedom of information and media responsibility in Pakistan.

NED grants, totaling more than \$400,000, have gone to four other groups: Center for Research, Communication and Dialogue; Individualland Trust; Balochistan Institute for Development; and Internews. "These grants focused on specific regions such as the tribal areas and Balochistan or election-related journalism training," NED senior program officer Wilson Lee said.⁷⁹

Over the years, the National Endowment for Democracy has helped fund the Pakistan Press Foundation and other groups working with media development.

Internews began working in Pakistan in 2003 soon after the state's monopoly on airwaves was abolished and "we have been going strong ever since," said Oren Murphy, Internews regional director for Southeast Asia, based in Bangkok.⁸⁰

Internews has trained more than 1,700 journalists and journalism students in Pakistan and in 2004 established the nation's first university-based women's broadcast media center and radio station at Fatima Jinnah University in Rawalpindi. It has worked through universities to reform curriculum and improve broadcast journalism education.

Recent Internews initiatives in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA regions include training for university journalism departments, press clubs, unions of journalists, and media outlets. "This has been a good platform for reaching journalists in regions that don't often get much attention," Murphy said.

Pakistani universities have become a hub for efforts to improve media. USIP provided a grant to the University of Peshawar for a two-phase training program to upgrade skills of correspondents who work along Afghanistan's border.

The university's journalism department coordinated workshops for newspaper and radio correspondents, their editors, media owners, and bloggers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the scene of increasingly violent conflict.

In 2011, USIP initiated a project to counter extremist voices through the media. "There is so much discussion about extremism in Pakistan's media, but it's very hard to find rigorous content analysis, especially of the vernacular media," said Himelfarb, who directs USIP's Center for Innovation on Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding. "We will be working closely with Pakistani media experts to fill this gap, and provide an evidence-based map and review of extremism across the media landscape."

During a second phase, USIP and its Pakistani partners will share results with media stakeholders in Pakistan. "This is a very sophisticated media market. They already have identified the problem. We are hoping to provide better analysis and support to enable the media actors themselves to develop a workable strategy for mitigating it," Himelfarb said.⁸¹

Young people are especially vulnerable to extremist views, especially in remote regions cut off from the world. Three years ago, the London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) launched Open Minds, a project that has reached school-age children in 42 state schools and madrasas in strife-torn tribal areas of Pakistan.

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Around 4,000 young people, ages 10 to 19, have received basic journalism training and produced articles, videos, and audio recordings about what is going on around them. One youngster wrote about the army-imposed curfew and a bomb that exploded near his school. A group of children wrote about civilian life amid the ongoing war between Pakistan’s army and insurgent groups. Some of the students never used a computer until Open Minds came into their schools.

Pakistani journalists do much of the training and local media organizations have published the students’ work on their websites. The program began with a \$250,000 grant from the British government.

“The areas we are working in are seen as breeding grounds for extremism,” said IWPR program director Sam Compton. “The young people are learning to think for themselves and express opinions. The project is giving them a voice.”⁸²

Conclusion

For the foreseeable future, Pakistan’s journalists will face serious threats from state security thugs and armed fanatics who specialize in terror. Their fate is inextricably linked to the standoff between the civilian government and armed forces. A 2010 U.S. State Department human rights report on Pakistan paints a bleak picture:⁸³

- Extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture are widespread.
- The TTP, the main Taliban militant umbrella group, targets civilians, journalists, schools, pro-government community leaders, security forces, and law enforcement agents, killing hundreds and injuring thousands with bombs, suicide attacks, and other forms of violence.
- Militant and terrorist groups often attack religious minorities.
- The number of torture cases doubled from 2009. Methods of torture included beating with batons and whips, burning with cigarettes, electric shock, denial of food or sleep, hanging upside down. Observers noted the underreporting of torture throughout the country.

“Journalists are shot like stray dogs in Pakistan - easily killed because their assassins sit at the pinnacle of power ... Journalists have shown resilience, but it is hard to preserve when the state itself becomes complicit in the crime.”

— Umar Cheema
New York Times

None of that bodes well for Pakistan’s beleaguered press corps. “Journalists are shot like stray dogs in Pakistan—easily killed because their assassins sit at the pinnacle of power... Journalists have shown resilience, but it is hard to persevere when the state itself becomes complicit in the crime,” Umar Cheema wrote in a column for the *New York Times*.⁸⁴

When journalist Syed Saleem Shahzad was murdered, it was widely reported that intelligence information obtained before his death showed the military’s spy agency, the ISI, directed the attack. Cheema believes the men who abducted him were sent by the ISI. Amnesty International’s 2011 report also pointed a finger in that direction. Journalists were harassed, ill-treated, and killed by state agents, the report said.⁸⁵

Beyond the scars on journalists’ psyches, the current state of affairs thwarts the media’s watchdog role in a democratic society. Safety and security are essential preconditions for journalists do their jobs. Newsgathering and analysis on the insurgency and widespread violence is diluted when journalists self-censor or go into hiding for fear of retaliation. This adds to the information

vacuum, particularly in areas where Taliban and other radicals have established their own media outlets for propaganda and recruitment.

A cadre of dedicated media practitioners continues to report on risky topics with remarkable bravery and strength. Pakistan’s local media organizations with support of global watchdogs like CPJ and RSF keep a spotlight on them, making certain no attack goes unnoticed. Still, when they are in the field, they are on their own against a wide variety of threats.

“For sure, there are many journalists who strive to bring out the truth even if it means facing death in the end. Most journalists just rely on their luck in this country,” said investigative reporter Salman Siddiqui, who covers politics and terrorism.

Recommendations

- During media workshops with more than 200 Pakistani journalists in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi in May 2012, one concern surfaced above all others: physical safety was at the top of everyone’s list. Safety training and risk awareness must become part of the overall media development strategy in Pakistan.

Some training is being done, but on a spotty basis. Greater efforts should be made by Pakistan’s media companies, journalism organizations, and outside supporters to coordinate and develop collaborative strategies. InterMedia and the Pakistan Press Foundation monitor violence against journalists and provide some safety training. Cooperation with those organizations could expand initiatives and outreach to freelancers, especially those who work in conflict zones; small media outlets; and stringers in rural areas.

- Newsroom managers must support reporters in the field with safety protocols, procedures, and basic protective gear. Safety guidelines posted by the Committee to Protect Journalists, the International News Safety Institute, and others on their websites could be translated and tailored to meet the needs of Pakistan’s journalists without incurring great expense. Roundtables could be held in newsrooms or through local press clubs to discuss best practices for covering conflict and other violent events. Pakistan’s journalists make a strong pitch for more professional training in all aspects of the field.
- Attention needs to be paid to the psychological toll brutality and fear can take on journalists operating in crisis zones. The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma based at Columbia University helps educate the media about the emotional impact of covering violence. Relevant sections of the Dart Center’s “Tragedies and Journalists” could be translated into Urdu or other local languages. Dart Center training modules could be woven into media workshops throughout the country. All of these are posted on the Dart website.
- Emphasis should be placed on modernizing journalism education in Pakistan’s universities, moving from theory-based curricula to practical training that prepares students for today’s media market. Journalism students and journalism educators need to be versed in social responsibility and reporting in a country where violence is pervasive. An assessment of core courses in Pakistan’s main journalism schools should be carried out with the goal of introducing international standards of journalism education. Courses in top journalism schools in Europe, the United States, and South Asia would be good models for change.

- Pakistan’s journalists need training in how to cover conflict. Online resources in crisis reporting and conflict sensitive journalism are available through media groups such as International Center for Journalists and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies and could be helpful to Pakistan’s press corps. International Media Support has a handbook on conflict sensitive reporting available in English at <http://www.asiaing.com/conflict-sensitive-journalism-a-handbook-by-ross-howard.html>. It includes sections on media’s role in covering conflict and humanizing victims of violence, as well as a checklist for conflict sensitive reporting.

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