

Security Risks And Threats To Journalists In Pakistan: A Critical Analysis Of Media Landscape In Pakistan

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Abstract

Journalists around the world including Pakistan, are faced with threats while performing their duties. The Freedom House (FH), Reporters without Borders (RSF) etc., indicates have described that conditions, sources, and prototype for journalists' security are different from county to country so that is the aim of this study is to explore Pakistan's media environment for the variable "threat" in an academic and empirical way. The study calculates the existence, intensity, nature, and sources of threats. The media landscape is divided into five clusters and forty-five respondents were investigated. The sampled journalists make 1.125% of population, acceptable for the generalization. The findings show that journalist faced severe threats to their lives from the establishment. Results also show that journalists considered religious groups as major threats to their lives while reporting on religious issues.

Key words; Security Risks, Pakistani Media, Threats to journalists, Professionalism

Introduction:

Security risks, threats, and mass-communication have a catena of co-existence ripped by the history of the religious, political, cultural, economic and technological developments and their transformation. The world saw the exile of Protagoras from Athens for free expression in front of masses. The death sentence of Socrates and ban on the work of Aristotle are the early example of threats to free expressions and their orators (Cambridge, 2005).

The Bengal Gazette also called the Hickey Gazette published by August Hickey was the first paper in the subcontinent. The newspaper was launched on January 29, 1782, but soon it was seized after a short period of one year and the editor and owner exiled for criticizing the officials of the East India Company (Natarajan, 1962). This was the first threat to journalists in United India and the flow continued to the day present.

In Pakistan, after its independence in 1947, more than one hundred and twenty journalists have been killed, hundreds have undergone injuries, thousands have been sent behind bars, tens have been sentenced and tens are missing (Dawn, 2016). Not only journalists but also the friends and family members of the mistimed journalists have also suffered like the brother of missing journalist Zeenat Shahzadi, Saddam Hussain committed suicide who was grieved for his sister (Dawn, 2016).

Pakistan's media environment is not favorable for media professionals, and it is one of the worst countries for journalists in the world (KT, 2017). Furthermore, in this ground, the Reporters without Borders reported Pakistan as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists (RSF, 2011).

Reports and news and research declare Pakistan's media landscape threatening and security risk for journalists, but no attempt have

been made for to locate the sources, nature, and reasons for attacks on journalists and study nominates the actors behind threats to journalists.

This research explores the ground for ground realities about security risks and threats to journalists. The study sums up confessions of the victimized journalists and collects perspectives of working journalists about the generally believed vicious situation of the media environment in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the year 2018, fifty-four journalists lost their lives for the sake of their profession around the globe, while ninety-one journalists were killed in Pakistan from 1992 to 2018 (CPJ, 2018). According to Freedom House, the situation of press freedom in Pakistan is worst and that was placed in the category of “Not free” in the ranking index for 2017 (FH, 2017). Similarly, the nongovernmental organization Reporters without Borders declares that journalists are confronted with deadly attacks in Pakistan (RSF, 2018). This depiction of Pakistan’s media environment on the international stage makes it obligatory to dig into the field and ask the working journalists whether and how they face the situation.

Most of the studies made in the different countries in the world pinpoint threats in the nexus of journalism as a profession and media professionals. Bajomi-Lazar (2003) in his Ph.D. Thesis declares that journalists are working in an environment of fear from known and unknown sources in Hungary. Similarly, Salleh (2005) in her thesis finds that journalists are at risk in Australia. In the same line Arioba (2012) concludes in his thesis that journalists in Tanzania are facing pressures and threats from the owners of the media organizations, the politicians and other stakeholders. This hold is furthered by Gecer (2014) in his Ph.D. Dissertation where he declares that press and journalists are working under authoritarian pressure and can’t properly contribute to the public discourses. McCargo (1999) finds in his research that media and journalists in South Asia are captive of different interests by content and presentation.

The media environment in Pakistan is highly dynamic in its nature and reflects the legacy of colonial patronage of media-government and media-masses relations till the day present. Although Pakistan achieved its freedom from foreign yoke on August 1947 no serious attempts were made to re-establish and upgrade the media-government relation to make use of free media for the nourishment of democracy in the country and to institute accountability in the state institutions. This conception is portrayed in studies on individual and institutional levels in the realm of research indigenously and abroad.

Dr. Zafar Iqbal (2010) declares in his research article that press and journalists are victims to economic and physical threats and pressure from the politicians and establishment in Pakistan. The same context is indicated by Kalansooriya (2010) who in his research claims that poor working conditions and security issues deteriorate the standards of journalism in Pakistan. Similarly, in a report for the Initiative for Peace Building, Mezzera, and Sial (2010) find that journalists are facing internal and external threats which exert adverse impacts on the standards of media content. Furthering their search, they locate the sources of threats as state and non-state actors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research method by means of a survey, using Guttman Scale, as an instrument for collecting data. Survey technique is fortuitous to get concrete and easily interpretable responses in “Yes” and “No” format. This format is also facilitative for the highly fearing research environment and busy under study population.

Population of the study were Pakistani journalists working with different media organizations. No study or document has the actual number of population of journalists in the country but the generally believed number is twenty thousand derived after authentications by Ricchiardi (2012) and PPF (2012).

Both probability and nonprobability methods were implied for sampling. The population was divided into five clusters i.e. the capital city Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, and Baluchistan and 45 journalists were consulted for

filling the questionnaires following the snowball technique which is a suitable homogenous undefined sample (Zubairi, 2013). Two hundred and twenty-five responses were collected on an equal opportunity basis.

Guttman scale was applied to the collected data for getting empirical results. The Guttman or Cumulative scale makes the data processing easily understandable with no traces of confusion (Kumar, 2016). The “Yes” and “No” pattern of questions gives no escape to realities. Bi-lingual i.e. English and Urdu questionnaire were used to get involved the respondents in their mother languages. The pattern was implemented to facilitate understanding of the respondents. For further authentication of the study twenty-five senior journalists were interviewed and the situation about security risks and threats to journalists in Pakistan was discussed. Five senior journalists were consulted for a face-to-face debate

based on snowball mechanism and interviews were tape recorded after prior consent.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Data collected through close-ended questionnaire using Guttman scale was processed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and was presented in frequency tables and pie charts for better understanding and generalization as below.

Confessions of security risks and threats in the media environment of Pakistan

The following table summarizes the confessions of working journalists about security threats while the figure illustrates the percentage distribution of the responses of sampled journalists when they are asked whether have faced any threat in the line of their duties.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of confessions of sampled journalists about threats.

Have you faced any threat in the line of your duty as a Journalist?	Frequency	
	Yes	100
No	125	
N= 225		

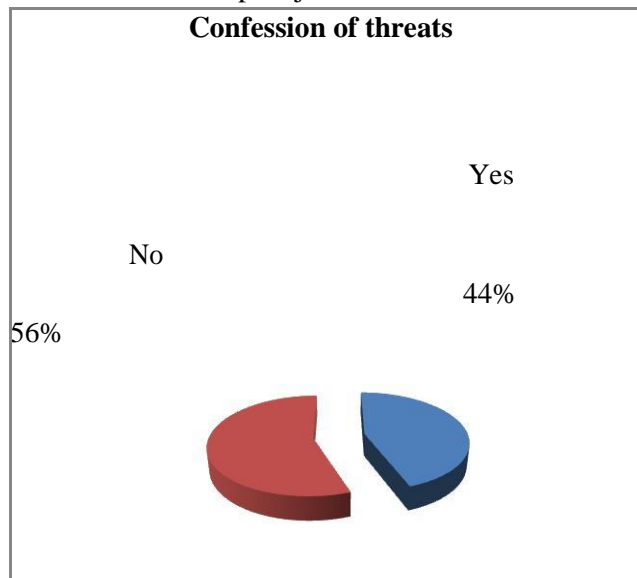


Figure 1: Percentage distribution of confessions of threats

Interpretation: Table & figure 1, confirms the presence of threats in the media environment. Forty-four percent the journalists confess the threats they faced in the line of their duties which

is alarming and needs to be considered for any measurement aimed to protect journalists and assure the freedom of the press as guaranteed in the constitution of 1973.

Table 1.2: Frequency distribution of geographical existence of threats to journalists

Geographical distribution of threats confessed by working journalists	Frequency
Sindh	16
Baluchistan	23
Islamabad	16
KPK	24
Punjab	21
N= 100	

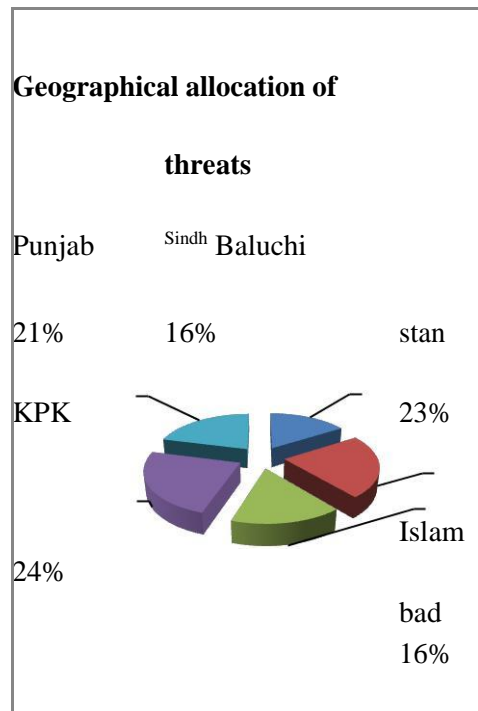


Figure 1.2: Percentage illustration of confessed threats.

Geographical allocation of threats to journalists

Journalists in all the five clusters of the study have confessed threats with a little difference in its intensity. The following statistics represent the empirical of the geographical distribution of threats in the media landscape of the country which nominates the most dangerous zone for journalists that needs urgent arrangements to be controlled.

Interpretation: Table & figure 2, nominates Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as the region where most of the journalists have facing threats followed by Baluchistan. Punjab is in the third place while Islamabad and Sindh stay on the fourth and last

position. KPK and Baluchistan are conflict zones where allegedly Taliban and Baloch separatists are in action and the law-and-order situation is not favorable for journalists to work free of threats and security risks.

Nature of threats

It is important to situate the nature because the findings indicate the directions and tone of threats and security risks. Perceptions of journalists is a stone line and able to be generalized.

Table 1.3: Frequency distribution of nature of threats

What was the nature of threats?	Frequency
Killing	12
Kidnapping	5
Dire consequences	83
N= 100	

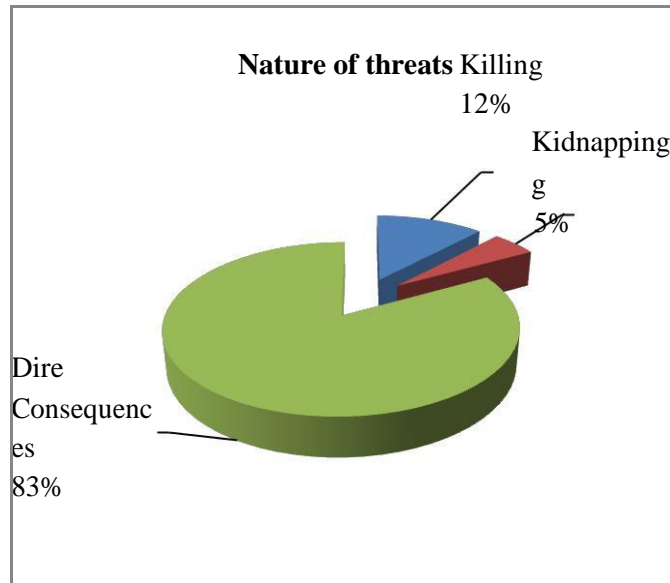


Figure 1.3: Percentage of nature of threats

Interpretation: Table & figure 1.3 reveals that most of the threats are blind in the norm of dire consequences which is the most dangerous aspect of the situation. The tone Dire consequences enshrine all the terrors in its inferences.

Who are threatening journalists?

It is very important to locate the sources behind the threats and security risks. The following statistics after direction consultation with affected persons will nominate the actors who are threatening journalists with zero degrees of confusion.

Table 1.4: Frequency distribution of actors behind threats confessed by journalists

Who was behind the threats?	Frequency
The governing Party	8
The Opposition parties	6
Establishment	11
Law enforcement agencies	6
Traffickers	7
Land grabbers	6
Militants	8
Religious Groups	8
Social Activists	2
Economical Interest Groups	6
Individuals	11
Unknown	21
N= 100	

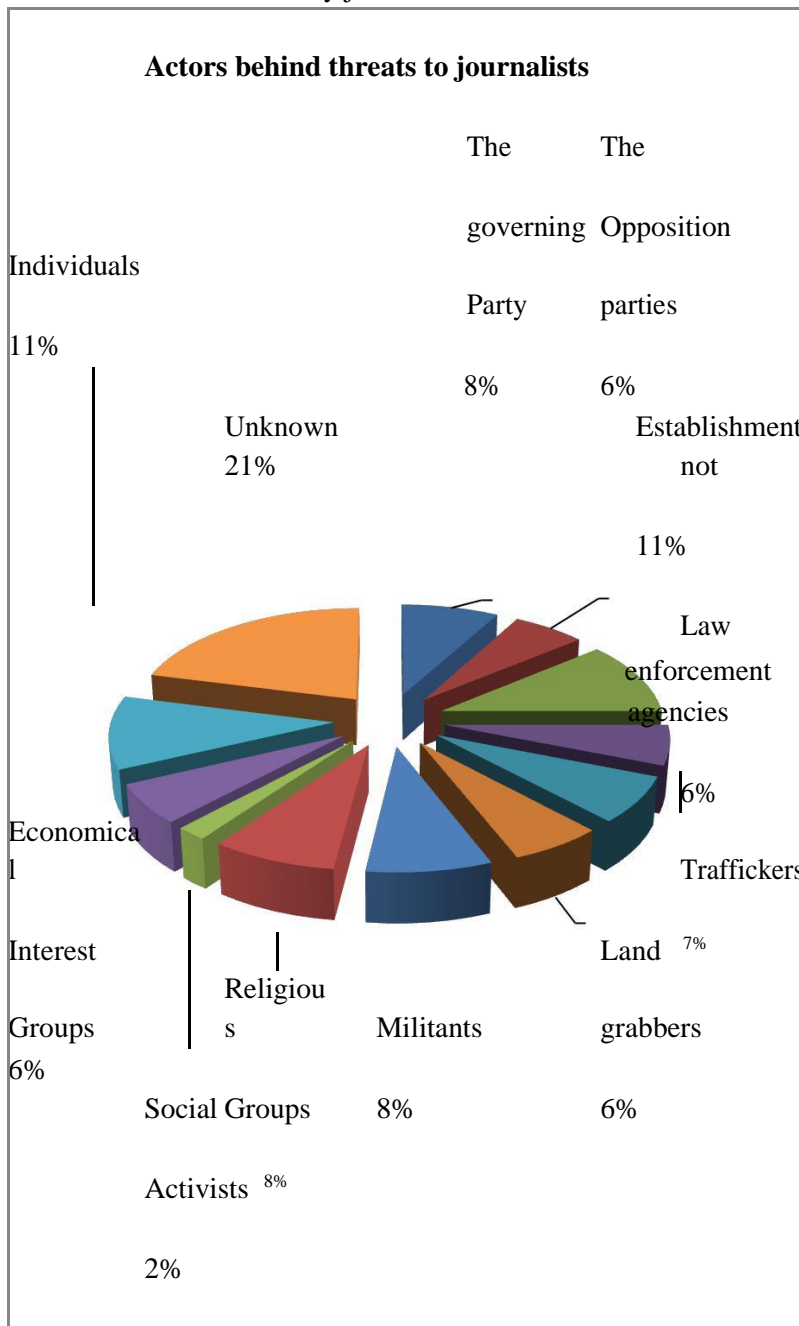


Figure 1.4: Percentage behind threats to journalists.

Interpretation: Table & figure 1.4 indicates that most of the social entities are involved in actions against journalists. The most horrible aspect of the situation that the statistics reflect is the threats from unknown actors. When the origin of threats is unknown that is all time threat which paralyzes a man.

PERCEPTIONS OF INTERVIEWEES

Expert’s opinion consolidate general perceptions and was achieved consulting 25 senior journalists using snowball sampling method for willing engagement as the national psychology urges for conclusive discussions on the situation of security risks and threats to journalists in the media environment of Pakistan.

Similar reflections were found in most of the interviewees' perceptions about the prevailing quandary of threats and security risks; Journalists segregate the situation based on content, workplace, personal persona, and social maturity. According to the member International Crime Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) Amir Latif (2018), journalists working on investigative journalism, in conflict zones and in the outskirts of big cities are more vulnerable for threats as to compare with beat journalism, in peaceful areas, and in the big cities¹.

Furthering the perception of Amir Latif, the country editor of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Haroon Rasheed (2018) divides the media content into three categories i.e. political landscape, state institutions, and religion. The division of content carries three mannerisms i.e. free of threats for the first, partially free for the second and third as the no go area for journalists. The discussion concludes that threats are based on the content, when content are political in nature there is no fear to express, where the content resides in state institutions, the fear of threats is partly but if the content is linked with religious affairs that enshrine full threats².

Similarly in Lahore the former president of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) Rana Azeem (2018) categorized threats based on sources as political, laws and state institutions and opined that in the line of political reporting, journalists know no limits and cross the boundaries of freedom of press while no media law is respected but on the ground of state institutions journalists are facing with threats³.

The president of Hyderabad Union of journalists, Hamid Sheikh (2018) describes threats to journalists on the influence of the source. He says that in rural areas the feudal pattern of society is the origin of threats while in cities the land-grabbers and criminals are the fountains of threats,

and some political leaders are also sources of security risks in big cities⁴.

Adding to the perception of Sheikh, the president of Mardan Press Club M. Riaz (2018) opines that journalists in rural areas are more exposed to threats for journalistic jobs due to direct contact with threatening actors, the power of whom are the clergy and feudal lords⁵.

Another aspect of the threats was discovered in discussions with the former president of Quetta Press Club, Shahzada Zulfiqar (2018) as the sadistic position of journalist economy. Journalists are paid a very little amount as salary which is don't meet their requirements and they have sought other means to earn their livings which turn out threats and security risks for them⁶.

The prototype of threats perceived by Zulfiqar was tinged by the general secretary of National Press Club Islamabad, Shakeel Anjum (2018). He describes that journalists are exposed to threats due to their employers' ambitions to earn money. Reporters are given heading of news to craft a story centered on vested interests which fabricate threats for journalists⁷.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings provide evidence of the existence of threats and security risks in the media environment of Pakistan. Although slightly more than half 56% of the sampled journalists have not faced with threats 44% of working journalists confessed threats in the line of their professional duties which is alarming and reflect the dreading situation. The most terrifying aspect of its nature of threats in the tone of dire consequences which is confessed by the 83% of threatened journalists followed by killing at 12 and kidnapping at 05%. Findings of the survey nominate threatening sources where most of the interest groups are engrossing all the means to pressurize journalists for desired courage or to play down the investigated content against their illegalities.

Results indicate that unknown actors top the rest at 21% percent who coerce journalists for vested interests. Establishment and individuals are following the score at 11%, religious groups, militants and governing parties are equivalent at 8%, and opposition parties, economic interest groups, law enforcement agencies, and land grabbers are on the same place at 6% while traffickers make the part in threats against journalists at seven percent. The most moderate group of intimidating actors is the social activist's organization whose share is 2% in the baleful activities against journalists. The state of affairs is shuddering in the sense that the groups whose job is to protect the rights including the right to expression guaranteed in the constitution are confining the same.

The gravest aspect is the top position of unknown mean-looking sources that transgress the capabilities of a journalist to appease the profession. The survey's findings also stipulate the geographical intensity of threats where Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan are on the top following by Punjab, Sindh, and Islamabad consequently. The portrayal reflects that no region of the state is a haven for journalists and threats are hovering over the heads of working journalists engulfing them when the interests of powerful come on the stake.

Same is the situation perceived by senior journalists during their interviews. Threats to journalists in Pakistan are inevitable as the position of rule of law is weak, society has low tolerance for press's criticism, the social patronage is feudal with no check on them, employers are self-interest driven and journalist's economy is feeble which makes vulnerable to compromise on professionalism or sufferer threats with no hope of betterment.

CONCLUSION

The study endows with ample evidence so it is fair to conclude that journalists are facing threats and security risks in the line of their professional duties in the media landscape of Pakistan. Most of the threats are in the tone of dire consequences and unknown actors top the list of the threatening source while journalists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

and Baluchistan are open to the elements comparatively more than other parts of the county. Poor conditions of the rule of law, low level of tolerance for press's criticism in the society, discontinuation of democracy as governing system in the country, no check on the powerful elements in the society as well in the state institution, diversity in society, impunity, financial gain thirst of the owners of media organizations and the pitiable situation of journalists' economy are main causes of the threats that deteriorate the standards of journalism in the country.

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