



ERODING PRESS FREEDOM



**MAY 3
REPORT
2026**





FREEDOM FORUM

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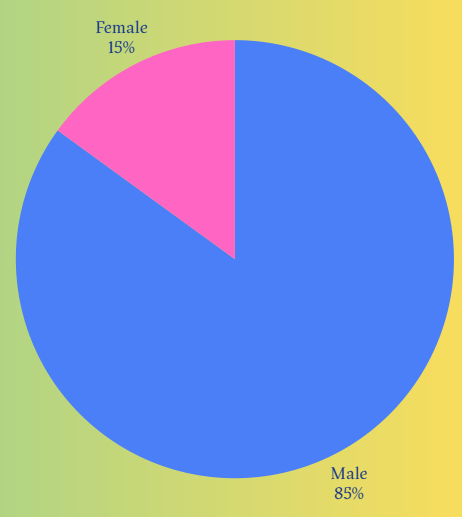
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The trends of increased violation of press freedom with growing death threats and physical attacks, media under mounting economic stress with new advertisement regulation, stalled lawmaking and media reform, information disorder, destruction of properties and equipment of media and brutal attack upon frontline journalists, impunity left ignored and rising intolerance and discredit to media characterized Nepal's media landscape in this past one year- from May 1, 2025 to April 30, 2026. Supportive and inclusive laws on media reform along with collaborative efforts are essential to make media viable and credible. Equipping journalists with evolving technological skills and building tolerant public spheres are equal needs.



Freedom Forum recorded 97 incidents of press freedom violation from May 1, 2025 to April 30, 2026. In 97 anti-press incidents, a total of 145 media persons- 123 male and 22 female journalists- including 20 media houses were directly affected. This past year saw increase in violation, as the previous year from May 2024 to April 2025, had only 68 incidents of violations which had affected 88 media persons including 11 female and eight media houses.

Gender Distribution of Affected Media Persons



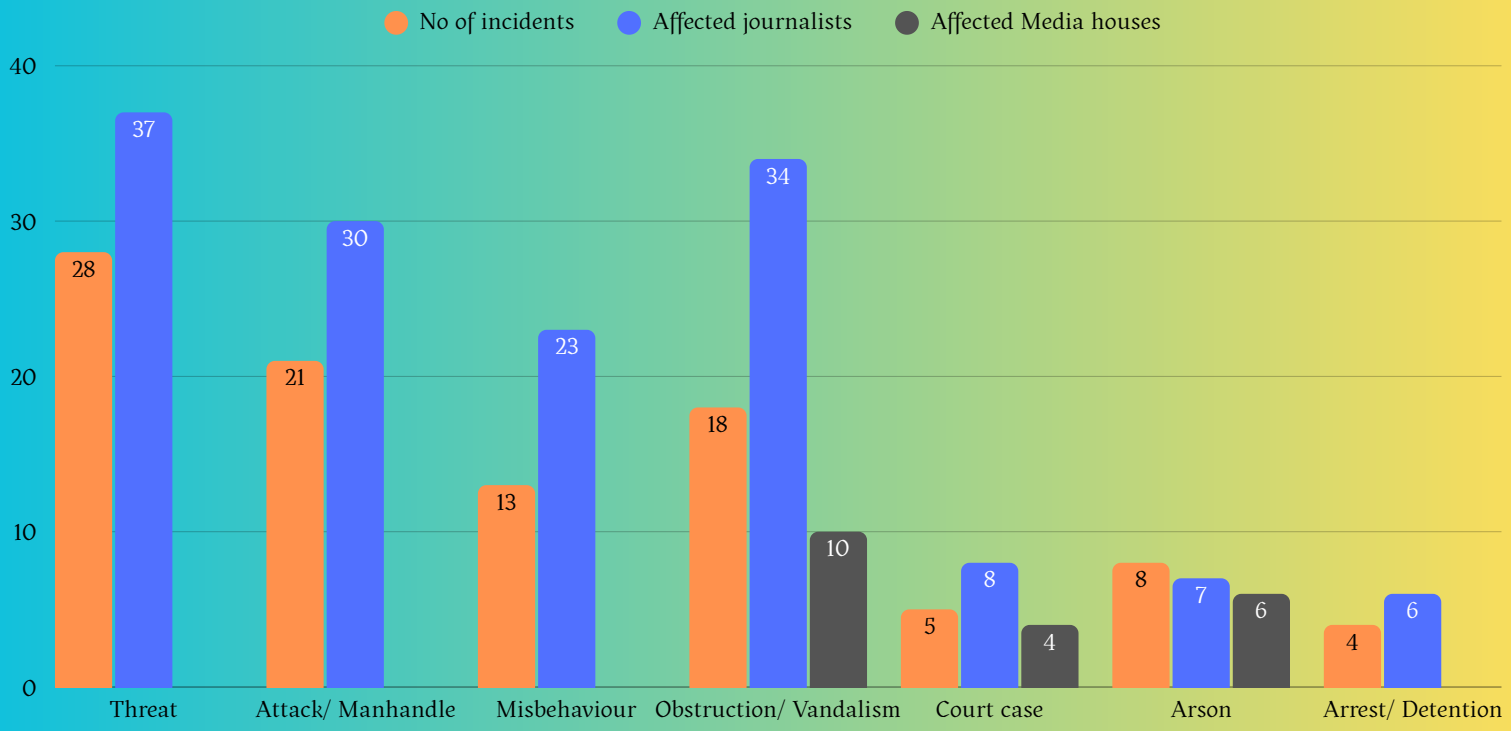
Freedom Forum tracks incidents of press freedom violations in all seven provinces of Nepal through its media monitoring desk. These incidents are then analyzed and data maintained in the website- www.nepalpressfreedom.org

1. Violation Type

This year, FF recorded seven types of violation against journalists and media. These are categorized as: - 28 incidents of threats/ death threats, 18 obstruction and vandalism, 21 attack/ manhandles, 13 misbehaviors, 5 court cases against media and journalists, 8 incidents of arson on media houses and their properties, and 4 cases of arrest/ detention.

Out of total 145 media persons affected this year, 37 received threat and death threats combined; 34 faced obstructions while reporting; 30 were attacked; 23 faced misbehavior; 8 faced lawsuits (two under cybercrime charge); and 6 faced arrest/ detention. 7 journalists were injured in the arson attack at media houses.

Sudurpaschim Province, Beldadi Municipality Vice-Chairperson Shanti Nath filed a complaint against journalist Basudev Dhama over news reports published on Paschimkhabar.com. Following this, Nepal Police issued an arrest warrant against journalist under cybercrime charges on April 23, 2026.[1]



[1] <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1601>

Moreover, out of total affected journalists 22 media persons including three females were assaulted while covering the Gen Z movement in different places on September 8 and 9, 2025. Out of 22, three photojournalists and a reporter were seriously injured with the bullets fired by the security forces in Kathmandu. A female photojournalist was also injured with stones thrown by the protestors in the same incident. Their reporting devices were also damaged.

Further, this year witnessed huge loss on media houses due to arson and vandalism that occurred during the Gen Z uprising. In these incidents, six media houses were set on fire and 10 vandalized in different parts of the country. Around 12 television channels broadcast were disrupted and 38 media persons' vehicles and properties were destroyed in these incidents. Affected media organizations recorded a huge loss of infrastructures and relevant data and archives. Similarly, four media houses faced lawsuits under different charges.

The Special Court staffs filed a contempt of court against Drishtinews.com and its Chairperson Shambhu Lal Shrestha and Executive Editor MP Subba on June 23, 2025. The portal had published news on alleged corruptions in the court processes leading to acquittal in the cases registered by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority[2].

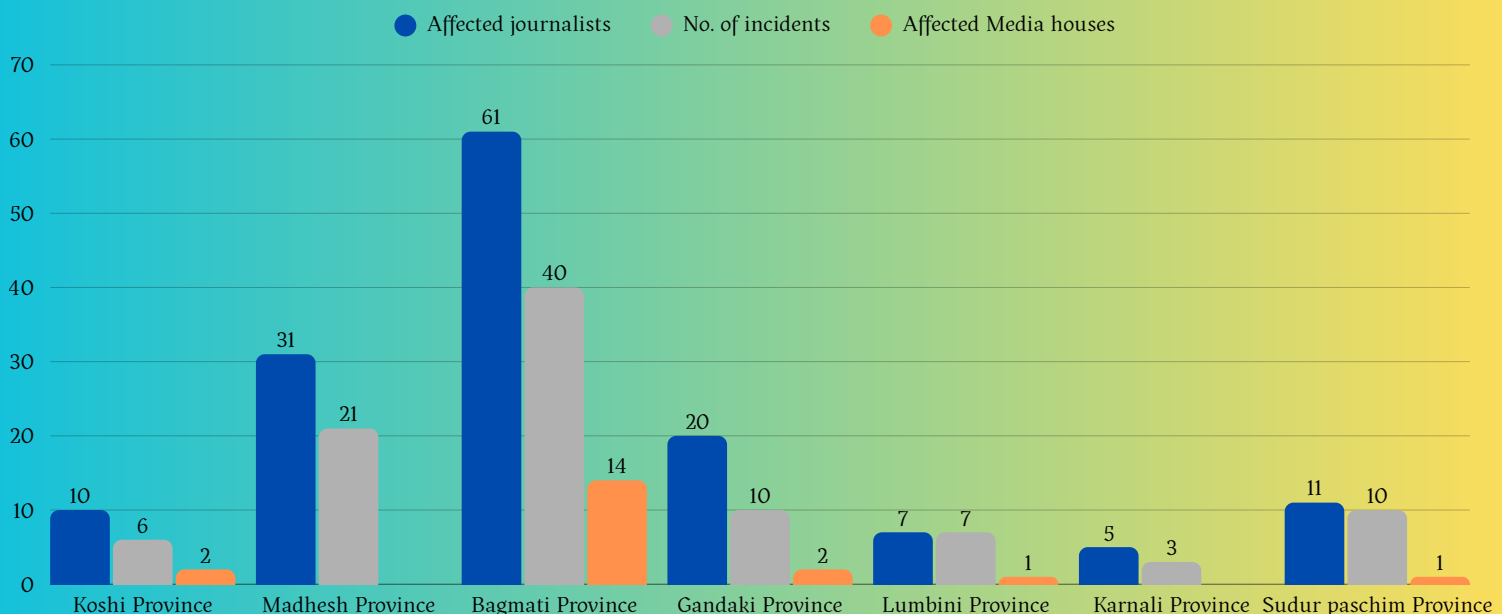
Himal Khabar and Drishtinews.com faced contempt of court charges; and Bizmandu.com and Nepal Khabar.com faced lawsuits under defamation charges for publishing critical contents.

2. Violations in Provinces

The highest number of press freedom violation (40) was recorded in Bagmati Province with majority (33) in federal capital, Kathmandu. In these incidents, total 61 (46 males and 15 female) media persons and 14 media houses were directly affected.

Lately, Kathmandu has become increasingly hostile for the journalists' covering protests and government activities with affected numbers 35 male and 10 females in the past year. Even the newly formed government is yet to create a positive atmosphere for free press.

On April 30, while reporting on homeless squatters in rehabilitation centers in Kirtipur, around five journalists were harassed and their recordings were forcefully deleted from their mobile phones and cameras. When the journalists confronted the security personnel at the centers, they were told that they had received "orders from higher body" to restrict media access to the premises.[3]



[2] <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1534>

[3] <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1603>

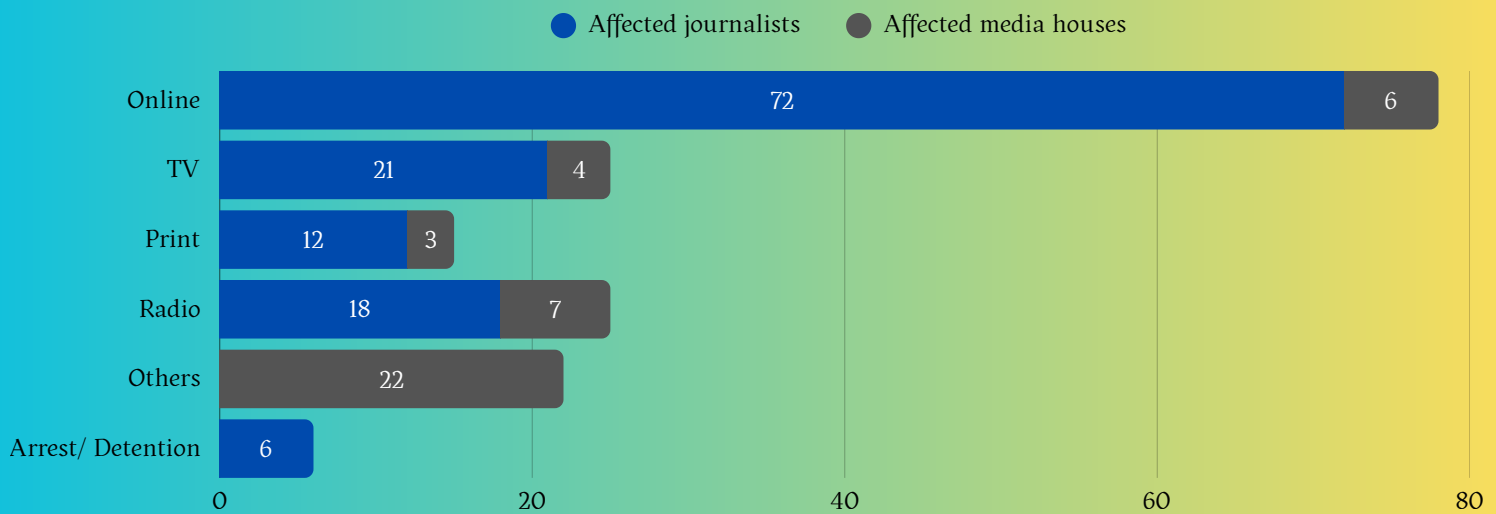
During Gen Z movement alone, 11 different incidents took place in Kathmandu, where media outlets- Kantipur Television and publication house, and the Annapurna Post daily were set on fire and various television channels- Avenues, AP1, Prime TV, News Nepal, Himalaya, ABC and Space 4K - were also forced to stop their operation for at least 24 hours. Four journalists were seriously injured with bullets and other were injured during arson and vandalism in the media offices.

Similarly, media houses outside Kathmandu- Bhanjyang daily, Radio Dhorbarahi, Safalkhabar.com, Kalika FM, Ilam Express, Radio Bani, Lokdarpan FM and Radio Jagaran- were also seriously affected in vandalism during the movement.

Bagmati Province is trailed by Madhesh Province with 21 incidents affecting 31 media persons (3 females). Similarly, 10 incidents each occurred in Gandaki and Sudurpaschim Provinces affecting 20 media persons in Gandaki and 11 in Sudurpaschim; followed by 7 incidents in Lumbini Province where seven journalists were affected. In 6 incidents recorded from Koshi Province, 10 males and in 3 incidents from Karnali Province 5 male journalists were affected.

3. Affected media persons and media

Continuation to the previous years' trend that media persons affiliated with the online media are found to be the most targeted for their news coverage. According to data, 50% of the total journalists who faced intimidation for doing their job in the past year work in different online media houses.



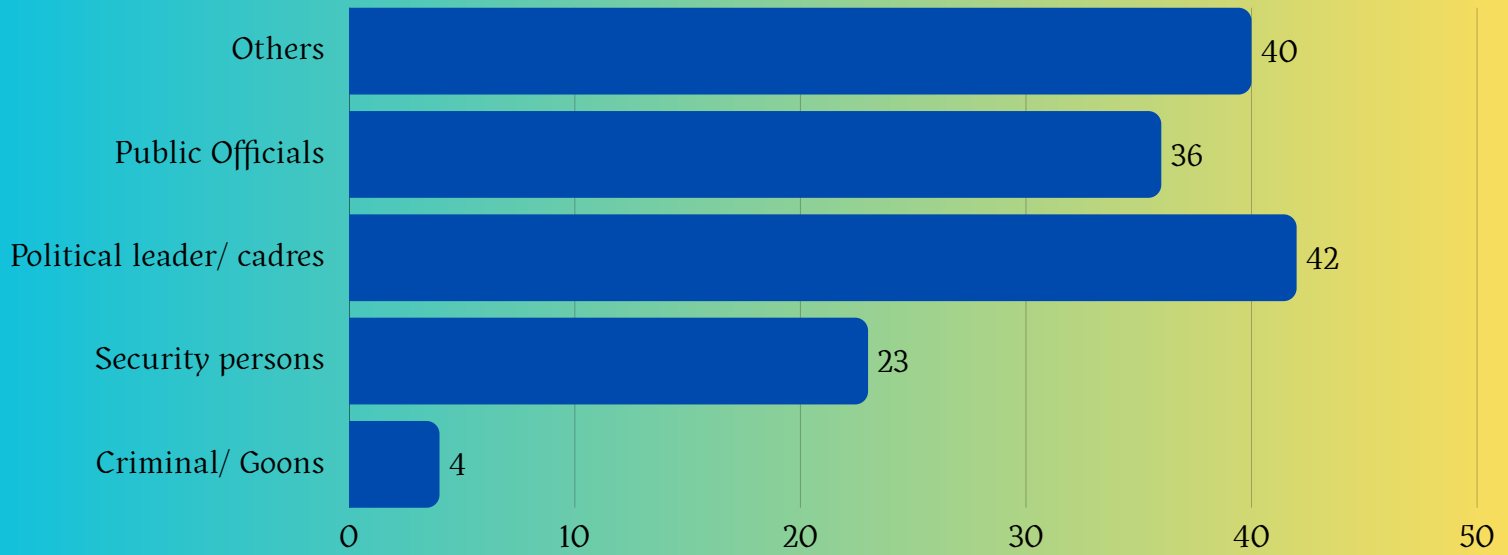
Photojournalist at Onlinekhabar.com, Kamal Prasai was attacked while covering the ongoing demolition of informal settlements in Kathmandu on April 25. While he was recording drone footage of settlements along the Manohara riverbank three individuals carrying protective shields and batons approached him and threatened whether he was a journalist. They hit on Prasai' nose and took camera's memory card. [4]

Among 145 violation affected journalists, 72 are affiliated to online media followed by 21 in television, 18 in radio, 12 working in print media and remaining 22 journalists categorized under 'Others' faced intimidation during reporting in groups (events, press meet, etc.)

Notably, with the growing number of online news portals and television channels broadcasting on social media platforms like YouTube, a significant number of journalists in these media have been targeted for their contents.

[4] <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1599>

4. Elements hostile to journalists



The highest number of journalists (42) faced threat and/ or attacks from political leaders and their cadres followed by public employees intimidating 36 journalists.

Additionally, 23 media persons were intimidated by the security persons including four photojournalists who were hit by the bullets during Gen Z protest coverage. Total 40 were targeted by elements categorized under 'Others' such as businesspersons, locals, contractors, advocates, etc. Under this category, 17 journalists faced attacks and obstruction during reporting from the protestors. It is concerning that both state and non-state actors are on the frontlines, actively intimidating journalists.

5. Topics of the news reported

Out of total affected journalists, majority (35) faced intimidation for covering news related to government activities in both the federal and local levels. Secondly, journalists (31) reporting corruption at public offices were found to receive threats of attack and death threats followed by 22 journalists intimidate for covering news on social issues including health, education, protests, etc. and 14 reporting on political issues.

Moreover, ten journalists faced violation during reporting on environmental issues especially illegal extraction of natural resources.

Journalists reporting election activities during March 5 House of Representatives election were also attacked and threatened for their news coverage.

On February 26, a prominent online news portal Ratopati.com's Koshi Province bureau chief Arjun Acharya was attacked in Jhapa-5 while covering a door-to-door campaign of Communist Party of Nepal (UML) Chairperson KP Sharma Oli. His mobile phone was confiscated and he sustained injuries to his head, eyes and face.

In addition to physical attacks, media also faced regulatory restriction on its contents during election.

On February 16, the Election Commission (ECN) wrote to the Press Council Nepal (PCN) to take action against Setopati.com, an online news portal, for publishing a public opinion poll on election outcomes. The Press Council sought clarification, alleging a violation of the code of conduct. Setopati.com subsequently filed a writ petition at the Supreme Court, arguing that the move violated constitutional guarantees of press freedom. On March 9, the Election Commission imposed a fine of NPR 100,000 on the media.

TREND ANALYSES

Media at receiving end during Gen Z uprising

This past year Nepal's media also became victim during the historic Gen Z uprising that marked massive destruction. Many media persons were injured. The Gen Z uprising held on September 8 and 9 took lives of 76 youths and more than thousands were severely injured across the country.

With rising youth frustration toward then government leading to demonstrations and protests, a notable trend this year has been severe attacks on photographers and their equipment. Multimedia journalists on the ground covering news faced increased intimidation.

Arson attacks on mainstream media houses caused huge loss of property and documents including irreplaceable contents archive. These losses are yet to be compensated or adequately addressed. These incidents clearly indicate that the journalists are at the receiving end during are political protests- be it in the federal capital or outside. The more political protests, the more risk to media.

The House of Representatives that was dissolved after the Gen Z movement on September 12, 2025 came to life after election held on March 5 electing representatives to 275 seats. Subsequently, a new government led by the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), with nearly a two-thirds majority is formed amid high public expectations.

Stalled law and policy reform

The laws and policies that were rendered ineffective at the Lower House following the dissolution of Parliament are yet to be reintroduced or reformulated by the newly elected members of the Lower House.

Social Network Management and Operation Bill is pending at the National Assembly, the upper house and Mass Media Bill is still waiting entry to parliament.

After a year of transition period since the approval of the Public Service Broadcast Bill and the transformation of state-owned media into Public Service Broadcasting organizations, no visible reforms have been observed. The PSB has largely failed to establish itself as an independent and autonomous entity, as envisioned by the law.

Misuse of outdated legislation- Section 47 of the Electronic Transaction Act (ETA)- is continued against journalists and citizens for exercising their freedom of expression on digital platforms. In the past year, two journalists were issued arrest warrant over their critical reporting under this charge.

Senior journalist Dil Bhusan Pathak was issued arrest warrant for his reporting in June 2025, following complaint filed by a Former Prime Minister's son. Pathak faced the lawsuit for a year and was finally acquitted by the court on April 1, 2026 stating that prosecution's claims were insufficient^[5].

[5] <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1525>

Impunity persists, Justice delayed

At a time when impunity relating to crimes against journalists during the conflict-era are still awaiting address, the torching alive the on-duty journalist and lackadaisical investigation into the incident exposes journalists are at high risk. Cases of slain journalists Suresh Rajak, Suresh Bhul and recent brutal attack upon journalists during Gen Z protests are still awaiting investigation and justice.

Even though the government declared martyr to journalist Suresh Rajak who died while covering the pro-monarchy protest on March 28, provided employment to his wife and provided monetary support to four journalists injured during Gen Z movement, justice is yet awaited. Inaction of transitional justice mechanisms have further fueled a trend of impunity and deepened despair among victim families.

In a democratic society where press freedom and journalists' safety must be a multi-stakeholders' concern, the inadequate advocacy for these shows a reflection of shrinking civic space in Nepal.

Investigative journalism under constant threat

As was the case in the past, the investigative journalists who expose political and financial corruption and irregularities were among the most targeted this past year too. Both the state and non-state actors are at frontlines to assail these journalists who question officials and their cabals linked to irregularities.

Despite political parties being one of the key pillars of a democratic system, the other pillar-free press continues to be victimized by political cadres at the district and local levels. Their public commitments often contradict their actions, as they undermine media freedom and are often intolerant of criticism. This calls for a shift in the political perspective on the role of media and free press in sustaining a functional democracy.

Regulatory pressures on media

The media regulatory body, Press Council Nepal took action against 136 registered media and 27 unregistered media till January 21, 2026 through its own monitoring. According to the Council, these media allegedly violated the journalistic code of conduct.

During election period, both the Election Commission and Press Council Nepal monitored contents published in both social media and mainstream media through their own monitoring system. Elections Commission's Information Integrity Promotion Center claimed 612 contents as 'Harmful Information' published on various platforms including media outlets from February 20-26. The commission referred 74 cases to the Press Council Nepal for further action.

Press Council Nepal too, took action against 25 for allegedly violating election's code of conduct and publishing the misleading contents such as public polls, fake screenshots of news portals, fake and misleading information. Additionally, the Council's monitoring between

January 18 to March 8 identified total 987 media publishing fake or misleading contents. Of these, 844 were registered media and 143 involved fabricated screenshots impersonating credible media. The Council notified 125 media through phone calls and issued letters to 269 media. Further, 43 cases were referred to the Cyber Bureau of Nepal Police and 550 remain under investigation at the Council.

On February 26, ECN also wrote to the PCN asking removal of the documentary published in YouTube channels of BBC citing its potential impact on the HoR elections that was going to be held on March 5. PCN, responded on the request as its was beyond its jurisdiction because BBC is an international media outlet. But the Council advised Nepal-based media outlets not to republish the documentary. Moreover, Setopati online was also fined Rs. 100,000 for publishing public polls during election period.

On April 22, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology issued a statement urging all news media, individuals, and institutions not to publish, disseminate, or circulate “baseless, false, or misleading” news. It warned that violators would face strict action under prevailing laws, including the Electronic Transactions Act. This statement is unconstitutional and represents a severe attempt to suppress free expression.

A new trend that the Nepal Army issued a notice on April 24 urging public not to trust fake and misleading information on social media and the mainstream media and rely on the official and verified information. It has warned that its department is regularly monitoring such activities and those involved in spreading such information will face serious legal pursuit. This act may have serious repercussions upon facts brought through investigative journalism and published in media in future.

Media literacy must to combat Mis/ Disinformation

The number of online media outlets is continuously rising with around 5,307 online media portals already registered at the Department of Information and Broadcasting. However, their sustainability remains uncertain. The need for skilled human resources, affordable internet access and a favorable business environment is essential to strengthen online media.

Moreover, the capacity building of Nepali media houses and journalists to navigate disruptive changes remains inadequate leaving them vulnerable to the growing flood of disinformation, misinformation and malinformation. This has undermined the information integrity, contributed to information disorder and restricted citizens' access to information. It has further weakened the role of a free press and traditional media.

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools are emerging frontier bringing both opportunities and challenges to Nepal's media landscape. However, their sustainable and effective use to promote press freedom is still limited. Their use with current applications is largely limited to basic tasks such as translation, editing and content generation. Nepali journalists and media houses still lack adequate AI literacy as well as the skills needed to mitigate its risks, particularly those arising from the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

The widespread circulation of misinformation on social media during the House of Representatives (HoR) election also influenced mass media this past year, resulting in the noticeable publication of misleading information. This highlights the urgent need for efficient editorial skills and dedicated fact-checking desks in every media organization.

Rising economic crisis in media

Media co-opting is a concerning trend that is eroding the value of a free press. This growing practice involves the control and manipulation of media houses and journalists to serve specific interests, posing a serious threat to press freedom.

In the aftermath of COVID 19, significant number of media shifted toward digital formats, bringing slow financial recovery in the media sector. However, as the financial health of media houses has not significantly improved, risks to journalistic professionalism have increased. Worsening this situation, the government's introduction of new advertisement regulations has become a severe blow to private media organizations, pushing them to further financial hardship. This has a direct bearing on strength and sustainability of media.

Retrenchment in media houses has continued this year as well, leading to increased job-hopping among media professionals. A comprehensive study and research on promoting press freedom and improving journalist retention has become an urgent need. Even the media houses have begun writing about each other's financial health, disclosing sorry state. Kantipur national daily talked to 27 working journalists at different media and learned that most of them have been unpaid, underpaid or laid off of their jobs.[6]

The ongoing financial crisis in the media sector has also resulted in the non-reporting and under-reporting of important public interest issues. The closure of media outlets and reduction of staff have deprived many journalists of their ability to practice press freedom and have further restricted citizens' right to information.

Safety mechanism at NHRC should be more functional

The FoE and journalists' safety mechanism of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) under its Directive on the Formation of a Safety Mechanism and Work Procedure for the Protection of FoE, 2019, has three level based on functions- one at central level Steering Committee, central level Task Force and seven Province-level mechanisms in seven provinces.

The central mechanism has decided to allocate budgets for these mechanisms in the upcoming annual program plan and to form a five-member mechanism in each district in coordination with district chapters of the Federation of Nepali Journalists, the Nepal Bar Association, and the NGO Federation. Furthermore, the NHRC has mainstreamed freedom of expression issues into its regular human rights monitoring activities. During the House of Representatives election, the Commission also conducted monitoring visits to media organizations including Freedom Forum to assess any violations of press freedom and the need for journalists' safety.

However, these mechanisms at the central and provincial levels need to be made more functional, especially given the current environment in which the media faces increasing threats and journalists reporting on corruption and government activities are becoming more vulnerable. The proactive functioning of these mechanisms can be helpful to free media reporting and journalists' rights.

[6] <https://kathmandupost.com/money/2026/04/15/nepali-media-is-fighting-for-survival-its-journalists-are-fighting-for-their-paychecks>

Discussion and Way Forward

Uncertainty in law and policy reform initiatives hampers the effective functioning of the state. In a democratic regime, constructive engagement and dialogue among multiple stakeholders form a foundational basis for making important decisions that have been largely ignored in recent times. As the new government and parliament have repeatedly committed to constitutional reforms, it is important to uphold the constitutional commitment to “full press freedom” by revisiting Articles 17 (2) and 19 of Constitution in line with international obligations, including the ICCPR. Multi-stakeholder engagement in policy making is the need of the hour.

Efforts to discourage and target media outlets and journalists- who question and demand accountability- are intensifying through social media campaigns, including coordinated “unfollow” movements. Digital threats, attacks, and discrediting campaigns against journalists and media must be addressed in ways that strengthen the media as a source of credible information. All sectors should support and encourage the media to fulfill its role as a watchdog and a critical voice holding all forms of power accountable.

Promoting independent fact-checking skills of media, civil society organizations and fact-checkers and increasing public awareness of journalists’ rights and safety are steps toward safeguarding democratic processes in Nepal’s evolving digital landscape.

With the rapid growth of digital platforms and the absence of appropriate legal frameworks to regulate them, citizens and journalists face increasing risks of surveillance and threats under outdated laws. The fast-evolving digital landscape requires constructive interventions through supportive and inclusive laws and policies.

Rising intolerance on multiple fronts poses growing risks to press freedom. It is essential for all stakeholders to build consensus and abide by the rule of law, ensuring respect for press freedom and the safety of journalists. Intolerance toward the media must end, and the protection of journalists reporting on corruption and irregularities must be guaranteed at all levels.

Continuous capacity building of journalists is essential through collaborative efforts. Skilling, reskilling, and upskilling should be continued as ongoing efforts in response to evolving political, digital, and environmental challenges. Empowering journalists will strengthen press freedom.

Adequate training in modern technologies, especially for navigating digital environments and responsibly using AI, is increasingly necessary. Journalists and media personnel should be equipped with the skills to leverage AI effectively while safeguarding credibility and protecting themselves from misuse and digital mishap.

Government advertising policies should ensure fairness, proportionality and equal access to resources across all media outlets. Proper advertisement policy counts for sustainability of private media.

Insurance coverage for journalists and their equipment has become an urgent need as frontline journalists face increasing threat of intimidation. Moreover, journalists working under distress should also be provided with psychosocial counseling and support to strengthen resilience and their retention.

Journalists' strict adherence to ethical codes and professional standards help them minimize risks and maintain credibility.

A progressive and liberal approach to media, IT, and cyber laws and policies is crucial to ensuring both press freedom and the safety of journalists.

Prolonged impunity in cases of crimes against journalists has further victimized affected families. Strong government commitment and decisive action are urgently needed to address this issue.

 -The End- 