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UNREST FUELS HOSTILITY TO MEDIA

ANNUAL
MEDIA
REPORT
2025



FREEDOM FORUM

A Nepali CSO (civil society organization) dedicated to democracy, human rights and governance

Unrest Fuels Hostility to Media

Summary

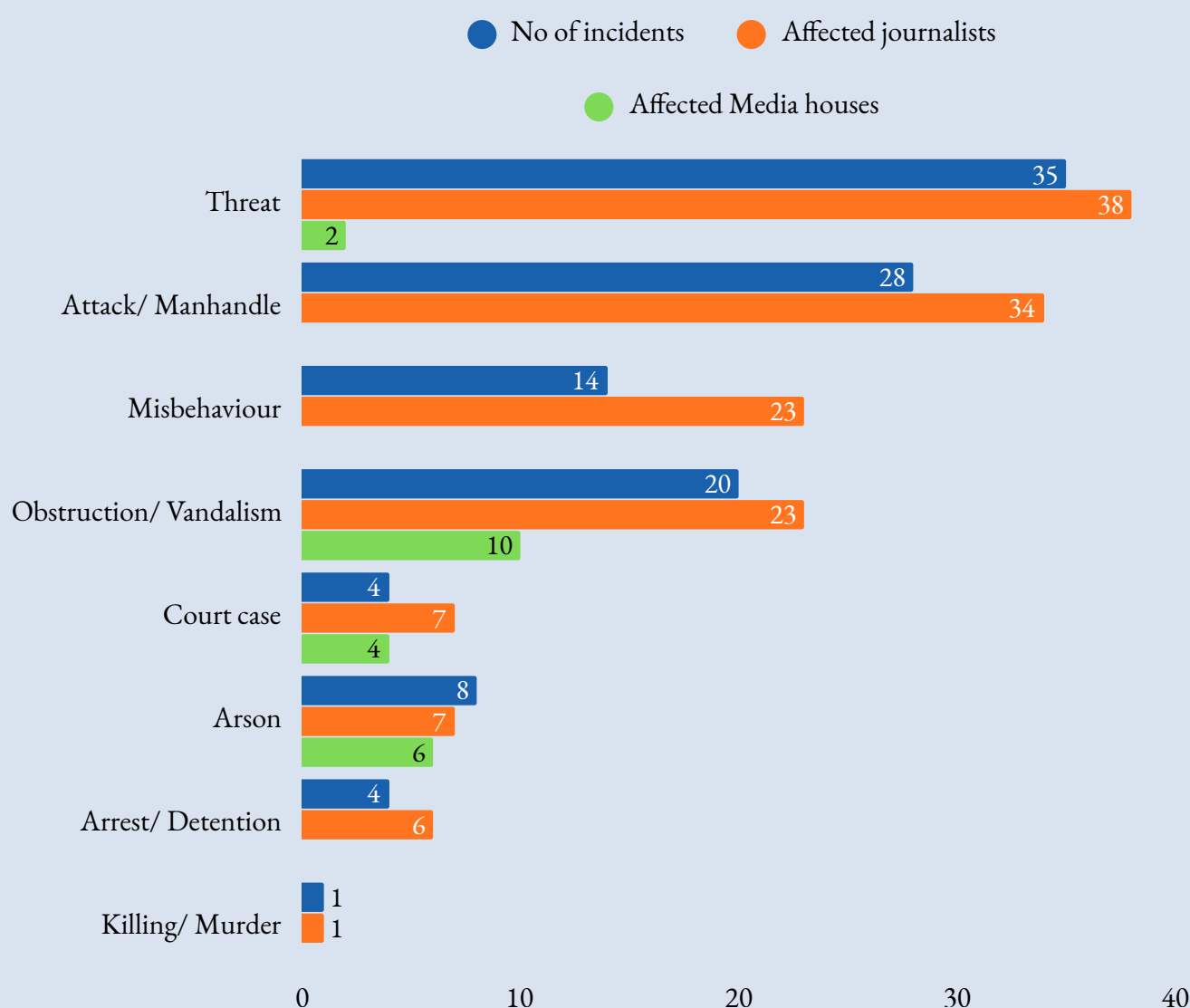
Surge of press freedom violations in the wake of two major protests- first in March and second in September; stalled law-making on media freedom and journalists' rights; shrinking enforcement of RTI law; cooperation and resources in short supply to recover media from financial crisis; misinformation, disinformation and mal-information getting entrenched, creating information disorder; continuous discrediting and criticism of legacy media with misuse of internet-based media; and impunity related to crimes against journalists awaiting proper address characterized Nepali media in 2025. Stable politics with strict adherence to good governance, democracy and human rights are urgency to build an atmosphere conducive to media freedoms and journalists' rights.

1. Press Freedom Status

Total 114 incidents of press freedom violations were documented by Freedom Forum in the past one year- January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. Among these incidents, 35 violations were recorded during the Gen Z protest occurred on September 8- 9 alone. These violations directly affected 139 media persons in total, among which, 13% were female and 87% were male. This year number of press freedom violations stood the highest in the last five years since 2020 and more than a double recorded in the previous year 2024. The number of affected journalists and media houses also remains the highest. Total 22 media houses faced various kinds of attack in 2025.

During Gen Z movement, 16 media houses were arsoned and 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 infrastructure and relevant data and archives.

1.1 Violations: Attack/ manhandle tops violation



This year, press freedom violations were recorded into eight categories- a) threat, b) attack/ manhandle, c) misbehavior, d) obstruction/ vandalism, e) court case, f) arson, g) arrest/ detention and h) murder.

The major press freedom violation recorded this year was threat of attack and of life to 38 journalists through different mediums (phone calls, messages, social media platforms), followed by attack on 34 journalists. The misbehaviors and obstruction on reporting stood each at 23. Similarly, seven media persons faced court cases over news reporting, seven journalists were injured in arson attack on media houses, six faced arrest/brief detentions and one journalist was killed while reporting.

Photojournalist at Avenues Television, Suresh Rajak, died in a fire set at a building by the protestors on March 28, 2025. Rajak was reporting the pro-monarchy group's protest at Tinkune area of Kathmandu Valley from the building. As the mob set the building on fire, Rajak could not escape, but succumbed to burn injury.

FF also recorded incidents of attack on 22 media houses in the past year, 2025. Majority media houses (10) were vandalized followed by arson on six offices. Four media were also charged with different lawsuits- two with contempt of court and two faced defamation cases for publishing critical contents.

On June 10, Bizmandu.com and Nepalkhabar.com were ordered by the district court to remove news reports about Chairperson of Securities Board of Nepal, following his 'character assassination' case over 'alleged unverified corruption' reporting. The court also issued an interim order not to publish any news on the issue. However, on a June 20 hearing, the court dismissed the earlier order and revoked Shrestha's complaint.

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Data on the attacks upon media houses' significantly increased this past year due to the two violent protests'- Pro-monarchy protest and Gen Z movement.

Moreover, 22 media persons including three female- were attacked and assaulted while covering the Gen Z movement in different places. 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.

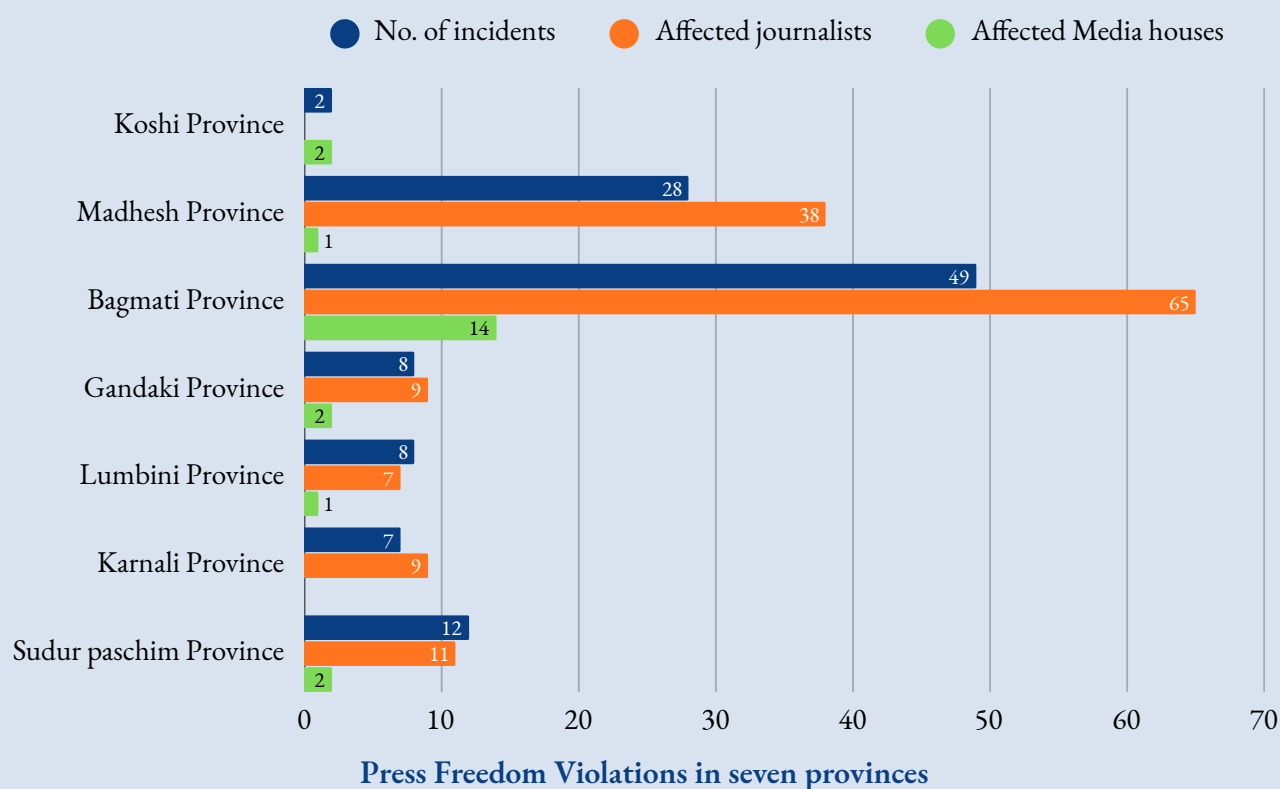
Two injured journalists- Dipendra Dhungana and Shambhu Dangal- are recovering and have not yet been able to resume journalism fully.

1.2 Bagmati Province with majority violations

As in the previous years, the highest number of press freedom violations were recorded in Bagmati Province with a total 49 incidents followed by Madhesh Province (28) and Sudurpashim Province with 12 violations. Similarly, eight incidents took place in Gandaki Province and Lumbini Province each, seven in Karnali Province and two in Koshi Province.

With maximum violations in Bagmati Province, number of affected journalists is also the highest in this province- 53 male and 12 female journalists. It is followed by 38 journalists (including 3 females) facing violations in Madhesh Province, 11 journalists (including two females) in Sudurpaschim Province, nine each in Gandaki and Karnali Provinces (with one female in Karnali), and seven male reporters in Lumbini Province.

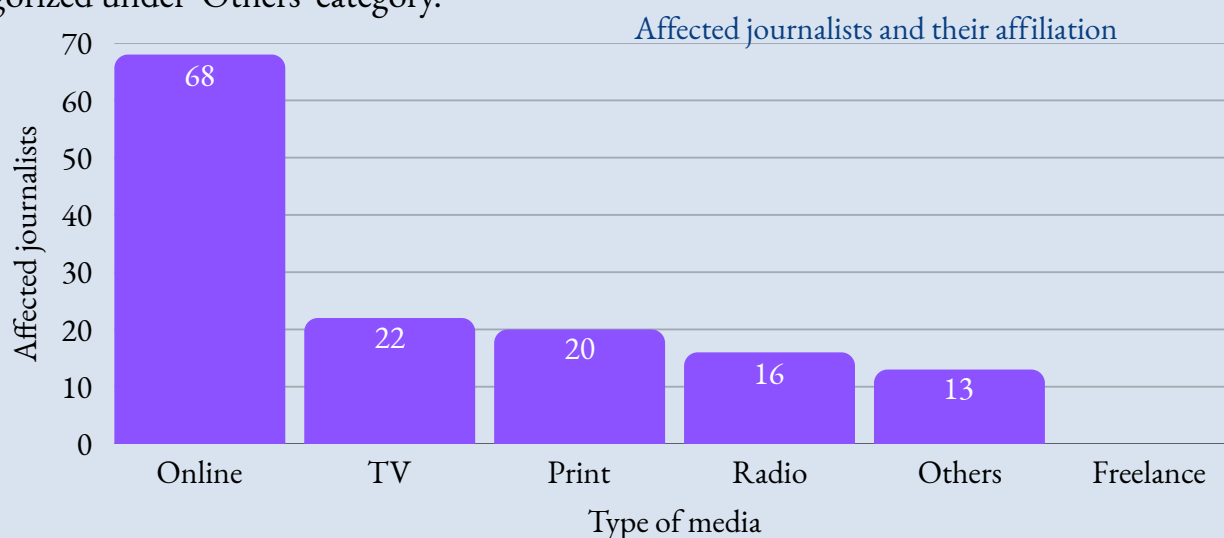
During two different protests held in the federal capital, Kathmandu, the agitated mob attacked various public properties, including media houses. They set on fire Kantipur Television and publication house, and the Annapurna Post daily building. Various television channels- Avenues, AP1, Prime TV, News Nepal, Himalaya, ABC and Space 4K – were also forced to stop their operation for at least 24 hours.



Looking into attacks on media houses, majority comes from Bagmati Province (14).

1.3 Online journalists most targeted

Of the total affected media persons in 114 incidents, the highest- 68 journalists are associated with Online media followed by Television channel (22), Print media (20), Radio (16) and 13 media persons associated with news agencies and/or attacked while reporting collectively are categorized under 'Others' category.



A woman reporter with Prime Times Television, Sabina Karki, was injured while covering a teachers' protest in New Baneshwor, Kathmandu, on April 27. Clashes erupted when protesting teachers attempted to breach a police barricade in a restricted area, prompting police baton charges and use of water cannons. Karki sustained severe injury in her eyes after being hit by water cannon[1].

With a rise of vibrant digital spheres promoting digital media, FF has recorded an increasing number of attacks on journalists associated with online media. It is reflected in the media monitoring report this year as well- a significant rise as compared to that in 2024. It is again followed by television journalists.

This data correlates with the rising number of online news portals in Nepal. According to Press Council Nepal, total 5,155 news portals have been formally listed till mid-October 2025.

1.4 Hostile elements

Out of 139 affected journalists, 34 faced intimidation specifically from public officials. They were most often intimidated for reporting on corruption and malpractices at the public offices.

Political cadre registered a complaint against Sheersha Khabar's reporter Dinesh Parajuli at the local police office in Saptari, on January 23, over his critical reporting on the President of a political party. Parajuli was also threatened of assault before the complaint.[2]

[1] <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1513>

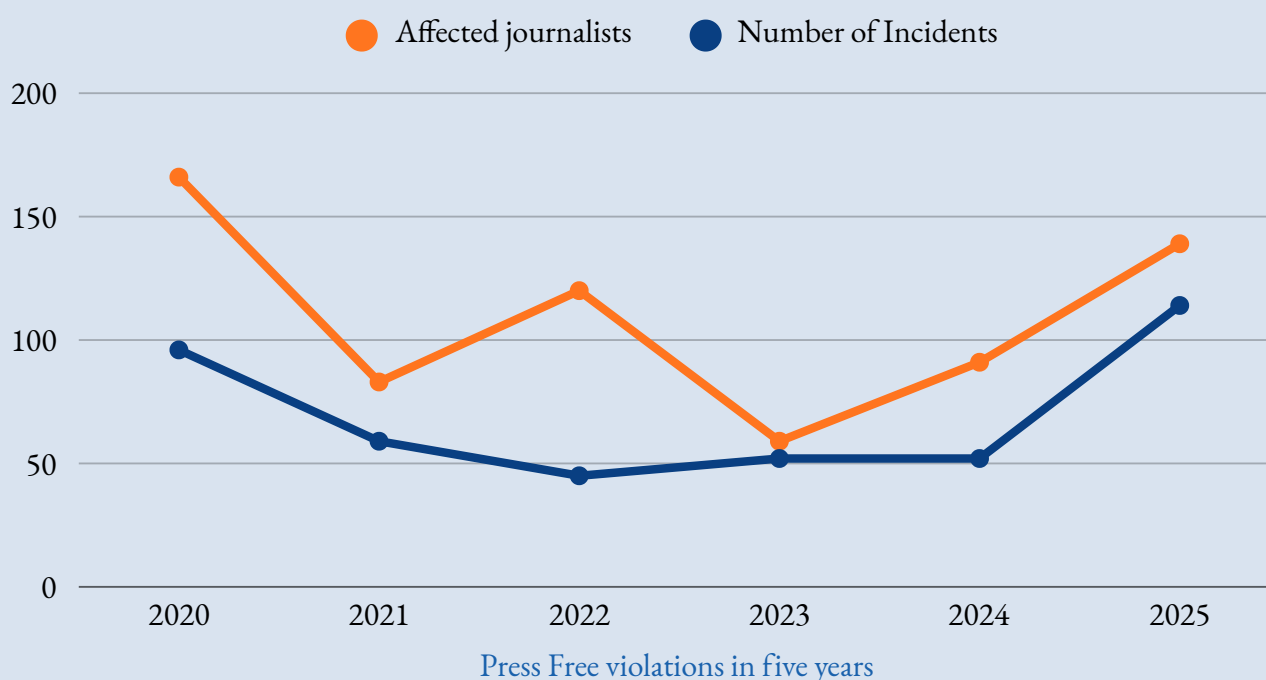
[2] <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1488>

On July 7, Htpkhabar.com chairperson Diwakar Sah and cameraperson Manoj Pariyar were manhandled and had their equipment damaged while reporting alleged financial irregularities at the Infrastructure Development Office in Madhesh Province. Despite prior coordination with authorities and security persons present at the scene, a group claiming to be a consumers' committee obstructed and assaulted the journalists. Following the incident, Sah fled to Kathmandu for few days seeking safety[3].

This year, total 18 journalists faced violations from protestors when they were covering different protests and demonstrations.

1.5 Violation trend in five years

The annual trend this year showed the number of violations standing highest of last five years from 2020 to 2025. Further, the number of journalists affected this year has also increased notably from last year.



Moreover, the number of female journalists facing violations is increasing every year, highlighting the urgent need for stronger safety measures for women in journalism.

In terms of news coverage, media persons reporting on social issues- particularly protests- faced the highest number of violations (37), followed by those covering politics (15) and corruption (16) among others.

[3] <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1513>

2. Impunity watch

Cases of impunity for crimes against journalists awaiting investigation and justice were not addressed in 2025 as well. The mechanisms responsible for adjudication of these cases- the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission for Investigation of Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP)- got appointments of commissioners and chairs on May 2024 and started receiving complaints from victim families. But justice process has not gained pace, thereby dashing hope for reduction of impunity with victims' trust in decline.

However, to a positive note, the interim government placed after the Gen Z movement declared a dead journalist Suresh Rajak as a 'martyr' on December 8 and provided employment to Rajak's wife as a support. Four of the injured journalists- Shambhu Dangal, Dipendra Dhungana, Shyam Shrestha and Umesh Karki- during Gen Z movement were also honoured and provided monetary support.

3. Law and Policy watch

This year failed to see any development for overall law and policy environment. On a positive note, the Government of Nepal endorsed the National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy on August 11 and inaugurated the National AI Center on November 10. This policy outlines specific measures such as awareness-raising, orientation, literacy, skill development, and capacity-building programmes on AI at the federal, provincial, and local levels.

Moreover, the Printing and Publication Act, 1991 was amended on July 30. Its fourth chapter dealing with print and online media regulation requires online media outlets to register and renew their registration through the concerned district authorities, instead of the previous provision under the Department of Information and Broadcasting. This amendment raised serious concerns among media professionals and added a financial burden to the online media outlets.

The regulation based on this act has a separate section for online media regulation. According to the rules 8 (a) and (b) the online media should pay Rs. 5,000 for registration and Rs 2500 for renewal process. The registration will be valid for one fiscal year.

Furthermore, authority for online media regulation by the Press Council Nepal has also been transferred to the local administration, which is viewed as a regressive move.

An independent regulatory mechanism is essential to ensure fair and credible regulation of online media. Regarding the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) Act, a year has passed since its approval and implementation on October 8, 2024. Even after a year of enactment, the meaningful transformation of state-run media- Radio Nepal and Nepal Television- into

independent public service broadcasters is awaited. The regulation still contains control oriented provisions. Provisions on editorial independence and an ombudsman mechanism for grievance handling are urgent needs in the PSB regulation. The PSB Board is also yet to form a Governing Council.

Amid these developments, the House of Representatives was dissolved and an interim government formed following the Gen Z movement that took place in Nepal on September 8–9, 2025. As many as 30 bills-including the Media Council Bill and the Information Technology and Cyber Security Bill went to 'zero' status, causing utmost uncertainty.

Similarly, Social Network Management and Operation Bill has been pending at the National Assembly, upper house. Mass Media Bill was also waiting entry to parliament.

4. Acute financial crisis

Nepali media facing severe financial crisis since Covid-19 has met further crisis with a loss of data and valuable infrastructure during the protests in 2025. Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) claims 19 media organizations across Nepal suffered financial losses worth approximately NPR 599 million. Similarly, as per the details shared by the media organizations with FNJ, personal losses of the media persons' account to approximately NPR 178 million.

5. Digital sphere and artistic freedom

With 92.39 population penetration on mobile internet, approximately 72.8% of the population aged 18-34 years are active in social media in Nepal. Contrary to this, Nepal Government took a strict action to ban around two dozens of social media platforms from operating in Nepal on September 4. The government demanded each platform must designate a point of contact, a Resident Grievance Handling Officer and a Monitoring officer to ensure compliance with self-regulation.

As per government decision, Nepal Telecommunications Authority on July 18 issued a directive to all telecom and internet service providers to ban Telegram App, citing the application's increasing use in online fraud, money laundering, and other serious cybercrimes as primary reasons for the ban.

Banning of these platforms and rising corruption contribute to a build against government move, to which, Gen Z youth took a lead. These bans were lifted following the Gen Z movement.

Moreover, general public and media persons felt unsafe in the social media platforms for exercising their rights to freedom of expression. Journalists were abused and threatened for

sharing posts related to activities of public offices and services.[4].

Flood of misinformation and disinformation on social media not only polluted entire information ecosystem but also played a significant role to discredit media, during the Gen Z movement. These posts also contributed to trigger panic and violence at different places of the country.[5]

The Film Censor Board censored two movies: Rajaganj and Tandavam. They were ordered to remove the scenes before getting permission certificate. Rajaganj movie team was asked to remove scenes containing statement by the then Prime Minister.[6].

An actress faced massive backlash for her statements during an interview given to a television channel. It was sheer violation of her right to free expression.[7]

Citizens making critical posts on social media platforms were also arrested in several incidents.[8]

6. Journalists' safety mechanism strengthened

To a positive note, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) central and provincial mechanisms for freedom of expression and journalists' safety worked on protection and promotion of freedom of expression in 2025. With the formation of provincial mechanisms in 2024, these mechanisms were further strengthened with orientations on freedom of expression monitoring, keeping record and investigation at province levels.

The central mechanism- Steering Committee has decided to include budget for these mechanisms in the upcoming yearly program plan, form a five-member mechanism in each district in coordination with district chapters of Federation of Nepali Journalists, Nepal Bar Association and the NGO Federation.

Further, NHRC has mainstreamed freedom of expression issues into its regular human rights monitoring. Lately, the media monitoring team at NHRC has been deployed across the nation to study the status of FoE, press freedom and journalists' safety. The team is planning to develop a checklist as a standard format for regular FoE monitoring and annual report publication.

[4] <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1542>

[5] https://ekantipur.com/opinion/2025/11/24/journalism-in-an-environment-of-misinformation-41-17.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawPBqGtleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETfQTEpYcXRfM1hXMUd0ZIRDC3J0YwZhchHBfaWQQMjIyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHrItsK6CXh-ktvryK1EngwoGHAFijpEDg0Uh2GYAmgZA6DkH8InrXKkxNyPw_aem_Of9JBA42XMKQgPdtjyzZ9g

[6] <https://freedomforum.org.np/news/detail/782>

[7] <https://freedomforum.org.np/news/detail/792>

[8] <https://freedomforum.org.np/news/detail/815>



NHRC also discussed with the journalists injured during the reporting of Gen Z movement and assured them of full support in justice seeking process.

7. Emergency support to victim journalists

The journalists seriously injured while covering the Gen Z movement on September 8 were provided support for their treatment and equipment damage. Nepal Government honored Dipendra Dhungana, Shyam Shrestha and Umesh Karki with cash prizes worth NPR 25000 each and NPR 100000 to Shambhu Dungal. FNJ supported these journalists with NPR 25,000 each and Press Council Nepal awarded them with Rs. 10,000 each.

In addition, the international organizations like the Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the Media and Cooperation and Transition (MICT) also provided emergency support to the journalists- Dipendra Dhungana and Shambhu Dungal- for their treatment and equipment damage. Journalist Santosh Deuja, whose residence was vandalized and set on fire during the Gen Z movement, received support from FPU. Similarly, journalist Gopal Dahal was provided relocation support to continue his work from Kathmandu after being displaced from Dharan due to repeated threats from the mayor's supporters. Another journalist Jiyalal Sah received litigation support from FPU for cases he has been facing at District Court Parsa. Freedom Forum facilitated the request and support process to these journalists.

Trends and Analyses

- With rising youth frustration towards government resulting in demonstration and protests, a specific trend of this year, was severe attacks on photographers and their equipment. The multimedia journalists, who are on the fields for news coverage, faced more intimidations.
- FF prepared a special report[9] on the impact on freedom of expression and journalists' safety in the wake of September 8-9 Gen Z movement in Nepal. The protest called by the youths of Gen Z group in the federal capital, Kathmandu, was initially peaceful on September 8, but in the afternoon, the youths demanding the lift in social media ban and good governance became victims of indiscriminate firing opened by the security persons. It caused as many as 19 deaths till late night on September 8.
- The attack on media houses eroded sense of security among journalists. They were forced to work under panicked situation.
- Populist politics took a heavy toll on media, flaring narrative against mainstream media and inciting violence and attacks. The misinformation and disinformation on the mainstream media content and journalists was further augmented during the crises where the entire security was paralyzed.
- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) visited some media houses which suffered much in the protest occurred on September 9. The NHRC mechanism on freedom of expression and safety of journalists provided orientation to the provincial mechanisms. Even the journalists in need were enquired by the province and central level mechanisms of NHRCs. However, a further active role of NHRC will be helpful to protect and promote FoE and journalists' rights in difficult time
- The government declared martyr to a journalist Suresh Rajak who died while covering the pro-monarchy protest on March 28 and provided monetary support to four journalists injured during Gen Z movement. However, further supportive and positive roles are expected from the government for the cause of FoE and journalists' rights in adverse situation.
- Gen Z movement toppled the government, causing the new government in place that dissolved the House of Representatives, the lower house of federal parliament. With this, the status of dozens of bills, including those relating to mass communications and journalists' rights were rendered zero. Media reform came to stand still.

[9] <https://freedomforum.org.np/publications/item/nepali-media-braves-hostility-preliminary-report>

- Although the enforcement of Social Security Fund (SSF) scheme in state-run media comes in a positive development, many other journalists and employees at private media are waiting for this facility for their financial security.
- The contents generated with artificial intelligence (AI) went viral, creating utmost confusion among the consumers of digital information. The ill-intended content including hate speech and gender-based violence made round on social media, especially during the tense political unrest and foreign visits of dignitaries.
- Efforts of legacy media remained inadequate to dispel the confusion created by the misinformation and disinformation over pressing issues. Even the political cadres resorted to amplifying AI-generated contents to create narrative in particular favor, which ultimately invited criticism.
- Incendiary remark of political leaders gave impetus to the spread of hate content online.
- It was positive that number of internet-based media, YouTube channels have increased lately. Although the shift towards digital media is encouraging in number, it is partly a measure to avoid financial burden of running legacy media and lure to new model of income. But, professional values are eroding to the extent that it has caused discredit.
- The financial crisis has continued to the legacy media, especially the community radios. Resources decline and reduction in project-based programs resulted to decrease income. As many as 35 community radios were closed, according to the ACORAB (Association of Community Radio Broadcasters' Nepal). There is massive retrenchment in the running ones as well.
- Although the local media emerged vibrantly in the wake of federalism, they are badly co-opted by the local governments, thereby rendering media to lose credibility and trust. Several issues surrounding local government, good governance and development activities are left underreported or unreported due to this. It not only ruins media professionalism but also kills local democracy and fuels non-transparency.
- The liberal approach from judiciary is expected for better protection of journalists' rights and safety.
- The right to information (RTI) campaigners and activists found their role shrinking. The intervention from the National Information Commission (NIC) to expand RTI regime was slow off the mark.

- It was evident that the more the protest and political unrests, the more the vulnerable the media were. The March protest and September 8-9 movement exposed media vulnerability.
- It is positive that Nepali media have gradually begun utilizing AI to create relevant photos and videos for stories. Similarly, AI has been helpful to journalists to find new ideas for writing stories, summarization of long stories, and presentation in an impressive way. Translation and editing are also assisted much by AI. However, hasty use and ultimate trust to AI is detrimental, eroding public trust in media content and journalists.
- Chasing after viewership, professional media practices and ethics have eroded, especially in new media, creating gross confusion among information consumers.

Observation and Forecast

- With the election to the House of Representatives (HoR), lower house of the federal parliament, scheduled for March 5, 2026, political campaigning would be intensified, thereby creating opportunities for active reporting by the media. However, in case of fragile security and political protests, the media persons would face attacks.
- In view of the past incidents where media houses and journalists on fields suffered worst, safety measures along with adequate training is imperative to field reporters. Both the media houses and reporters need to pay adequate attention to avoid untoward activities against them.
- The political polarization- new or the alternative force on the one hand and the parties with legacy- is likely to emerge in a bid to consolidate their strength in view of the coming election. At such, the media houses must be aware to remain independent, fair and professional, to cater right and credible news and information to the consumers and contribute to functional democracy.
- However, manipulation of media with the use of technology cannot be denied. The political parties and media are equally important actors in a democracy, so parties must realize the fact that manipulation of media would ultimately dent democratic values.
- Practicing self-regulation and professional values is imperative to protect media credibility.
- Adequate training to media houses on modern technology, especially to navigate digital spheres and utilize AI is a pressing need. Both the journalists and employees at all media must be equipped with AI so that they would be able to protect themselves and media credibility while staying away from downsides of AI and intimidation waged by other elements with misuse of AI.
- Moreover, the insurance of journalists and their equipment has become an acute need in view of the serious attack upon them during the Gen Z movement.
- The more the protest and political unrest, the more the vulnerable the media.
- The code of conduct to be issued by the Election Commission for the upcoming HoR election, should facilitate journalists' rights to free reporting rather than keeping provision to suppress independent media in the name of election integrity. Journalism's watchdog role should not be dented by election code of conduct. Free media is imperative to help ensure electoral integrity.

- Proper training is essential to security persons mobilized in mob control and protest so that attacks on journalists covering tense situation would decline.
- State institutes' transparent and accountable functions are essential to help create an atmosphere free for journalism.
- Accountability of tech platforms can be helpful in fostering FoE and journalists' rights.
- Stable politics with strict adherence to good governance, democracy and human rights are urgency to build an atmosphere conducive to media freedoms and journalists' rights.



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