



Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries for Freedom of Speech. The country's blasphemy laws are disastrously harming the Freedom of Speech. Such laws are taken as the "Licence to kill" by the sympathizers of the Jihadi groups, radicalized individuals, and the vigilantes.

The year 2017 started catastrophically for Freedom of Speech in Pakistan with the disappearances of five bloggers/ social media activists. In March this year, the dangers to Free Speech reached the boiling point when Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), while shedding tears, swearing in the name of God and overwhelmed by the religious emotions, decreed against Freedom of Speech with threatening a complete shutdown of social media and stiffer punishments for the accused of blasphemy. On March 7, 2017, Justice Shaukat also said, "Those uploading blasphemous material on social media are terrorists."

The Justice received a prompt endorsement from the Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar who warned: "We can go to the extent of permanently blocking all such social media websites which would refuse to cooperate with us in blocking the blasphemous content." The Minister also, wanted people to stop criticizing judiciary and the government. Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb extended the jurisdictions of the cybercrime laws and threatened to persecute those criticizing Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on social media. The Prime Minister and his family have been mocked and questioned on social media on many corruption scandals including Panama Papers. In the middle of the storm, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution asking the government an exemplary punishment for the accused under section 295-C, who are blasphemous on social media according to the government's interpretation.

In another ruling, The Islamabad High Court asked authorities to bring back the departed bloggers making it impossible for people to run for the safety. In October 2016, a Pakistani journalist Cyril Almeida was immediately put on notorious Exit Control List (ECL) after his investigative article on Civil-Military relationship.

This inflammatory, emotionally and consistent provocation has left Free Speech exposed to be lynched and jailed, restricted press and silencing the voices against corruption and human rights. In the speeches, public debates, Friday prayers and on the social media, killing a suspect of blasphemy was widely preaching to be the way to the heaven. Targets of blasphemy have to endure isolation, public shaming and looming deaths for the rest of their lives. Mere doubts are enough for the religiously charged people to kill the subject.

***Irrespective of the accusations, suspicions or acquittal, the victims of blasphemy have to live with threats, possibly in hiding and isolation or leave the country.***

In April 2017, the government and politician's insistence and provocation against blasphemy aggravated vigilantes and radical elements resulting in the brutal mob lynching of Mashal Khan, a journalism student at the Abdul Wali Khan University in Mardan for his liberal views and Freedom of Expression on social media in April. Charged mob hit Mahshal with stones, sticks,

shot, threw his body from the second floor of the campus to death, and later tried to set his body ablaze. Police admitted after his brutal murder that Mashal's social media accounts contained no blasphemous material and many fake accounts were detected using his name.



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### **Murders for Free Speech in 2017**

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- February 2017, Samaa TV's 22-year-old Assistant Cameraman Taimoor died in an attack on DSNG van in Karachi.
- February 2017, unidentified gunmen killed former senior journalist of Geo News, Aftab Alam in Karachi
- April 2017, Journalism student Mashal Khan brutally mob lynched over blasphemy in Mardan.
- April 2017, three sisters killed a man over blasphemy in Sialkot.
- April 2017, Mob seriously injured a mentally challenged man Ahmed, in a mosque doubting his utterance as blasphemous. Imam of the mosque Khaleeq uz Zaman, heroically saved Ahmed's life.

***Blasphemy laws added to the constitution in 1986, since then, an estimated 1,360 people have been charged under blasphemy laws.***

## **In Jail**

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- In April 2017, Veerji Kolhi, sentenced to life imprisonment in Sindh Province. Veerji is a right activist working for the rights of the bonded laborers of the minority Hindu community and also an elected chairman of Bhansar union council in Nangarparkar.
- Two journalists of Saathi Awaz (Sindhi-language) weekly in jail for criminal defamation.
- Two Blogger, Allama Ayaz Nizami and Rana Noman. Police say they have committed blasphemy. A campaign #HangAyazNizami was launched demanding execution for Nizami.

## **Rise of the Vigilantes against Freedom of Speech**

Infiltration of radicals and the dependence of the political parties on gangs and religious seminaries making political parties to side with those demanding censorship and ban on free speech and moderators.

The political and religious parties use Madrassah students (non-regulated religious schools) as the raw material for political gains in instigating violence. The young and mostly impoverished students are easily provoked using religious sentiments and commonly used in mass murdering the members of the different faiths.

- April 2017, PTI councillor Arif Mardan warned the lynching mob about revealing the identity of Mashal's killer. He told the crowd at the murder scene, "Nobody should disclose who shot him [Mashal] and if anyone does, he would have betrayed Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)."
- March 2017, PTI MPA Nabila Hakim Ali Khan submitted a resolution in the Punjab Assembly making Hijab mandatory and additional marks for Hijab wearing girls. The resolution failed after media backlash.
- January 2017, unidentified men brutally attacked and injured TV reality show host Waqar Zaka in Karachi.
- January 2017, three people attacked and injured Journalist Shamsur Rehman Shams in Kohistan. Mr Shamsur is the general secretary of Kohistan Union of Journalists.
- June 2016, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) led government in the province of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) allocated Rs300 million for religious seminary Darul Uloom Haqqania linked to Afghan Taliban and known for producing ruthless terrorists including Mullah Omar.

## Some other brutal murders linked to Blasphemy

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- March 2015, mob lynched two Muslim men, thinking of their involvement in the bombing of two churches. The attack had killed 78 people in Punjab.
- November 2014, the young and destitute Christian couple Shama and Shahzad, were dragged out from their house, beaten and thrown in the kiln they were working at in Punjab. The couple had three kids, and Shama was pregnant at the time of immolation. When Shama's clothing resisted the fire, she was stripped and rolled up into cotton to burn quickly. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) revealed that the brick kiln owner where Shama and Shehzad worked used blasphemy against the couple of desecrating the Muslim's holy book to settle a financial dispute of equivalent US\$ 970. The HRCP also believed that Shama might be alive when thrown into the Kiln.
- 2014, 70-year-old mentally challenged accused Muhammad Asghar killed in custody by his guard likewise Salman Taseer, who was also murdered by his guard.
- 2011, then Punjab governor Salman Taseer and then Shahbaz Bhatti, Federal Minister for minorities, were killed for advocating withdrawing the charges against an accused woman of blasphemy, Asia Bibi.

*Between 1987 and 2017, an estimated 74 men and women killed and 1,480 people have been accused under the blasphemy laws. Most of the murders committed on doubts of blasphemy by the mobs, burnt alive in the kilns or tortured to death for misinterpretations of Free Speech or settling in personal disputes. This law does not reprieve even mentally or physically challenged people.*

## Freedom of Speech under Attack on Campuses

Over the years, mob lynching and vigilantes have taken the law into their hands, primarily using blasphemy laws as a pretext to their crimes. Intolerance and Freedom account almost 98 percent of campus violence in Pakistan.

The strangulation of Free Speech on Campuses has strengthened the status quo of political inheritance and radicalization in Pakistan. Though the military regime banned the student's union in 1984, the successive governments of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) could not reinstate campus freedom and flaring up of on-campus violence. Political parties manipulated the student's unions for their benefits of street power, strikes, extortions, and intimidations. The formation of the unions is based on religious, linguistic and political affiliations rather than intellectual or nonviolent manifestations.

*Mob lynching of Mashal Khan is the worst example of the radicalization of students on campuses in Pakistan, but campus violence to silence Free Speech is not surprising in Pakistan.*

- April 2017, law enforcement agencies arrested two Karachi University Professors, Dr. Riaz Ahmed and Dr. Meher Afroz before their press conference near Karachi Press Club.
- March 2017, Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT) banned Islamic scholar Javed Ahmad Ghamidi's books from the book fair at the University of Peshawar (UoP).
- March 2017, five students injured at the Punjab University (PU) when Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) backed Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT) attacked a cultural show.
- March 2017, International Islamic University in Islamabad (IIUI) told female students to stay on the campus until the university time is over. The female students cannot leave even if they have one class scheduled for the day. They need a written permission in case of emergency.
- October 2016, Angry students of Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba (IJT), armed with sticks stormed the sociology department of the Punjab University looking for a boy and girl seen sitting together.
- October 2016, Prof. Dr. Hassan Zafar Arif arrested and tried in the Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) for listening to the televised speech of his party leader. He was en route to hold a press conference at the Karachi Press Club (KPC). He spent seven months in jail.
- March 2016, boys and girls at the University of Swat have to pay the penalty for walking or sitting together.
- February 2016, two teachers injured at Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology (FUUAST).
- January 2016, more than 22 killed in militant attack on Bacha Khan University in Charsadda.
- August 2015, four students injured in clash over co-education at the Government Science College
- March 2014, three students of Preston University Islamabad were targeted for their ethnicity by the fellow students and severely beaten up.
- December 2014, in the worst campus attack in the history of Pakistan, 144 students and teachers of the Army Public School (APS) killed in Peshawar.

Punjab University (PU), Karachi University (KU), Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) and the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science and Technology (FUUAST) among the universities with periodic campus violence in Pakistan.

Zeenat Shahzadi, a Pakistani journalist for the *Daily Nai Khabar* and Metro News in Lahore, was kidnapped in August 2015 when armed gunmen grabbed her from a rickshaw and threw her in a waiting car. The brazen, daylight kidnapping of a 24-year-old female journalist on a busy street of the capital city was the first of its kind in Pakistan. Read about Zeenat [http://www.cjfe.org/the\\_kidnapping\\_of\\_zeenat\\_shahzadi](http://www.cjfe.org/the_kidnapping_of_zeenat_shahzadi) .

***On International Women's Day this year, the dominant patriarch media had pathetically forgotten Zeenat. One of the leading organizations in Pakistan did not mention Zeenat in an article "promote the safety of female staff."***

## **Media biased**

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Media and journalists have already self-censored and limit the Freedom of Speech. Political manipulations, killings, censorship, misogyny, fear, very high costs to stay in business, and religious affiliations have largely bifurcated media in Pakistan. Based on social media activities of the verified pages and individuals, thirty Press Clubs out of an estimated ninety in the country (as on December 2016), have openly asked for death penalties and harshest punishments for the people suspected of blasphemy. None of the press clubs have officially denounced blasphemy laws. Partisanship is a must for survival, ill-gotten political money and nepotism marred the media ethics.

- April 2017, one of the senior journalists with 305K Twitter followers, urge the government to censor the airing of an Indian song on music channel Jalwa TV complaining about "crossed all limits of decency." The journalist affiliated with the largest circulated newspaper in Pakistan. Another writer with 32.3K Twitter followers has also been instrumental in propagating against liberal activists and bloggers.
- February 2017, a self-proclaimed TV host-turned-preacher threatened a television channel for a complete shut down to the point that the crew may have to leave the country. His hate speech followed by the TV channel's supportive instance towards the disappearance of bloggers and attack on civil society members. The host goes on to threaten the activists with the blasphemy laws. The show 'Aisay Nahi Chalay Ga' aired on Bol News and later banned after Amnesty International and social backlash.

## **Bloggers disappearance**

Earlier this year, five bloggers reported missing and then fled the country. Later, blogger Ahmad Waqas Goraya, resurfaced in the Netherlands. Mr. Goraya said law enforcement agencies tortured him and behind his disappearance. In March, three more bloggers were charged with blasphemy in the anti-terrorism court, Islamabad. Not only in Pakistan, but the government is persuasive to go after the accused of blasphemy across the world. Facebook and Twitter have been asked to identify such activists to extradite them back to Pakistan.

***Inquiry Commission on Enforced Disappearances in Pakistan admits the missing of 1,219 people across the country; disputing the number, some unofficial sources put the number of the missing people three-times higher than the official count.***

## **Censorships and intolerance to political sarcasm and Entertainment**

*“Screenwriters in Pakistani cinema have a gun to their heads”*. Hamza Bangash - independent filmmaker and playwright.

*April 2017*

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- Cartoon channel issued notice by PEMRA over questionable content
- PEMRA fines Hum TV Rs one million (US\$9540) for airing an episode “Chew Gum” in its drama series “Kitni Girhein Baqi Hein.” According to PEMRA, the show was “indecent.”
- Song Jahan Tum Ho on Jalwa TV banned citing “vulgarity.”

*March 2017*

- Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) suspends Dawn News program Zara Hut Kay for three days for debating about an ongoing case before the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC).
- Pemra issues notice to ARY News channel over remarks against the Prime Minister.
- PEMRA bans Geo TV morning show 'Geo Pakistan' for five days citing 'indecent' content.
- Police ban music in Mattani village, Peshawar.

*February 2017*

- Islamabad High Court banned Valentine’s Day celebration.
- Social media activist Nasir Khanjan was arrested and granted bail in Lower Dir, but his case transferred to the Federal Police. The police said Nasir social media activities were offensive to the Pushtuns.

*January 2017*

- Online political satire publication Khabaristan Times abruptly blocked without any justification or notice to the publisher.
- Indian movie Raees banned in Pakistan. The censor board said the movie was painting a negative image of the Muslims.

## **Media credibility**

Some media houses, journalists and social media activists doing enormous harm to Free Speech by indulging in faking news for the reasons of partisanship, publicity, propaganda or simply for



keeping their job. Unfortunately, the culture of fake news is widely practiced in Pakistan – and by some of the very popular anchors. Media houses in Pakistan repeatedly insist for “Breaking News,” and jump to the conclusion even though the occurrence is still unfolding. Retractions, corrections, and apologies are rare. Non-regulated print media boom resembles the Madrassah boom of the nineties. Plagiarism and wrong information could easily be detected in the talk shows, morning shows, and in general relating to the issues of high sensitivity such as rape, rights, children, health, and science.

- March 2017, the electronic media regulator issued show cause notices to nine TV channels for airing “fake news” about a plane crash near Rawalpindi. Notices issued to Ab Tak TV, Waqt TV, Channel 5, Sach TV, 7 News, Aaj TV, Roze TV, News One and Capital.
- February 2017, PEMRA suspended a senior and known anchor with more than 467K Twitter follower for thirty days. PEMRA also fined the TV channel he was on for RS one million. Both the anchor and TV failed to provide evidence supporting their allegation against the Pakistan Army and the Federal Ministers for Finance and Defence. The anchor swiftly changed his employer after the suspension.

### **Attacks of political parties on Freedom of Speech**

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One of the many shocking realities in Pakistan that the armed wings of the main political parties have always been hostile to the Freedom of Expression and Free Press.

- March 2017, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmaker Ali Muhammad Khan warned the bloggers in talk show “Whoever wants to turn Pakistan into a secular state should mend their ways or move to such a country.”
- March 2017, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Aleem Khan infuriated when journalists asked about his involvement with land mafia, the most lucrative business in Pakistan. Aleem Khan used his anger to dodge the questions.
- February 2017, Anusha Rehman, Minister of state for Information Technology snatched journalist Azam Gill’s phone outside the parliament and threatened him with fourteen years in prison.
- October 2016, female reporter Saima Kanwal of K21 News channel was slapped by a police officer in a Federal building. The incident went viral, but the officer was never charged or disciplined.
- October 2016, Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) workers physically assaulted a TV cameraman; the second attack in a month on media by PTI.
- October 2016, Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) workers attacked Geo News DSNG van in Swabi.



