

Pakistan - Media Landscape

Author(s): Najam U Din

Copyright © European Journalism Centre (EJC) 2025 - [MediaLandscapes.org](https://www.MediaLandscapes.org)

Table of contents

- Introduction
 - Media
 - Print
 - Radio
 - Television
 - Digital Media
 - Social Networks
 - Opinion Makers
 - Sources
 - Organisations
 - Trade Unions
 - Journalist Associations
 - News Agencies
 - Audience measurement organisations
 - Sources
 - Policies
 - Media legislation
 - Accountability systems
 - Regulatory authorities
 - Sources
 - Education
 - Universities and schools
 - Professional development
 - Sources
 - Conclusions
 - 5.1 Conclusion
 - 5.2 References
-

Overview

Until the dawn of the 21st century, the Pakistani media landscape comprised almost entirely of print media publications. The only exceptions were two state-owned electronic media entities – a national television broadcaster (*Pakistan Television*) and

a public radio (*Radio Pakistan*).

The government's monopoly over radio and television ended in 2002 when the electronic media liberalisation led to scores of private electronic media platforms to begin operations. Since then TV news channels and, to a lesser extent, radio appear to have become key sources of news and information for a considerable proportion of the population in Pakistan.

A number of print media organisations operating prior to 2002 expanded to include TV and radio platforms, but many new entrants also benefited from the ending of the state monopoly on the airwaves.

Many of Pakistan's established newspapers were founded by journalists with a political or nationalist agenda. However, after the liberalisation of broadcasting in 2002, there has been common criticism towards commercial interests gaining prominence in the media and professional journalism giving way to sensationalism. A large proportion of those working in the news media do not generally get formal training or education to work as journalists. Media schools curricula also do not sufficiently focus on the requisite training needs. Lack of basic training for media practitioners, including those in the field, has been linked not only to biased, unethical or unprofessional journalism but also to safety issues and vulnerabilities for journalists.

Pakistan's is a multi-linguistic media landscape with clear urban-rural disparities. Urdu-language publications have greater reach than those in any other language. The English print media readership is far smaller in comparison but its publications have considerable leverage among opinion makers. The English print media is urban-centric and generally tends to be more progressive. There are currently no Pakistani English-language TV channels or radio stations. Regional-language media boast varying level of influence confined largely to their specific regions.

The footprint of the mass circulation press has been small in Pakistan, and it seems to be shrinking further amid the growth of the electronic media.

Political reporting forms the bulk of the coverage of many print and TV news outlets. This has been most pronounced around elections and important judicial decisions with implications for political entities. Live and prolonged TV coverage of rallies benefits political parties.

Pakistan has long had some tradition of political parallelism. Some political parties have published their own newspapers; the better known examples include daily *Jisarat* and daily *Masawat*, owned by Jamaat-e-Islami and Pakistan People's Party, respectively.

Even in absence of direct ownership of or connections to political entities, an inclination in the news media content to support one political party or another can sometimes be discerned, be it for ideological reasons, economic interests or other considerations.

At times, some TV talk show hosts have been well-known leaders of political parties and have used their programmes to defend and promote the policies of their parties and censure those of other parties.

Proliferation of Internet connectivity has facilitated users' access to conventional media and social media. However, growing Internet penetration has not necessarily led to Internet freedom. In 2016, Washington DC-based research firm Freedom House ranked Pakistan among the worst 10 countries for Internet freedom. Fundamental freedoms for citizens and the media in Pakistan have generally been far from assured. In the country's uneven history in terms of media freedoms, General Zia's martial law (1978-1988) is generally considered to be the period of the most stringent curbs and excesses against the media and media practitioners at the hands of the state.

The state's role as an owner of media platforms is today limited to the *Pakistan Television* and *Radio Pakistan* channels, but the government has a considerable role as a regulator and its advertisements are an important source of revenue for many news outlets.

The print and electronic media require official permission or licences in order to start operating. State regulators can fine and otherwise penalise media organisations for printing or airing 'objectionable' content. The regulator can also suspend or block access to social media websites.

Government advertisements represent an important revenue source for many media outlets. News media organisations have often decried the use of government advertisement as a leverage and the withdrawal of ads as a tool to punish unfavourable coverage.

Pakistan's media landscape will be incomplete without a mention of the work-related violence and threats of violence for the media practitioners. In fact, international media safety watchdog Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has counted Pakistan among the top 10 most dangerous countries for journalists in the world in all but five years since 2000.

Between 2000 and 2016, as many as 105 journalists were killed in Pakistan on account of their work. This represented one of the highest fatality rates for journalists in any country for this period. Out of these cases, the killers have been identified and successfully prosecuted in only two cases. As things stand, Pakistan is among the countries considered least likely to punish media murders. In 12 of the last 15 years, CPJ ranked Pakistan among 10 countries with the highest levels of impunity for perpetrators of crimes against journalists.

It has been argued that attacks on media organisation offices and violence against and intimidation of journalists and the attending impunity have contributed to an environment of self-censorship. The news media appears to have grown increasingly cautious of covering news of sensitive issues such as blasphemy and violation of rights of religious minorities.

Media

Print

Daily newspapers and periodicals have been the oldest and, until 2003, the most recognizable face of Pakistan's media landscape. The struggle for freedom of expression and free media in Pakistan through the years has also largely been synonymous with the efforts of print media journalists. Other media forms have also benefited from the fruits of that struggle.

According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the number of newspapers and periodicals in the country stood at 539 in 2016, down from 1,820 in 2007. There were 308 daily newspapers in 2016, compared to 437 in 2007, 72 weeklies (463 in 2007), 18 fortnightly (92 in 2007), 137 monthlies (686 in 2007) and three quarterly publications in 2016 (compared to 71 in 2007).

According to data by All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), an organisation of major Pakistani newspapers owners, 378 of its member newspapers were printed daily. Out of the 458 APNS member publications nationwide, 19 were weekly, four fortnightly and 61 monthly publications.

The PBS noted that the average combined daily circulation of Pakistani newspapers fell from 9.9m in 2007 to 6.1m in 2008.

This included a circulation of 4.6m for Urdu, 670,743 for English and 640,897 for Sindhi newspapers and periodicals.

Reliable recent figures on print media circulation or market share have been difficult to come by, but circulation of print media organisations generally seems to be in decline.

A range of reasons have been cited for low circulation of newspapers, including low literacy levels and a perception that the print media does not adequately reflect issues of concern for the masses, especially those outside a few main cities.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that newspapers are often shared communally and a single newspaper copy may be read by multiple readers in public spaces.

The state used to own a number of daily newspapers but those were sold or liquidated in the early 1990s. Today the government publishes no daily newspaper. However, it controls the Associated Press of Pakistan, one of the major news agencies.

After the arrival of the Internet, all leading newspapers, including *Jang*, *Nawa-i-Waqt*, *Dawn*, *The Nation*, *The News* and *Business Recorder*, have also started relying on online delivery mechanisms to reach their audience. Almost all major newspapers have also launched TV news channels.

The political leanings among the print media are generally not very apparent, although political slants are visible and government bashing often exceeds what many might consider objective coverage.

The advent of new media has expanded the competition for audiences, and advertisement revenue.

According to *Aurora*, Pakistan's main advertising magazine, total advertisement revenue across mediums increased by 14 percent, from Pak rupees (PKR) 66.9bn in financial year (FY) 2014-15 to PKR76.2bn in FY 2015-16. The total advertising revenue in FY 2015-16 included PKR38bn for TV, which was 50 percent of the total, PKR18bn (23 percent) for print, PKR8.9bn (12 percent) for out of home (OOH) advertising, PKR4.5bn (6 percent) for digital and PKR2.8bn (4 percent) for radio. A two-year (2015-2016) comparison of percentage share per medium showed 1 percent decline each for print and OOH and 1 percent increase for digital. There was no change for TV and radio.

In FY 2011-12, the top five newspapers in terms of print media advertisement revenue were *Jang* with PKR3.45bn revenue (31 percent of total print ad revenue), *Dawn* with PKR1.87 (17 percent), *Express News* with PKR0.86bn (8 percent), *Nawa-i-Waqt* with PKR0.76bn (7 percent), and *The News* with PKR0.731bn (7 percent).

Radio

The history of radio in Pakistan is as old as the country itself. However, until the turn of the century *Radio Pakistan*, which was run by the state-owned Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), had monopoly of the airwaves.

In 2002, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), a statutory body regulating the private electronic media, was established and it became possible for privately owned FM radios and television channels to operate.

By the end of 2017, PEMRA had issued 143 commercial FM radio licences across the country. Another 45 FM licences had been issued to non-commercial entities, mainly campus radios.

Additionally, a total of 62 radio channels of the state-owned PBC today cover 98 percent of the population and 80 percent of the total area in Pakistan. These include 40 FM and 22 AM stations. The AM channels include five current affairs channels.

PBC, which runs the state radio network, has official monopoly on broadcasting national and international radio news. Private radio stations are allowed to relay the news bulletins of PBC and, to a lesser degree, the BBC Urdu service and Voice of America.

The FM licences granted by the government do not permit private radio stations to broadcast their own news and current affairs programmes. The listeners have to depend on state-owned radio channels for news via radio. Some private channels are allowed to broadcast local news.

In Pakistan's rural areas, where access to or affordability of television is limited, there has traditionally been considerable reliance on radio. Private radio has limited penetration in rural areas, where the PBC-run channels *Radio Pakistan* and *FM 101* have a virtual monopoly of radio audiences. With the FM radio opening up to private acquisition in the early 2000s, music, phone-in and other entertainment programmes on the radio have managed to attract an urban and relatively young audience.

Radio audience has multiplied with the spread of phones equipped with FM radio receivers in Pakistan. This helps explain overall radio use among young Pakistanis, who are more likely than their elders to use their phones to listen to the radio. Car users also form an important part of the listener base.

According to *Aurora*, out of the total advertising revenue of PKR76.2bn across all media in the country in FY 2015-16, radio's share was PKR2.8bn (4 percent).

Television

The story of television in Pakistan is in certain respects similar to that of radio. State-owned *Pakistan Television* (PTV), remained the only TV channel in the country for a long time. It was only after the establishment of PEMRA that privately owned TV channels were permitted to operate.

An important distinction, however, was that unlike radio stations, dozens of private TV channels were allowed to broadcast their own news and current affairs programmes.

In the 16 years since private TV channels began operating, television has become the dominant medium and the medium of choice not just for accessing news but also infotainment and entertainment content. Wherever television is available, most Pakistanis seem to prefer it to radio as a source of information.

As of late 2017, 89 satellite TV licences had been issued by PEMRA. Another 29 foreign channels had been granted landing rights.

At least 30 private TV channels, prominent among them *Geo News*, *Dawn News*, *Aaj TV*, *ARY News*, *Capital TV*, *Samaa*, *Dunya News*, *Waqt News*, and *Express News*, exclusively broadcast news and current affairs programmes. Many print media organisations operating prior to 2002 expanded to include TV news platforms. Almost all TV news channels maintain their websites, which include news coverage from their main platforms.

While the broadcasts of the clear majority of news and entertainment channels are in Urdu, transmissions of a number of TV channels are in regional languages, such as Pashtu, Sindhi, Balochi, Punjabi and Seraiki.

The country's first English-language news channel, *Dawn News*, started test transmissions in May 2007 and went live in July the same year. In May 2010, it started only Urdu broadcasts due to financial reasons related to thin viewership for English-only content in the country. *Express 24/7*, the only other English-language television channel to be established in Pakistan,

remained the only 24-hour English-language news channel in Pakistan until its closure in November 2011. The proprietors cited difficult economic circumstances and insufficient advertisements as the reasons for the closure.

According to Gallup Pakistan, the Pakistani affiliate of Gallup International Association and a pioneer in media research, at the end of 2016 on average a Pakistani TV viewer spent two hours a day watching television.

Many sections of the TV news media have faced strong criticism for an inclination for breaking the news first at all cost and engaging in what can only be described as sensationalism.

The news media coverage of politics at times does not have a moderating role and delves into subjectivity. Some TV talk shows proceed to discuss and condemn a certain organisation, institution or political party's policies or decisions, often without inviting representatives from or seeking the stance of that institution.

At times, some TV talk show hosts have been well-known leaders of political parties and use their programmes to defend and promote the policies of their parties and censure those of other parties.

Private TV channels are only authorised to broadcast content by cable and satellite and not via terrestrial transmitters. That has contributed to a smaller footprint for the private television channels in rural Pakistan. Only the channels of the state-run *PTV* use terrestrial transmission, which has enabled *PTV* to maintain its domination of rural TV audiences.

The Pakistani television sector has quickly managed to overtake other mediums in terms of both audiences and revenue. Gallup Pakistan estimated that there were 86 million TV viewers in Pakistan in 2009. Out of these, 48 million were terrestrial viewers who could only receive *PTV* channels.

The popularity of direct satellite television has gradually waned. TV news and entertainment channels depend almost entirely on cable networks to reach the audience. Almost all of the electronic media revenue is generated through on-air advertising. Cable networks do not pay anything to the channels for transmitting their content. The channels do not charge any subscription fee from the end consumer either.

In the total advertisement revenue of PKR76.2bn for all mediums in the country in FY 2015-16, half (PKR38bn) went to TV channels while the rest was divided among other mediums. Among the TV channels, the top earners were *Hum TV* (PKR3.84bn), *ARY Digital* (PKR3.80bn), *PTV Sports* (PKR3bn), *Geo Entertainment* (PKR2.93bn) and *Geo News* (PKR2.6bn). The advert income share included PKR2.5bn each for *PTV Home* and *Urdu1*, PKR1.9bn for *Samaa*, and PKR1.8bn each for *ARY News*, *Dunya News* and *Express News*.

Digital Media

Every Pakistani newspaper of note now has both a digital and a print version. All TV news channels also maintain websites, which usually contain news in text and video coverage from the transmission of their main platforms. This has come about in conjunction with rapid growth in Internet access in the country. The number of broadband subscribers in the country grew from 5.1 million in 2013-14 to 44.5 million in 2016-2017. Pakistanis use well known search engines or websites of popular media platforms to access content.

The websites of most Urdu-language news channels often contain news in English text only. Some online news portals use resources of news media platforms and others are independent news portals which only have a digital existence.

The newspaper and TV channel's digital versions do not earn any direct revenue from visitors to their websites as there are no subscription requirements or pay walls. Whatever revenue they derive is solely from the sale of advertising spaces.

However, many media organisations in the country are yet to work out a way to make money from their websites. News media organisations have not shared statistics to indicate the extent of their digital circulation.

Social Networks

From 133,900 Internet users in the year 2000 to 44.61 million at the end of 2017, the Internet penetration has reached more than 22 percent of the Pakistani population, according to Internet World Stats. The connections have also improved in speed and cost effectiveness.

Technological changes have contributed to changing the ways in which audiences access and consume news and information and engage in discourses in the public sphere. Social networks are more popular in Pakistan than blogs and news websites as a venue for sharing user-generated content. There are around 32 million Facebook users from Pakistan. At the end of 2016, there were 3.9 million active Instagram users. As of July 2016, there were 3.1 million users of Twitter.

One of the reasons behind increasing social media users in the country is the penetration of 3G/4G technology in Pakistan. There are 146 million cellular subscribers (72 percent teledensity), 49 million 3G/4G subscribers (24.44 percent penetration) and 52 million Broadband subscribers (25.6 percent penetration) in the country, according to Pakistan Telecommunications Authority.

Despite the somewhat smaller number of its users, Twitter has become the preferred social network of Pakistani politicians, celebrities, journalists and social activists, who often use tweets as a medium to express themselves and engage with the public.

The conventional news media as well as civil society organisations increasingly use social media, including Twitter and Facebook, to draw attention to their content.

Entertainment programmes and current affair talk shows are uploaded and accessed on Pakistani and international video-sharing websites and platforms, such as YouTube, *Dailymotion*, *Tune.PK* and *Zem TV*.

In January 2016, Pakistan lifted a 2012 ban on YouTube in Pakistan. The website was blocked after a video posted on it led to widespread protests and complaints of blasphemy and injury to religious sentiments. After the website was unblocked in January 2016, users were redirected to a local version, *YouTube PK*.

The total digital advertisement revenue for Pakistan was PKR1bn in FY 2011-12. Google predictably topped the list with PKR0.25bn (25 percent of market share in the segment), followed by Facebook (PKR0.1bn). The top 15 websites in terms of advertisement revenue included a number of Pakistani media organisations, including *Jang.com.pk* (PKR0.08bn), *Geo.tv* (PKR0.05bn), *Dawn.com* (PKR0.04bn), *Express.com.pk* (PKR0.022bn), *Brecorder.com* (PKR0.02bn) and *Tribune.com.pk* (PKR0.018bn).

In FY 2014-15, digital advertising revenue had risen to PKR3.54bn. In FY 2015-16, digital revenue rose further to PKR4.5bn, which was 6 percent of the overall advertisement revenue across all media over that period.

Opinion Makers

Perhaps one of the most well-known blogs in Pakistan's history was run by Malala Yousafzai, a teenage girl from the troubled Swat region in northern Pakistan, called *Diary of a Swat Schoolgirl*. The blog drew attention to the threat religious extremists posed to girls' education. Malala went on to become Pakistan's youngest Nobel laureate, but not before the Taliban

ambushed her school van and shot her in the head for opposition to their actions.

Blogging has increased in sync with the rise in Internet access. Even though the number of independent bloggers is on the rise in Pakistan, the blogs of established media groups dominate the Pakistani blogosphere. The top blogs in Pakistan in terms of traffic are published by Urdu daily newspaper *Jang* and the English-language dailies *The Express Tribune*, *Dawn*, and *The News*. Increasingly, independent bloggers prefer to publish their posts on established news sites because of the greater exposure they offer.

With the increased use of the online space, the challenges confined to print and electronic media practitioners have also visited upon those voicing their opinions online. In January 2017, at least half a dozen bloggers and social media users became victims of apparent enforced disappearance in separate incidents. Some of the individuals accused state agencies of involvement after they were released.

Sources

Newspapers

- [Business Recorder](#)
- [Daily Dunya](#)
- [Daily Express](#)
- [Daily Jang](#)
- [Daily Times](#)
- [Dawn](#)
- [Din](#)
- [Herald](#)
- [Khabrain](#)
- [Nawa-i-Waqt](#)
- [Newsline](#)
- [Pakistan Today](#)
- [The Express Tribune](#)
- [The Friday Times](#)
- [The Nation](#)
- [The News International](#)

Radio

- [CITY FM89](#)
- [FM 101](#)
- [Hum FM 106](#)
- [Mast FM Lahore](#)
- [Radio Pakistan](#)
- [Radio1 FM91](#)
- [Samaa FM](#)

Television

- [Aaj News](#)

- [ARY News](#)
- [Capital TV](#)
- [Dawn News](#)
- [Dunya News](#)
- [Express News](#)
- [Geo News](#)
- [HUM TV](#)
- [Pakistan Television](#)
- [Samaa TV](#)
- [Waqt News](#)

Digital media

- *same sources as cited for newspaper and television*

Social networks

- [Hamariweb](#)
- [Siasat.pk](#)
- [Tune.pk](#)
- [Zem Tv](#)

Opinion makers

- [Blog - The News International](#)
- [Blogs - DAWN.COM](#)
- [Dunya Blogs](#)
- [Jang Blog](#)
- [The Express Tribune Blog](#)

Organisations

Trade Unions

Established in 1950, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) is a trade union and an umbrella organisation representing journalists of the entire country. It strives for the safety, welfare and better working environment of all journalists, not just those who are its members. Regional unions of working journalists that adopt its constitution are affiliated with PFUJ. Regional affiliates include, among others, Punjab Union of Journalists (PUJ), which is the mother body of Lahore Press Club and other journalist trade unions in the Punjab province.

PFUJ has a long history of struggle against oppression and autocratic rule. It was known for struggling for basic freedoms for all, not just journalists' rights.

A right-wing splinter group broke away from PFUJ after General Zia's imposition of martial law in 1977. What remained behind was known as the PFUJ-Barna, which broke into two factions in 2013 over a disputed election. All factions pleaded with the government and non-government organisations, including the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), that theirs was the original PFUJ. The fractures have robbed PFUJ of the effectiveness and clout it once had as the journalists' trade union. They have also exposed the divided journalist community to exploitation by the government, media owners and others with vested interests. Efforts to unify the PFUJ launched by senior journalists on the request of the various factions have failed to yield results.

Bloggers and citizen journalists are not covered in the mandate of PFUJ as it considers only those individuals working as journalists who depend on journalism as their only professional means of living.

All Pakistan Newspaper Employees Confederation (APNEC) works for journalists as well as other media workers. PFUJ is also affiliated with APNEC as are numerous CBA unions of media offices.

Journalist Associations

Press clubs in Pakistan are membership-based, mainly elected, bodies of journalists from the print and electronic media, based in towns and cities throughout the country. Some of the bigger press clubs, such as those in the provincial capitals, wield considerable influence. There are more than 200 press clubs across Pakistan. They offer not only a collective space for media practitioners but also a forum to take up work-related challenges.

Several associations represent Pakistani media organisations and the practitioners working with those. Since its inception in the late 1950s, the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) has worked as the combined body of newspaper editors in the country to campaign press freedom and the right of access to information. All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS) includes editors, publishers and other senior management employees.

APNS was formed in 1953, by merging the existing groups of publishers. It remained very active in handling the problems faced by its members vis-à-vis the provincial and central governments relating to advertisements, clearance of dues, taxes and newsprint. It laid down rules of conduct for member publications as well as the advertising agencies.

Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA), a representative body comprising both television and radio broadcasters in Pakistan, was established in 2005. PBA has 105 members, of which 17 are radio channels and the rest TV channels. The association aims to resolve the problems of the industry with mutual understanding not only among broadcasters but also with the concerned authorities. The broadcasters also strive to collectively deal with various problems arising from governmental regulations, pressure groups and frame rules for conduct of business with advertising agencies/media buying houses, production houses, clients and professionals related to broadcasting media.

News Agencies

Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) is the main news agency in Pakistan. It began its operations in 1947. In 1961, APP was taken over by the government on the pretext of financial difficulties. It offers news in English, Urdu, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Brahvi, Seraiki and Arabic languages. Being a government organisation allows APP greater access than any other Pakistani news agency can muster. It gives disproportionately more coverage to the engagements and statements of cabinet ministers and government functionaries. The news content generally gives more favourable coverage to the government. APP has news exchange agreements with 37 foreign news agencies.

There are a number of privately owned news agencies as well. The main ones include Network News International, which was established in 1992 and provides services in English and Urdu. Online International News Network initiated its operations in 1999 and also offers news services in English and Urdu. Pakistan Press International (PPI) was established in 1956 as Pakistan Press Association (PPA) and renamed as PPI in 1968. PPI offers text, photo and audio news services in English and Urdu.

Audience measurement organisations

In the early years of Pakistan's electronic media expansion, audience measurement was very much a work in progress.

Gallup Pakistan compiled statistics through a national TV ratings service. Gallup combined primary research from TV, newspaper, radio and social media.

Medialogic Pakistan was set up in 2006 to address the need of a burgeoning television industry for more detailed and timely data on programme popularity and audience demographics. Medialogic is an overnight TV ratings provider whose model includes television audience measurement (TAM) panel. The initial panel covering three cities was expanded first to five cities in 2010 and currently covers 20 cities with approximately 1,000 households, enabling coverage of urban population in many of Pakistan's main cities. Medialogic data today helps media decisions by broadcasters, advertisers and media agencies across Pakistan.

In late 2014, Medialogic joined hands with the world's leading TAM company, Kantar Media, replacing older meters with the latest generation RapidMeter to gauge the viewership patterns of the consumers more precisely.

The journey has not been without controversy. In September 2015, the Medialogic CEO claimed that a leading media group had indulged in malpractice and bribed Medialogic employees to increase its TV ratings. The CEO said the TV channel had profited by upto PKR450m from the altered TV ratings at the cost of the entire electronic media industry.

Even with more than 100 radio channels, there was no radio rating company working in Pakistan until 2014. This led to a lack of clarity on the listenership base. That changed in 2014 with the establishment of Radio Score, which introduced Radio Audience Measurement (RAM), a measurement tool that provided the industry with quantifiable parameters for their investment.

In 2017, Radio Score had 350+ devices installed in Pakistan across Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad Faisalabad, Rawalpindi and Peshawar. This compared to only 150 devices in two cities in 2014. The expansion resulted in more radio channels coming on board; the total number in 2017 was 26.

The listenership data gathered by Radio Score is then transferred to internationally accredited tools like Kantar to gather accurate targetable audience information. Radio Score's data is analyzed by the same software used by People's Meter, enabling media planners and clients to evaluate both mediums side by side.

The radio stations were using the RAM data to chalk out the pricing strategy for their clients and media agencies. By March 2018, Radio Score extended its footprint to Gujranwala and Multan as well.

A frequent critique of the people meters project has been that the sample size is very small and therefore unrepresentative. However, getting a bigger sample, in more cities and the rural areas, requires a concerted stakeholder approach and for the industry to support the venture financially.

Sources

Trade unions

- [All Pakistan Newspaper Employees Confederation](#)
- [Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists](#)
- [PFUJ Dastoor](#)
- [Punjab Union of Journalists](#)

Journalists associations

- [All Pakistan Newspapers Society](#)
- [Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors](#)
- [Karachi Press Club](#)
- [Lahore press club](#)
- [National Press Club](#)
- [Pakistan Broadcasters Association](#)
- [Peshawar Press Club](#)
- [Quetta Press Club](#)

News agencies

- [Associated Press of Pakistan](#)
- [Independent News Pakistan](#)
- [News Network International](#)
- [Online International News Network](#)
- [Pakistan Press International](#)

Audience measurement organisations

- [Gallup Pakistan](#)
- [Medialogic Pakistan](#)
- [Radio Score](#)

Policies

Media legislation

The news media in Pakistan had always been rather heavily regulated through legislation. The constitution guarantees freedom of expression for every citizen as well as freedom of the press. In 2010, the constitution acknowledged citizens' right to information by including Article 19-A.

A quick perusal of the many media-related laws indicates that citizens' right to information has not the main objective of these laws. These were mainly designed to regulate or control media from the government's perspective.

The expansion in the country's electronic media market can largely be attributed to the promulgation of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance 2002. The law allowed private sector ownership of electronic media outlets and regulates private broadcast/electronic media such as television, cable and radio.

Other relevant legislations in recent years have included the Press Council Ordinance, 2002. The council has the mandate to implement a 17-point ethical code of practice for the press and suspend or cancel the declaration of any newspaper or news agency for non-compliance.

The Press, Newspaper, News Agencies and Books Registration (PNNBR) Ordinance, 2002, consolidates the law related to news agencies, publications and printing presses. It also repealed the West Pakistan Press and Publications Ordinance, 1963.

The Defamation Ordinance, 2002 defined defamation as any wrongful act or publication or circulation of a false statement or representation made orally or in written or visual form which injures the reputation of a person.

Traditionally, however, when the news media have upset those in power, the response of the latter has not always been confined to the use of laws.

The Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Services) Act, 1973, was another important media-related law promulgated in Pakistan in the last century.

Additionally, several parliamentary acts and ordinances contain various provisions dealing with the media. These include the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860, the Telegraph Act, 1885, the Post Office Act, 1898, the Contempt of Court Act, 1973 and the Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-Organisation) Act, 1996.

With the exception of the PNNBR Ordinance (registration of press, newspapers, books and new agencies) and PEMRA Ordinance (regulation of private broadcast/electronic media such as television, cable and radio), all the above laws are applicable to all kinds of media.

Accountability systems

Any discussion on accountability systems for Pakistan is known to provoke strong opinions from the media stakeholders and media critics. The media has at times faced criticism for a lack of understanding of ethical issues as well as for knowingly ignoring them in some instances. Over the years, there has been much soul-searching over the most appropriate, and least invasive, way for media accountability in the country. The news media is keen to jealously guard its hard-won freedom and has been wary of any undue government role in this respect. Although the media has long insisted that self-accountability is the way forward, effective industry accountability measures remain absent.

Friends of the media have repeatedly stated that a self-accountability mechanism will add to media credibility. Civil society actors focused on ethical journalism have literally invested years in consulting media stakeholders to arrive at what they suggest are consensus codes of conduct for journalism. However, media organisations' cooperation and commitment in instituting or adopting an industry-wide code of conduct remains largely missing.

In fact, internal accountability mechanisms are in existence in no more than a couple of media organisations. In 2014, *Dawn* newspaper appointed an internal ombudsman to attend to readers' complaints and take note of any alleged violations of its

code of ethics. The only other newspaper to make such an effort earlier was *The Express Tribune*, which in 2010 appointed an eminent jurist as ombudsman for the paper. No other newspaper has set up such readers' complaint address mechanism.

A media commission set up by the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 2013 regarding media accountability made a number of recommendations with respect to policies, structures and improvement of laws on media. The commission noted that media could not be left to exclusively regulate its content. The government and the court agreed with the overwhelming majority of the recommendations but substantial progress on implementation could not be made.

In the form of Press Council of Pakistan (PCP), the law provided in 2002 a forum with the stated purpose of accountability in the print media. The PCP comprises representatives of the APNS, CPNE, PFUJ and government officials and legislators. However, the body has largely been dysfunctional since its inception.

Regulatory authorities

When the state monopoly over electronic media ended in 2002, PEMRA was established as an independent regulator for the sector. It is also the licence-issuing authority for TV channels, FM radio stations and cable TV distributors. PEMRA has faced accusations of acting as a de facto subordinate body of the government and failing to act as an independent regulator.

Over the years, PEMRA has fined and temporarily suspended broadcast of a number of TV news channels as well as banned TV anchors for varying lengths of time over various reasons. Many of its decisions have been challenged in and overturned by courts. PEMRA has faced criticism for attempting to regulate media content instead of regulating the sector.

In November 2017, the broadcast of all private television channels across the country was suspended for 28 hours by TV cable distributors on PEMRA's instructions. The suspension order came during a security operations against participants of a protest in Rawalpindi.

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) is a government body responsible for controlling and maintaining all communication technologies in the country including the Internet.

In terms of Internet freedom, Pakistan's status is currently designated as 'not free' by Freedom House, the watchdog organisation focused on freedom and democracy around the world.

PTA has ordered blocking of numerous social media networking websites, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, as well as other websites for containing pornographic content and content prejudicial to national security, among other reasons. In 2012, PTA directed all Internet service providers in Pakistan to block YouTube over showing blasphemous content. YouTube remained blocked in Pakistan until January 2016.

PTA has ordered a shutdown of cellphone networks, ranging from a few hours to a whole day, on account of security reasons in various cities. Such shutdowns also disrupt the use of cell phones to access the Internet.

It has been argued that PEMRA and PTA cannot both regulate the converged communication sector with their existing separate regulatory frameworks.

In 2017, an attempt to introduce a PEMRA-like authority for the print media under the proposed Pakistan Print Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance was abandoned after strong opposition from civil society.

Not all the directions to media organisations have come from the formal regulators. Courts have also weighed in on a number of occasions. In February 2017, the Islamabad High Court ordered a ban on Valentine's Day celebrations in public places across Pakistan. The electronic and print media was also told not to give coverage to any promotion of the day.

Another key player in the media landscape, the TV channel cable distributors, have increasingly become a party to media conflicts. They have influenced access to channels by arbitrarily changing the numerical position in the cable distribution network of those channels which are out of favour with government authorities.

Sources

Laws, Regulations and Institutions

- [Newspaper Employees \(Conditions of Service\) Act, 1973](#)
- [Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority](#)
- [Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance, 2002](#)
- [Pakistan Telecommunication Authority](#)
- [Press Council of Pakistan](#)
- [Press Council of Pakistan Ordinance, 2002](#)
- [Press, Newspaper, News Agencies and Books Registration Ordinance, 2002](#)
- [Report of Supreme Court-appointed Media Commission on media accountability](#)

Education

Universities and schools

There has never been any mandatory educational requirement for becoming a journalist in Pakistan. A large number of media practitioners, especially in the print media, do not have formal training as journalists. In fact, with expansion in radio and television journalism, the need for formal education in the discipline has become more critical.

Formal institutions of journalism education have a long history in the country. In 1941, at the University of Punjab in Lahore started the first department of journalism in the Indian Subcontinent. Called Institute of Communication Studies now, it offers bachelors, masters, M. Phil and Ph.D. programmes in Communication Studies.

Karachi University established a department of journalism in 1955. Journalist training programmes started in Gomal University in Dera Ismail Khan in 1974 and the Department of Mass Communication was established at Sindh University, Hyderabad in 1977. The Department of Mass Communication opened at the distance-learning Allama Iqbal Open University in 1986 and at the University of Balochistan, Quetta in 1987.

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Peshawar started offering a master's programme in 1988, and such a programme was introduced at Bahauddin Zakari University in 1991.

Numerous other public universities and colleges have since started departments of journalism. A number of private institutions also offer journalism courses in almost all major cities of the country. The quality of the education, curriculum and

the faculty varies widely.

Professional development

There is little emphasis on continuing education or professional development among journalists. Sufficient training and education of TV professionals have not accompanied the sudden boom of TV and radio channels. The bulk of the new TV reporters have come from the print media and started working without any formal training. Some experienced TV journalists have left the state broadcaster *PTV* to work at the new TV channels.

In recent years, civil society organisations have collaborated with international media and development organisations to arrange trainings for media practitioners. Such trainings have generally focused on safety and security challenges for the country's journalists and to some extent on ethical journalism, again with an eye to journalist safety. The number of journalists trained and indeed the organisation of such trainings depends on funding by donor agencies. The emphasis on journalist training generally does not come from media organisations, with the possible exception of some TV channels. Media organisations generally nominate senior staff members for trainings organised by NGOs. Generally, the same journalist is sent to multiple trainings from one media house, leading to widening capacity gaps among the staff and a reduced likelihood of the trainings being put to use.

Sources

- [IBA - Centre for Excellence in Journalism](#)
- [Institute of Communication Studies, University of the Punjab](#)
- [Department of Media & Communications Studies - International Islamic University](#)
- [Department of Journalism & Mass Communication - BNU](#)
- [Department of Journalism & Mass Communication - Kohat University](#)
- [Department of Journalism and Mass Communication - University of Peshawar](#)
- [Department of Mass Communication - University of Karachi](#)
- [Department of Mass Communication - NUST](#)
- [Department of Mass Communication - Forman Christian College](#)
- [Department of Mass Communications - BUIITEMS](#)
- [Department of Media Studies - Kinnaird College for Women](#)
- [Mass Communication - National University of Modern Languages](#)
- [Media and Journalism Department - University of Balochistan](#)

Traditional forms of communication

Summary

Sources

Conclusions

Conclusion

Pakistan has a vigorous and vibrant media landscape by all accounts, thanks largely to reforms that liberalised the electronic media in 2002.

Some of the prominent features include considerable focus on politics and political commentary from the print and TV news media. However, with the growing commercialisation of the media, any clear or permanent political linkages or slants have largely subsided and short-term leanings and sympathies seems to have emerged.

Even in the absence of direct ownership or connections with political entities, support of some media organisations with certain political parties can sometimes be noticed. The reasons for that might not always be ideological. In fact, economic and other considerations might well be involved at times.

Furthermore, in less than two decades, television has firmly established itself as the go-to medium for consumers seeking news and information. This further underlines the need for the medium to cautiously and responsibly use the extensive power at its disposal to shape public opinion.

With the privatisation of radio operations, radio has made a comeback as a popular medium in urban areas. However, with only state-run radio networks generally permitted to broadcast their own news, private operators can only cater to the entertainment needs of the listeners. Audience measurement mechanisms are leading to more informed advertisement, programme and marketing decisions. There is a gradual but definite shift of advertisement revenues from one medium to another.

The country's media has undoubtedly played a role in empowering the citizens and magnifying their voices by articulating public demands. However, standards of journalism in the country, which are often described as uneven, also provide the context for somewhat biased, sensational and outright inaccurate coverage of news stories, at times with regard to political parties or developments. This can and does have serious impact on polarisation of views.

There are those who argue that Pakistan's media landscape appears to have suffered from too-rapid a growth, with the result that training of media practitioners and professional standards have lagged behind the required levels. Improvement of the overall quality of journalism perhaps represents the most immediate challenge for the Pakistani media.

References

- A. Baig, U. Cheema (2014-2015). [A Baseline Study, Broadcast Journalism in Pakistan: A Hostage to Media Economics Outlining economic infrastructure of media industry](#), Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives: Islamabad.
- Aurora, Nov 15, 2017. [Media Advertising Spend, An overview of advertising spend in FY 2015-16](#)
- Freedom House. [Freedom on the Net 2016, Silencing the Messenger: Communication Apps Under Pressure](#)
- Freedom Network: Islamabad. [State of Media in Pakistan, Key trends of 2014 and Main challenges in 2015](#)
- Friedrich Ebert Stiftung: Islamabad. *Report and Recommendations of the Media Commission Appointed by the Supreme Court of Pakistan 2013*, second edition (2014).
- Human Rights Commission of Pakistan: Lahore. *State of Human Rights in Pakistan*, annual reports 2011-2016.

- International Media Support (2009). [Media in Pakistan: Between Radicalisation and Democratisation in an Unfolding Conflict](#).
 - M. A. Alam, [Right to Information and Media Laws in Pakistan](#). Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives: Islamabad.
 - Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). [Pakistan Statistical Year Book 2010](#).
 - Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS). [Pakistan Statistical Year Book 2015](#).
 - Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. [Annual Report 2017](#), p. 51.
-

Copyright © European Journalism Centre (EJC) 2025 - [MediaLandscapes.org](#)

Document generated on 05/02/2025