



# FreeExpression

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A NEWSLETTER OF FREEDOM FORUM

## Challenges to Nepali media unabated

### Digital threats to rise alarmingly

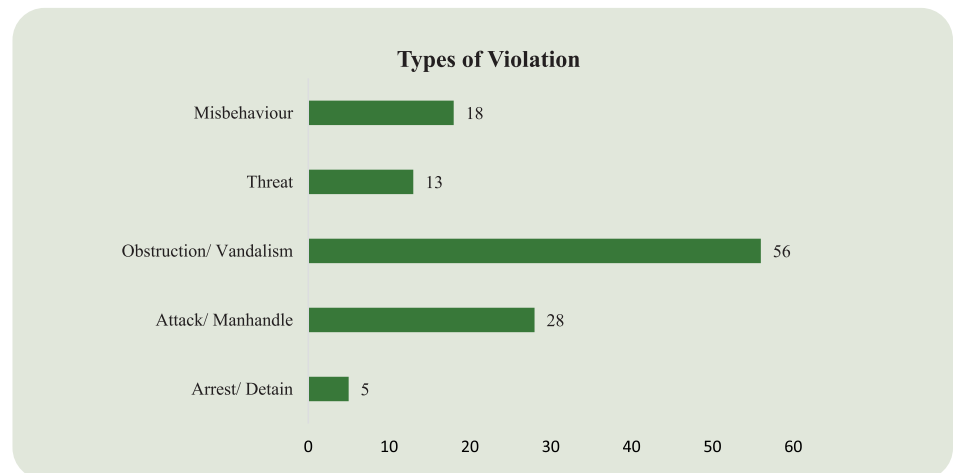
Despite slight decline of press freedom violations in 2022, growing number of affected journalists is a worrying trend. Little progress in addressing impunity on crimes against journalists, continued hostility meted out largely by the political cadres and local leaders, absence of FoE and press freedom friendly law and policy, interference in media by the constitutional body, increased cyber surveillance against media persons, and flood of fake news were major trends recorded this year. However, with the successful conduct of election at three tiers of governments, 2022 remained as an election year, thereby contributing to foster democratic system.

Freedom Forum recorded total 45 incidents of press freedom violations from January to December 2022. In these incidents, 109 male and 11 female journalists were directly affected. Though the data show slight decrease in the number of incidents, number of affected journalists has increased this year as compared to the previous year, 2021. In 2021, FF had recorded 56 incidents where 83 journalists were affected.

#### 1. Violation Types

This year, FF recorded five types of violations;

- arrest/ detention
- attack/ manhandle,
- obstruction/ vandalism,
- threat to life, and
- misbehavior



Among those, highest number of journalists (56) were obstructed from reporting followed by attacks upon 28 journalists. Similarly, 18 journalists were misbehaved, 13 received threats and death threats combined and five were arrested and/or detained for news reporting.

In the incidents recorded under obstruction/ vandalism, majority of journalists (53) including 6 female journalists were affected while reporting in the field and remaining three were affected due to vandalism inside the media house. A new trend where more journalists are intimidated while reporting in the field.

*Journalist and right to information (RTI) activist Kailash Majhi was held in police custody for four days for his critical reporting about local leadership in Saptari. Saptari lies in Madhesh Province of Nepal. Majhi shared that he had been reporting on the irregularities and mal-*

*feasance of local authorities for long. Recently, he had sought information on the activities of a construction consumer committee in the district using RTI.*

*Following this, the committee members abused him seeking information. On June 13, Nepal police arrested Majhi and charged him with indecent behavior. The case was registered at District Administration Office (DAO) under the Local Administration Act 2016 BS, Majhi informed. "I am a journalist and RTI activist but they treated me like a criminal while in detention. I even do not know what crime I committed. Is reporting on irregularities a crime?", argued Majhi. Later, Majhi was released on June 17 with Rs. 1,500 bail amount.<sup>1</sup>*

The highest number of press freedom violations was recorded in the Bagmati Province (17), where 44 media persons were directly affected followed by 11 incidents in the

<sup>1</sup> <http://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1343>

## Message from Executive Chief

# Democratic reform awaited



**T**his past year, 2022 largely remained an election year. It is the second election after the country got new constitution in 2015. Nepal successfully conducted the election of three-tiers of government- local, provincial and federal. The local level election was held in May 13 while the federal and provincial elections on November 20. The democratic party, Nepali Congress, has emerged the largest party in the parliament. Homework is going on with intensified discussions among the political parties for the formation of the new government. The elections were the best opportunity for the people to choose leaders. It was also a test to the parties whether they have retained public trust or not. The election result has shown the strength of the Nepali political parties. The new trend of the recent election is the emergence of new parties and leaders with relatively short span of campaigning. Whether the new parties emerged especially in response to the old parties' behavior would deliver the promises and how they build organization by retaining people's mandate is awaited. As the discussions are going on for the formation of new government and new parliament is being held, people are now observing closely both the old and new political parties. The role of the government and parliament will be important on how the federal democratic system would thrive in the coming five years.

We are the federal country and the Constitution has formally institutionalized the change in governance- from unitary to federal. Federal system is regarded as the democratic and inclusive system where the people's aspiration and demands would be addressed well. People have hoped that public service delivery would be smooth, social justice maintained, and participatory policy and law making flourished, marginalized people and community brought to fore and the development ensured. For it to happen, the political behavior must change and parliament made successful.

In addition to the role of parliament and political parties, the reform in other democratic spheres are also the essentials in Nepal. The judiciary which remained tainted and obstructed for long in 2022. The longtime struggle by the legal practitioners against Chief Justice over his incompetence and bad governance in judiciary indicated reform, change and good governance in judiciary. Rule of law must not be elusive.

Similarly, the media situation did not see noticeable progress. There was neither any legal and policy reform nor change in the political attitude to press freedom. The annual media report Freedom Forum prepared showed slight decline in number of press freedom violation but the number of journalists affected with violation increased. A total of 45 incidents of press freedom violation were recorded where 120 journalists were affected in the year, 2022. It showed that Nepali media is not free from intimidation. The political parties are in need of teaching their cadres and local leaders to respect press freedom and journalists' rights to free reporting. As the role of investigative journalists and critical public sphere are contributors to good governance and transparency in system, their safety also bear significance.

Although this past year was the election year, thereby making democratic exercise, the repercussion of twice dissolution of House of Representatives was manifest in the political parties and national affairs. The parliament could not function well to serve people's interest. Many bills had to be scrapped and some retracted. The five-year term of the parliament was not successful. Making of government and breaking it with alliance formation continued serving short-lived interest of the parties. Already affected by global crisis of COVID-19, the country's economy was nearly pushed to tailspin with slow development, low capital expenditure and meagre collection of revenue. Corruption and irregularities were not curbed to the extent the governments had promised. An atmosphere conducive for the citizens to exercise economic freedoms would help boost business and innovation with the creation of employments. This sector also needs attention.

So, time has come for broader consensus for working together to cement democratic system is imperative. By grappling with the global impacts of the Covid-19, restoration of enthusiasm and activities from all sides would enable atmosphere for the sustainable peace and stability where free press, independent judiciary, and democratic public institutions would be strengthened. As always, Freedom Forum continues its advocacy for functional democracy with the protection and promotion of press freedom. Happy New Year 2023! 🌱

## Prosecution of comedian Singh FF urges for civil liberty sensitivity among law enforcing bodies

**C**omedian Apoorva Kshitiz Singh was arrested twice on August 28 and October 18. He was arrested for allegedly hurting the sentiment of the Newar community through his standup comedy.

The activists had filed slew of cases against Singh under four different sections:- Section 165 (Prohibition of undermining social rites and rituals), Section 166 (Prohibition of untouchability or discriminatory treatment on ground of caste) and Section 168 (Prohibition of degrading or inhuman treatment) of Chapter 10 (Offenses Relating to Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment), and Section 65 (Prohibition of acts prejudicial to public tranquility) of Chapter 2 (Offenses against Public Tranquility) of the Criminal Code, 2017.

Singh was presented in the Kathmandu District Administration Office on August 28, 2022. Then, the administration issued an order to keep him in custody for 10 days for investigation. Thereafter, police submitted the charge sheet at the District Attorney Office after investigation, according to the media reports. Singh was rearrested after the order from the District Attorney Office.

Singh was presented at the court for his statement on October 19.

As FF was calling for immediate release of comedian Singh, the news had come that the court granted him bail over a court guarantee of 250 thousand on October 20.

The malicious prosecution based on overbroad interpretation of law has resulted in punishing-through-the-process effect on the comedian. FF is concerned that these forms of prosecution will cause chilling effect on the exercise of right to freedom of expression. 🌱



# Freedom of Expression Violations

## Province 1

### Photojournalist arrested

A Udayapur-based photojournalist at Radio Nepal Gajendra Rai was arrested for his reporting on November 26.

Freedom Forum talked to another journalist Bharat Khadka about the incident. He shared that Rai was arrested for his news published on [www.nigranipost.com](http://www.nigranipost.com) (online news portal).

Police arrested Rai while he was reporting update on vote counting. According to Nepal police, Rai was charged under cybercrime act.

Rai is also chairperson of the news portal.

According to Khadka, the court had added five more days of detention for investigation purpose on the case. The police took Rai's statement on November 29. 🗳️



Listen to Freedom Forum Podcast Freedom Chautari Here.

<http://freedomforum.org.np/content/podcast/>



## Madhesh Province

### Digital threat

Journalist and RTI activist Raghunath Sah was misbehaved for his reporting on November 7 in Rautahat.

Sah informed Freedom Forum that he had published a news about corruption in Gadhimai Municipality, Rautahat on <https://www.newsdailymp.com/> and shared related posts on his social media pages.

The news had quoted minutes of the municipality's executive meeting which stated that due to unsatisfactory performance of the finance officer Rameshwar Sahani, he could not continue his job from July 17, 2022. The news claims that Sahani was involved in different financial activities at the municipality after the decision.

After the news was published, Sahani and his people started to call Sah and threaten him to remove the news from the online. Few people also misbehaved with Sah for publishing news.

### Threats

A. Reporter at <https://farakdhar.com/> Deepak Karna received death threat for his reporting on November 2 in Dhanusha.

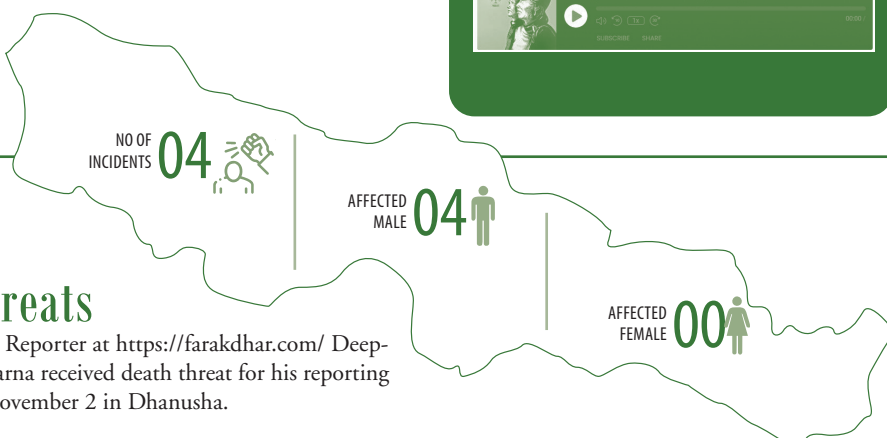
Talking to Freedom Forum, reporter Karna shared that he had published a news on dispute between two ward chairpersons of Janakpurdham on November 1 in a news portal (<https://todayawaj.com/>) being operated from Janakpurdham. Following the news publication, he received several calls and abusive messages pressing to delete the news from online news website.

"I refused to delete the news from website and suggested him to follow legitimate process to complain for any reservation over news", said reporter Karna adding, "Later I found that the person was one of the ward chair's son." Reporter Karna further informed that the boy confessed in front of the police and fellow journalists and apologized in written for his misbehaviour.

B. Senior reporter at Kantipur National daily Abdhesh Jha was issued death threat for news published on December 3 on the daily. Jha is Saptari-based reporter for the daily which is located in Madhesh Province of Nepal.

Reporter Jha had published news about appointment of staffs with the direct order of executive Municipal Chief Ishrat Parveen. Following this, few people posted abusive and threatening posts against reporter Jha on their social media pages.

Journalists at Saptari also reported the incident at the District Police Office but no investigation had started yet, according to reporter Jha. 🗳️



## Mayor's threat of physical assault on journalist

Reporter at [www.onlinekhabar.com](http://www.onlinekhabar.com) Shailendra Mahato was issued a threat of attack for news reporting critical to the Mayor of Bideha Municipality, Dhanusha on December 30.

The incident took place during the oath-taking ceremony of newly elected province assembly members. Reporter Mahato shared with Freedom Forum that

he was there to report on the ceremony along with 3 to 4 fellow journalists.

Meanwhile, Mayor Das told reporter Mahato that there were 4 to 5 journalists including Mahato who should be taught lesson. Reporter Mahato further said that Mayor Das shouted and threatened, "You have written news defaming me so you are the first in position to get lesson. Someday, when you come in municipality office I will kick and break your bones."

Moreover, the Mayor continued, "If I cannot do that, I will use some women or other people but I will not spare you, I would rather go to jail", according to reporter Mahato.

Journalists in Madhesh Province have submitted a memorandum to the Chief District Officer to take immediate action against Mayor Das. 🌱

## Bagmati Province

### Digital threat

Editor at [www.ukeraa.com](http://www.ukeraa.com) K P Dhungana received abusive and threatening messages on his social media posts on November 17.

Editor Dhungana had posted his video questioning leader Rabi Lamichhane about his Nepali citizenship. Lamichhane, Chairperson of Nepal Independent Party, had contested the House of Representatives election.

Editor Dhungana also posted a status on November 18- The chairperson had admitted the

fact that he did not have Nepali citizenship and he was ready to discuss with him on this issue, so he (editor) requests everyone not to annoy him.

On both the posts, people supporting leader Lamichhane posted various abusive and insulting comments.

### Misbehavior

Reporter at Nayapatrika national daily Bibek Pokhrel was misbehaved while reporting in Chitwan on October 4.

Reporter Pokhrel had reached Chitwan Media College to report on the ongoing clash among the locals and police in the hospital premises. The clash broke when the victim families started protesting against the hospital administration demanding strict action against the doctor for his alleged carelessness leading to death of one of their family members.

Police officers misbehaved with the reporter while he was interviewing the victim families. 🌱



## Journalist attacked over political reporting

In the night of December 4, a group of political cadres and local leaders close to the Nepali Congress, attacked journalists Ram Kumar Elan, Ramesh Banjara and Krishna Saru Magar in Hetauda over the news story written on why a Nepali Congress party candidate got defeat in Hetauda district.

Publisher and editor of local Bagmati Express, Banjara had written a news analyzing why the Nepali Congress candidate lost the election to House of Representatives held in November 20.

Being irate over the news, the political cadres called the journalists and beat them up. The journalists had to visit hospital for treatment

as they got bruises. However, they escaped serious injury, according to Shubha Laxmi Bishwokarma, a reporter to the Annapurna Post daily from Makwanpur.

Bishwokarma further informed that the journalists lodged complaint at district police office. 🌱



# Lumbini Province

## Vandalism

A group of hooligans entered the office of Radio Banglachuli and threatened the media persons on December 5. The radio station is in Dang, Lumbini Province.

Program head at the radio station, Bhupendra Prakash Oli, shared with Freedom Forum that around 40-50 persons including political cadres entered the radio station and threatened staff.

They also tore staffs' attendance book and other official documents. They have said that they visited the radio station for monitoring purpose.

"We have also informed the local police about the incident, however, no investigation has been carried out till date (December 7)," Oli added. 🌿



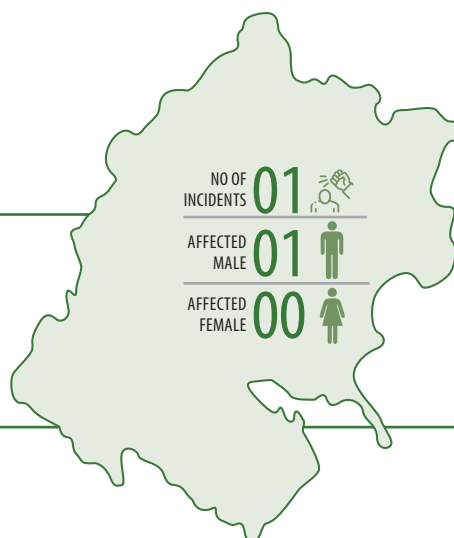
# Sudurpaschim Province

## Reporter taken under control for reporting on misuse of office vehicle

Reporter at News 24 television Khem Dhungana was taken under control for some hours while reporting on December 11 in Kailali. Journalist Dhungana was reporting on the misuse of vehicles owned by the Lamki Chuha Municipality by Mayor Ms Sushila Shahi for construction of her own residence. According to the reporter, he asked Mayor Shahi whether she had rented the vehicles but Shahi refused to talk to the

reporter. Then, reporter Dhungana went to the construction site and took photos and videos. As he was taking videos of the construction site, Mayor Shahi reached there and started threatening him to delete the videos. Shahi's personal secretary seized the reporter's mobile and asked him to delete the videos.

Later, reporter Dhungana deleted a few footages in front of police officers. But, Mayor Shahi and



her team took Dhungana under control and threatened him not to broadcast the news on television. Reporter Dhungana was set free after three hours as he committed seemingly to not broadcast the news on television. The news was, however, broadcast on the television channel later. 🌿

## EC goes beyond jurisdiction, tramples press freedom frequently

The Election Commission (EC) frequently attacked press freedom and freedom of expression, going beyond its jurisdiction in name of election code of conduct in the wake of November 20 election to the House of Representatives and Provincial Assembly. The EC issued a letter to a leading online news portal in Nepal, [www.setopati.com](http://www.setopati.com), to remove a news story it published on November 5, 2022.

According to the media reports, the letter addressed to Editor-In-Chief Ameet Dhakal stated that the news published on November 4 was aimed at defaming the upcoming House of Representatives election's candidate Agni Kharel and his family. So, the editor should remove the

content within 24 hours and justify whether the EC should take action against the news portal for violating election's code of conduct.

The news titled- 'Agni Kharel's son Nishan is in the US Army, still has Nepali citizenship' was published online on November 4. Editor in Chief Dhakal wrote in a tweet, "We will defend our right and move to court against the EC's order but we will not remove the news published." The news said that candidate Kharel's son despite being in the US Army for seven years still has Nepali citizenship and name in the voters' list. The EC's order to remove the news was an egregious violation of press freedom. There is already a media monitoring body Press Council Nepal if any news content has violated conduct. Such action to censor media does not come under jurisdiction of the election commission.

Following wide criticisms, EC withdrew its order issued to the online on November 6 stating the action does not come under its jurisdiction and it was a mistake at the commission. Meanwhile, Press Council has issued a 24-hour justification letter with the online over same news.

To this, FF observed that EC, a constitutional body's repeated threat to free press is a worrying trend in Nepal. Time has come for right defenders to speak against such misuse of State institution which breach citizen's fundamental rights enshrined by constitution. EC can not be above the constitution at all. Vibrant role of media is imperative in democracy to play a watchdog role. It is also essential for free and fair election. Silencing media does not ensure fair election. 🌿

# Senior journalist Nepal's social media accounts hacked

Senior journalist Kishor Nepal's social accounts were hacked since October 25. Nepal is former president of Federation of Nepali Journalists and has served as editor at various Nepali media.

According to the senior journalist Nepal, his Facebook account suddenly stopped functioning on October 25. After a few days, his twitter and INSTA accounts also stopped working.

Following this, journalist Nepal reported the incident at cyber bureau of Nepal Police, concerned ministries and administrative officer.

Moreover, his mobile number and email also stopped functioning on November 18- just two

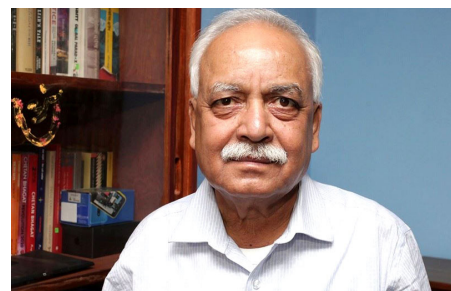
days before the federal and provincial election.

Thereafter, he was completely bereft of social communications and updates.

"I have informed all concerned authorities about the incident but in vain. I am worried why I am being attacked with these new sorts of weapons, he said, questioning, "Is this not an attempt to restrict my rights to free speech?"

Though journalist Nepal's mobile number started functioning from December 1, all other accounts are yet not functioning.

FF Executive Chief Taranath Dahal states- senior journalist Nepal has been victim of state surveil-



lance, digital threats and cyberattack which is deplorable. This is a severe restriction on journalists' and civic rights.

FF strongly urged the state authorities to investigate the incident fairly and ensure justice to journalist Nepal. 🌱

## EC's order to remove social media page

The Election Commission issued an order to remove social media pages in the name of violating election code of conduct on October 25.

The EC issued a press release stating- Facebook groups and pages with the names, 'No, Not again', 'No'. 'Not Again and NO NOT AGAIN', etc. should be immediately removed or those people involved in those campaigns through social media will have to bear 'fine up to 100 thousand or imprisonment up to five years or both' according to the Electronic Transactions Act.

According to the social media pages with these names and hashtags, these pages have been opened with the motive to promote citizen's Right to No Vote or Right to Reject. These pages have been found informing and reminding the public of the past experiences of the political leaders and candidates who are vying for upcoming federal and provincial elections.

However, the EC has claimed in the statement that the pages have defamed election candidates and confused the public to exercise their voting rights and spread misinformation and disinformation through their posts.

On November 6, Supreme Court issued a stay order stating not to take any action against the social media pages and issued a show cause notice to the defendants asking them to furnish written replies within 15 days. The writ petition was filed at the court against the Commission's order on October 31.

FF argues while criticism and healthy debate is the essence of democracy and voters should also be well informed to exercise their voting rights, the EC's move is aimed at stifling citizen's right to free expression and speech. 🌱

## NHRC's status downgraded

The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) based in Geneva downgraded the NHRC status to 'B'.

GANHRI decided to downgrade the NHRC in the wake of the questions being raised over the unconstitutional appointment of the Chairperson and Members of NHRC. The KP Sharma Oli-led government had appointed the Chairperson and Members of NHRC, breaching the constitution two years back. Even the writ petition filed against such a move of the government has been pending at Supreme Court since then.

Similarly, the same government made attempt to curtail the role of NHRC while amending the NHRC Act, which too must have contributed to the point in downgrading NHRC. FF takes this backsliding of NHRC seriously and urges all stakeholders, including the government and political parties to be serious to restore the NHRC status so that Nepal's human rights image can be boosted at home and in the international arena.

FF is of the view that downgrading of NHRC is a blot on Nepal's principal human rights monitoring body. Question on credibility of NHRC also questions the system. NHRC must therefore revive its image of an independent rights watch body. Government must stop its efforts to limit NHRC jurisdiction. Breaching rights body's jurisdiction is not acceptable in a democracy. 🌱

Continued from Page 1

## 2. Violations in Province

Madhesh Province affecting 42 media persons. The Gandaki and the Lumbini Provinces witnessed 2 and 4 violations respectively where 11 journalists each were affected. Again, in six incidents were recorded in the Karnali Province, seven journalists were affected. The Sudurpaschim Province recorded 3 incidents of violation and Province-1 witnessed 2. The number of journalists affected were three and two journalists respectively.

The Bagmati Province, having the federal capital Kathmandu and over 60 percent media concentration, saw the highest number of affected journalists.

## 3. Affected journalists and media affiliation

Out of total 119 journalists, sixty were listed under 'Others' category. The incident that affects more than two journalists associated with different types of media is recorded under this category. Similarly, the journalists associated with multimedia including social site like YouTube are also listed under this category.

Similarly, out of remaining 59 journalists, 44% (26) journalists working in online media faced violations while doing their job followed by 12 from print media, 11 from television channels, nine from FM/ Radio and one a freelance journalist.

## 4. Hostile Elements

Most of the journalists (53) were intimidated by the political cadres. Second hostile element is security persons which affected 37 journalists followed by government employees affecting 13 journalists and goons' intimidation affected two journalists.

Elements such as local public, businessmen, contractors and unidentified people are categorized under 'Others' which intimidated 15 journalists.

## 5. Violations over a decade

The figure below shows that number of press freedom violations decreased for the third time since 2019.

Though the chart shows decreasing number of violation incidents for some years, it is worrying that number of affected journalists have increased.

## Impunity Update

The impunity for the crimes committed against journalists during the armed conflict 25 years ago has not yet been addressed well. The

victims and their families are still awaiting justice.

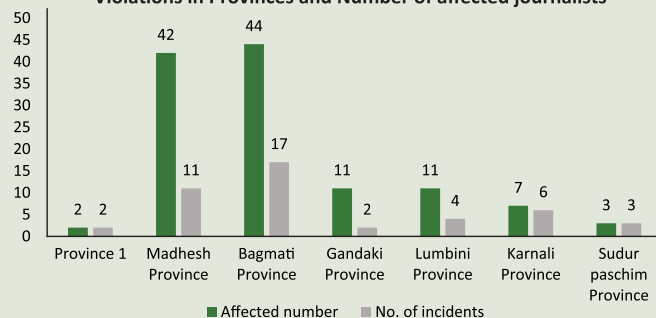
It is welcome that Janakpurdham High Court's verdict of life imprisonment to the murder convict of media entrepreneur Arun Singhaniya was one of the positive update on long pending case of impunity.

The Court issued the verdict on September 21, 2022. The High Court sentenced life imprisonment to the suspended lawmaker and former Minister of State Sanjay Kumar Saha who was declared the mastermind of the murder. Singhaniya, the then chairman of Janakpur Today Media Group was shot dead on March 1, 2010 at a local Shiva Chowk of Janakpur.

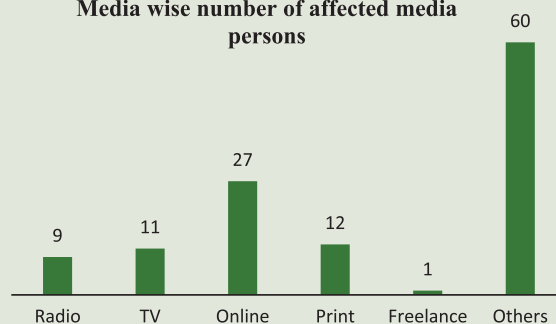
Though slowly, pending cases of impunity for crimes against journalists seem to be addressed providing justice to the victim families.

The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs tabled Transitional Justice Act's Amendment Bill at the parliament for amendment of Investigation of Enforced Disappeared Persons; and Truth and Reconciliation Commission

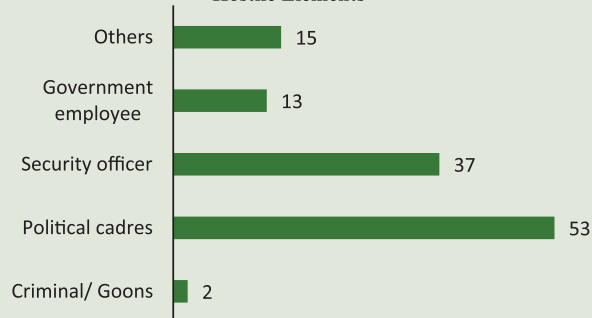
Violations in Provinces and Number of affected journalists



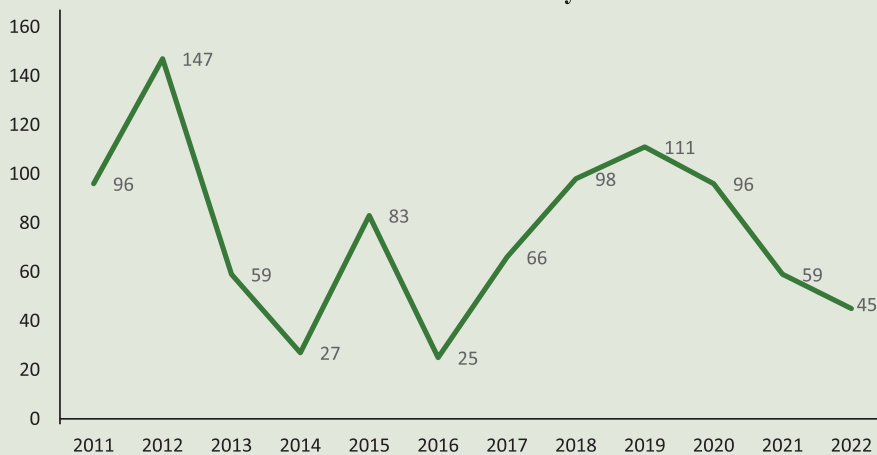
Media wise number of affected media persons



Hostile Elements



Number of violations in 12 years



Act, 2014, on July 12, 2022. The proposed amendment however drew criticism from various sides reasoning that it could not ensure justice to the victims of the armed conflict. Along with the transitional justice issues, the impunity relating to crimes against journalists is also left unaddressed. The demand put forth before the government to take the cases of crimes against journalists to the regular court under criminal offense rather than transitional justice mechanism went unheard this year too.

## Law and Policy

This past year, 2022, remained the election year with successful elections in three levels- local level government, provincial and federal assembly. With many bills pending at the parliament, media-related bills and policies (Media Council Bill, Public Service Broadcast Bill and IT Bill at federal level) were also in limbo while some retracted. This year faced the consequences of the twice dissolution of the House of Representatives.

However, the government amended 10 Rules of the National Broadcasting Regulation, 2052 with mandatory provision for the internet-based broadcasting (videos) to get license, which would charge half million rupees. Similarly, Rule 2 (C.6) of the Regulation is also against freedom of expression. According to Ministry of Communications and Information Technology the amendment was brought for regulation of online media and platforms.

Similarly, the Province Assemblies also brought the laws on media but lacked uniformity and FoE-friendly provisions. It is also serious trend.

## Trend Analysis

Press freedom violations' data recorded throughout the year 2022 showed gradual decrease in the number but the number of affected media persons in the incidents has increased. This shows although number of violation has decreased, more journalists are intimidated for doing their job. In some incidents, more than one journalists have faced violation while reporting.

In two incidents, 50 journalists were obstructed from reporting at the federal parliament and province assembly in Kathmandu and Dhanusha respectively. Despite the constitutional provision of free press, journalists were obstructed to report on the parliamentary proceedings. It reflects

the tendency against the value of open parliament.

- The use of digital spheres- social media- for public discourse is on rise in Nepal. Expansion of digital infrastructures, increased use of digital devices and growing penetration of internet have contributed positively to this end. It is indeed a significant development to propel the atmosphere for the exercise of free speech and press freedom. However, there are several incidents FF recorded which draw attention to protect and promote free speech and press freedom. This year too, majority journalists working in online media have faced violations as compared to traditional or legacy media.
- Another trend noticed this year was threats and abuse targeted to the journalists through social media posts. On the one hand, social media have worked as the fastest source of information for public and on the other hand, it has also become the platform for instant expression of abusing and threatening media and journalists for their profession.

*In a case, reporter Narajan Tamang received threatening messages on April 22 for reporting on the dispute among political parties for chairperson candidacy in the local level election at Chankheli Rural Municipality, Humla. The news also reported on the attack upon a political leader Lal Kesh Jaisi during the incident because of his biased involvement in selecting a candidate through lottery. Following the publication of news, followers and family members of Jaisi wrote abusive posts on social media, sent threatening and abusive messages to Tamang.<sup>2</sup>*

*A female journalist Babita Basnet was harassed online for her opinion article based on 'amendment of rape law in Nepal' published on an online news portal. A coordinated campaign was launched on twitter against her views on the article.<sup>3</sup>*

- Out of 17 incidents recorded in Bagmati Province, 12 took place in the federal capital Kathmandu city alone where 37 journalists were affected. This trend was also recorded in the previous reports which is because of the high concentration of media in the federal capital city.
- As in the past, media persons faced major threats from the political party leaders and cadres. The cadres attacked, threatened and abused journalists physically and through social media posts in different incidents. With political cadres as the highest hostile elements to media,

journalists appear to be in more threat while reporting on political issues.

Chasing of journalists and critics by the supporters of the party candidates in the wake of election for their reports and opinion was another abominable phenomenon. It had direct impact on the press freedom and freedom of expression online.

*Editor Narayan Adhikari and reporter Shalikh Bhatta at [www.onlinepana.com](http://www.onlinepana.com) were attacked for reporting news in Sarlahi on September 22. They had been doing follow up reporting on illegal activities of the Bagmati Municipality.<sup>4</sup>*

- Citizens' right to free expression and peaceful protest was also challenged this year with four incidents of arrests. The following incidents show the waning tolerance to criticism.

*On July 25, the police arrested three youth Arjun Poudel, Som Sharma, and Biplab Khadka for shouting slogans against Prime Minister at a program held in Kathmandu. Khadka and Sharma were rearrested from Maitighar Mandal while staging demonstrations against the Citizenship Amendment Bill.<sup>5</sup>*

*In a separate incident, a singer was also issued threat by youth leaders of Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) for his new video song, 'Pir Diyo Timro Mayale Malai Pir Diyo' published on YouTube on March 11. Due to this, singer Prakash Saput edited his video and republished on the YouTube.<sup>6</sup>*

*Comedian Apoorva Kshitiz Singh was arrested for allegedly hurting the sentiment of the Newar community through his standup comedy. Singh was arrested on the basis of complaints from activists under four different sections:- Section 165 (Prohibition of undermining social rites and rituals), Section 166 (Prohibition of untouchability or discriminatory treatment on ground of caste) and Section 168 (Prohibition of degrading or inhuman treatment) of Chapter 10 (Offenses Relating to Discrimination and Other Degrading Treatment), and Section 65 (Prohibition of acts prejudicial to public tranquility) of Chapter 2 (Offenses against Public Tranquility) of the Criminal Code, 2017. Though Singh was released on bail FF noted the malicious prosecution based on overbroad interpretation of law resulted in punishing-through-the-process effect on the comedian.<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>2</sup> <http://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1333>

<sup>3</sup> <http://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1328>

<sup>4</sup> <http://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1358>

<sup>5</sup> <http://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1350>

<sup>6</sup> <http://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1329>

<sup>7</sup> <https://freedomforum.org.np/comedian-singh-rearrested/>



- This year being the election year, Nepali media faced challenges from the constitutional body Election Commission too. There was also an egregious interference of EC with journalists' right to free reporting in the name of implementing code of conduct for election, while it is not rightful body to look after the journalists' code. For the fair election, EC's overture to control media and press freedom is worrying.

*The Election Commission Nepal issued a letter to a leading online news portal in Nepal, www.setopati.com, to remove a news story it published on November 5, 2022. The letter addressed to Editor-In-Chief Ameet Dhakal stated that the news published on November 4 was aimed at defaming an election candidate for House of Representatives and his family. So, the editor should remove the content within 24 hours and justify whether the Commission should take action against the news portal for violating election's code of conduct.<sup>8</sup>*

Similarly, EC tried to breach the citizen's right to free speech while monitoring digital media. Even a case was filed at Supreme Court against the voluntarily running 'No Not Again Campaign', but the court asked the Election Commission not to stop digital campaign.<sup>9</sup>

- Media have also been targeted by the media regulatory body, Press Council Nepal time and again. This year too, PCN misused its power to silence the media for its critical content.

*FF recorded an incident where PCN sought the clarification from the national daily, Nagarik, for publishing a cartoon on an Ex-Prime Minister on October 20, 2022. The daily had published the cartoon by Rabin Sayami on October 20.<sup>10</sup>*

- Even after seven years of promulgation of new constitution, Nepal has not been able to formulate FoE-friendly laws, thereby making legal foundation fragile for thriving media free press in the country.
- Misuse of Electronic Transaction Act continues this year too to harass journalist and citizens. There are separate laws in place regarding public security, defamation, hate speech and individual privacy but the authority frequently uses ETA which has vague provisions with hefty punishment.

## Misinformation/Disinformation

The flood of fake news- mis/disinformation on the election not only deluded voters but also contributed to discredit media. As the digital platforms were engulfed with distorted and fake news, the legacy media saw tough time to retain their presence and strength in the information ecosystem, so that they could contribute to the healthy and functional democracy.

Majority journalists working in online media have been the targets of press freedom and free expression violations. Digital media and journalists have been victim of digital surveillance and cybercrime. The following incidents are worth noting how the cybercrimes are being meted out to the journalists who write investigative reporting and make criticism.

*Original photos and contents published on the news portal www.ukeraa.com were deleted and replaced with irrelevant contents on December 1. Editor-In-Chief of the portal, KP Dhungana shared, "Total five news stories- about a citizenship and passport issues of newly formed political party Rastriya Swatantra Party and its coordinator and a cooperative involving Vice President's son - were deleted as many times as I had uploaded. While the news URL is same to that of original ones, there are new contents and irrelevant photos, which is really shocking."<sup>11</sup>*

*On the run up to the election, senior journalist Kishor Nepal's mobile phone was blocked and social media accounts hacked. Although the mobile phone was opened after some days, the social media accounts are blocked for long.<sup>12</sup>*

## Recommendation and Conclusion

- The political cadres and local leaders must internalize the fact that press freedom is the pillar of democracy and they, as one of the actors, need to respect journalists' rights to free reporting.
- Political tolerance and CSO's activism are other requirement to ensure the journalism a safe profession and create safe free-speech environment in society.
- In order to minimize hostility by the security persons to journalists, the security agencies should cater training

to their officers and employees on protecting journalists while taking under control the protests and mob.

- Digital literacy can be catered at multiple levels, including journalists in order to contribute to clean and safe digital atmosphere so that citizen's free speech and journalists' rights would be protected and promoted online.
- Continuous advocacy and activism is imperative to exert pressure on the State bodies to address the pending issues of impunity relating to crimes against journalists, and bring the FoE and press freedom friendly laws and policies.
- In the face of technological misuse resulting into floods of mis/disinformation, capacity building of journalists and public officials is imperative. The skills and knowledge to sift right information from fake news should be catered to journalists.
- Also, with the growing number of internet based media, the threats to the journalists working in online media will undoubtedly grow in the days ahead. Therefore, the digital skills to equip journalists is essential so that they can stay away from threats and challenges.
- Political will and commitment are necessary elements for enabling media law and policy environment in the federal and provincial levels as per constitutional spirit and international standards.
- Media literacy among media persons, police persons, government authority and local people is also important to understand the rights of media and journalists which in turn, is expected to contribute to reduce the incidents of press freedom violations.
- Free elections and free media are equally essential elements for a functional democracy. But, the interference of the electoral body on media in a way it suppresses free press must stop. Only balanced approach can contribute to the democratic system and respect both rights of citizen- voting and free speech. For this, limitations and duty of electoral body and media should be clearly defined, and followed. 🌱

<sup>8</sup> <https://freedomforum.org.np/election-commission-goes-beyond-jurisdiction/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://freedomforum.org.np/ff-concerned-over-ecs-order-to-remove-social-media-page/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://freedomforum.org.np/press-council-nepal-misuse/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://freedomforum.org.np/digital-surveillance-up-with-deletion-of-media-content/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://freedomforum.org.np/senior-journalist-nepals/>

## Digital surveillance up with deletion of media content

The content management software of an online news portal [www.ukeraa.com](http://www.ukeraa.com) was breached on December 1.

The original photos and contents published on the portal were deleted and replaced at around 12:30 am to 1:30 am with irrelevant contents.

Editor in Chief of the portal, KP Dhungana, shared with Freedom Forum, "Total five news stories- about a citizenship and passport issues of newly formed political party Rastriya Swatantra Party coordinator Rabi Lamichhane and a cooperative involving Vice President's son - were deleted as many times as I had uploaded. While the news URL is same to that of

original ones, there are new contents and irrelevant photos, which is really shocking."

News on Lamichhane's dual passport and citizenship was first published on November 26 and Pun's news on his cooperative's fraud case was published on December 1. Editor Dhungana has been receiving abusive and threatening messages through his twitter page for publishing the above mentioned news.

Through his twitter account, editor Dhungana has warned the attackers that he would take legal recourse through the cyber bureau of Nepal Police.

The hacked news, however, have been re-published through the archived links on the portal and Dhungana has informed that their

technical team were working to recover all the deleted news.

Some days back, FF had reported on the hacking of social media account of noted journalist Kishor Nepal. Two such incidents of deletion of content through online news portals were also reported in 2020 and 2021.

It is a blatant violation of data privacy, free press, free expression and information. This incident showed investigative journalist like Dhungana are facing digital surveillance and attack in Nepal. It also indicates that critical digital public sphere is shrinking. It is condemnable. The breach has flatly violated the constitutionally guaranteed right of media, press and journalists' rights.

## Misuse of Press Council Nepal continues; severe threat from State institution to press freedom

Yet again, Press Council Nepal, a media content regulatory body, wrote to a national daily to furnish clarification within 24 hours on why it published a cartoon on former prime minister and leader.

The Council sought the clarification from the national daily, Nagarik, for publishing a cartoon on Ex-Prime Minister and Chairperson of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) on October 20, 2022.

The daily had published the cartoon by Rabin Sayami on October 20, asking various questions to the former PM about his promises.

When the November 20 election to the federal and provincial parliaments was round around the corner in Nepal, political parties and their leaders and candidates had intensified election campaigns, and many making tall talk.

The cartoon, as an artistic form of a satiri-

cal expression, in no way had breached the Journalist Code nor the Election Code, as the Council had blamed, but questioned the empty promises of the leaders and parties.

Council's letter was against the Constitution of Nepal which has ensured press freedom and freedom of expression.

Freedom Forum condemned the Council's letter because it was intimidation of press freedom. It has discredited media and working journalists in Nepal.

To this, FF Executive Chief Taranath Dahal, commented, "Repeated misuse of Press Council Nepal, a state institution, to castigate journalists and media, exposes tyrannical nature to suppress constitutional rights of press freedom and free speech. Such acts of the Council discredits activism and enthusiasm of Nepali journalists who have been exposing political foibles, irregularities and corruption."

*May the New Year  
2023 inspire everyone  
to create atmosphere  
for unobstructed  
exercise of human  
rights including  
freedom of expression  
and information to  
pave way to better  
democracy.*

**Happy New  
Year 2023**

*Freedom Forum*

## OPINION

# The media trends that will define 2023

Buckle up, 2023 is going to be a hell of a ride.

By Damian Radcliffe

As we kick off the New Year, many publishers are contending with the need to tackle a heady mix of long-term structural issues and more short-term considerations.

Combined, it means that the media industry is facing a number of significant challenges in 2023. This includes ongoing changes in advertising markets, pressure on consumer spending due to inflation and the cost of living crisis, as well as evolving media habits and preferences.

In responding to this, many publishers will be seeking to do more with less in 2023 – the byproduct of the lay-offs seen at many outlets in late 2022 – as well as contending with other issues such as rising print costs.

Here are five charts demonstrating some of the biggest challenges being faced by media and publishing companies today; as well as some thoughts on how to address them.

## 1. Advertising will continue to grow... just more slowly

Global advertising is expected to increase by 5.9% in 2023, according to the latest forecast from Group M. This is only slightly lower than the 6.4% estimated by the group in June 2022.

Within this, they predict “strong gains” in areas such as “connected TV, retail media and fast-growing markets like India.” Group M also notes that China and the US will make up 55.5% of all advertising revenue in 2022, highlighting the significance of these markets for global players.

The headlines around recent predictions from Group M, Zenith and others, have often focussed on the downgrading of their 2023 forecasts, a potential source of concern given the continued reliance on advertising as a revenue source for many publishers.

Yet, at the same time, Group M suggests taking a more longitudinal look at the data. When you do that, they suggest, you see a very different picture. Looking at advertising growth on a three-year compounded basis can help smooth out the impact of the pandemic and other fluctuations in advertising markets.

When viewed in this way, “despite the headlines of negativity, we estimate the three-year compound annual growth rate for total advertising from 2019-2022 is at 8.8%, nearly identical to the 8.7% rate from 2016-2019,” they note.

That’s not to say that there are not challenges ahead for publishers when it comes to attracting advertising revenue, but the picture in 2023 may not be as bleak as many feared.

## 2. Subscriptions will also continue to grow... again, just more slowly

Arguably, we see a similar picture when looking at subscriptions, another essential revenue plank for many publishers. In this space, growth rates are also slowing, but again they remain relatively healthy when viewed over a longer timeframe.

In the introduction to FIPP Q3 2022 Global Digital Subscription Snapshot, FIPP CEO, James Hewes, acknowledges this reality, noting how this growth is potentially cooling.

“Just as we are starting to feel the chill of Winter approaching in the Northern Hemisphere, so perhaps we are also starting to feel the chill of the approaching freeze in digital subscriptions, he writes.

However, this subscription climate needs to be put into a wider perspective. “Growth for most brands remains healthy, with period-on-period gains of 5% or more for many,” Hewes adds, although “this is significantly down on the position at the same time last year, when low double-digit growth might have been expected each quarter.”

It’s a conclusion reiterated by Michael Silberman, SVP Strategy at Piano, who has pointed to subscription growth returning “from the stratosphere.”

“Subscriptions continue to be a real bright spot for publishers,” he said in a recent webinar. Although this has slowed, many publishers are continued to see growth in this area, with Silverman stating that “there was still a respectable pace of growth – 14% through November in terms of growth at the beginning of the year.”

Slower growth rates will mean a renewed emphasis for publishers in reducing churn and retaining existing subscribers. They will also need to offer fresh, innovative, packages and products to encourage new subscriptions.

This will be especially important as the cost of living crisis continues, with the result that many consumers will become more hesitant about taking on new subscriptions or begin to look more actively at cutting back on the ones they have.

Despite this, many publishers seem to be more optimistic about their prospects in this area than perhaps you might expect. Seeing how your fellow publishers put their subscription strategies into practice will remain an area to closely monitor – and learn from – in the year ahead.

## 3. (Re)Building trust will be vital

Addressing issues of trust remains fundamental to both reader revenue and advertising strategies. Advertisers wish to see their products associated alongside high-quality and reputable content that is aligned with their brand. Meanwhile audiences need to trust the content that they are consuming, both in terms of its accuracy and in meeting their information needs.

Numerous studies have shown the size of the trust challenge that publishers face. The 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer found that – across the 28 markets surveyed – nearly half of all respondents (46%) view the media as a divisive force.

“There is a turning away from traditional news sources because of the perception of bias and fake news (76%),” observes CEO Richard Edelman. Trust in media is often distinctly linked to political affiliation. In the USA, although not unique to it, this issue is especially acute. Edelman’s study – echoing other research – found a 31-point gap, when it comes to trust in media, between Democrats (55%) and Republicans (24%).

Similarly, the 2022 Digital News Report found that “only 26% of Americans trust news generally.” This represents a 3-point decrease from the previous year, and the lowest figure across the 46 markets sampled.

“Large numbers of people see the media as subject to undue political influence, and only a small minority believe most news organisations put what’s best for society ahead of their own commercial interest,” wrote Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, Director of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ) who produced the report.

To remedy this, publishers need to accommodate a range of different considerations.

In the advertising arena, trust issues must be integral to preparation for a post-cookie world. This will be essential if publishers are to offer advertising products that appeal to a wide range of advertisers while also being relevant to audiences.

Looking at the content space, publishers need to look at the breadth and tone of their output.

As Nic Newman, has suggested, this means making news content more accessible and easier to understand, embracing a mix of formats and content styles including approaches such as solutions and constructive journalism, “signalling opinion more clearly,” as well as “not labeling everything breaking news when it isn’t.”

Alongside this, as Peter Houston reflects, “media headlines have grown significantly more negative over the past two decades.” Publishers need to mind their language, as well as create more opportunities to listen, ask questions, and more effectively communicate the journalistic process. Initiatives such as the Trusting News project offer valuable case studies and guidance on that publishers can apply and adapt, as part of a wide-ranging trust strategy.

#### 4. Reaching Gen Z where they are

In the battle for the attention economy, publishers have long have to compete with a myriad of other ways in which audiences can spend their time.

That challenge is especially acute with younger audiences, and with Gen Z in particular.

This is a demographic that is attractive to advertisers and represents the next wave of potential subscribers. However, is an also an audience that often tends to consume media very differently, with platforms like YouTube and TikTok, as well as music streaming services, occupying a much larger percentage of their media diet than other age groups.

To reach this audience, it’s really important to understand the content types, styles and platforms they consume. To do this, publishers need to

make a greater effort to speak to them directly.

Talking about science journalism, but offering principles applicable to any beat or vertical, Martina Efeyini, a Science News Civic Science fellow, recently wrote for Nieman Lab about the importance of talking to this demographic “to see what sparks their curiosity.”

This “involves co-design and collaborating with teens, organizations, and groups,” it also means “we compensate the teens who participate in focus groups for their time. By giving teens a voice to share their opinions, we learn what excites them and what they need.”

Publishers should take heed of this, as well as the need to hire more talent from this demographic, and use this cohort to create the content which speaks directly to their own age group.

As Jon Birchall, Director of Editorial Strategy at the LADBible Group advocated to Press Gazette: “For us to build a media that is essential, inclusive, and as such commercially viable, for 2023 and beyond, we must listen to youth audiences and empower young talent to fundamentally redefine what news is and the role it plays for the next generation.”

Publishers need to meet Gen Zers where they are, and communicate in a style and format that speaks to them. Creating tailored products, hiring and empowering Gen Z talent, and engaging with audiences off-platform on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, are likely to be essential to any successful approach.

#### 5. Audiences spend over 2 hours a day with publishers’ content

Lastly, for all the legitimate concerns voiced about news avoidance, subscription fatigue and lack of trust in the media, it’s worth remembering that audiences still spend a considerable amount of time consuming content.

Insights shared by Simon Kemp – CEO of Kepios, a marketing strategy consultancy, and chief analyst at DataReportal, an online library of reports exploring people’s evolving digital behaviours – shows just how much of our time is spent reading “press media.”

#### About one-in-five teens visit or use YouTube ‘almost constantly’

% of U.S. teens who say they ...

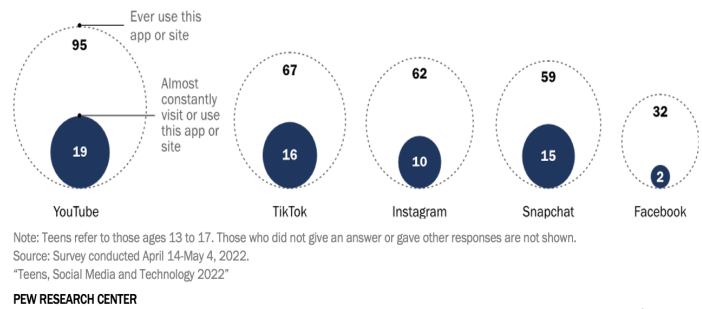


Image via Pew Research Center

On average, internet users around the world 2 hours 9 mins a day on this type of content, slightly less than social media (2 hours 28 mins), but perhaps more time than you might expect.

This makes for a firm foundation for publishers to build on in the year ahead, engaging with audiences and using this engagement to build products, advertising and reader revenue strategies that tap into these consumption habits.

The media industry is facing a range of challenges in the year ahead, including shifts in advertising markets, pressure on consumer spending due to inflation and financial struggles, and continued changes in media consumption habits.

In order to address these challenges, many publishers will need to be flexible and find ways to achieve their goals with fewer resources. In addition, print publishers will also have to grapple with rising paper and printing costs, and all players face a year full of multiple uncertainties.

At the same time, the industry may be more resilient than you might think.

Despite these challenges, the media industry remains full of potential for those who are able to adapt and find new ways to connect with their audiences. Whether through subscriptions, advertising, or other forms of revenue, there are opportunities for publishers to thrive in the face of these challenges.

There are clearly going to be bumps along the road, but by staying nimble and being open to new ideas, publishers can weather the storms of 2023 and emerge stronger than ever.

Buckle up, 2023 is going to be a hell of a ride. 🌪️

(Source: <https://whatsnewinpublishing.com/the-media-trends-that-will-define-2023-in-5-charts/>)

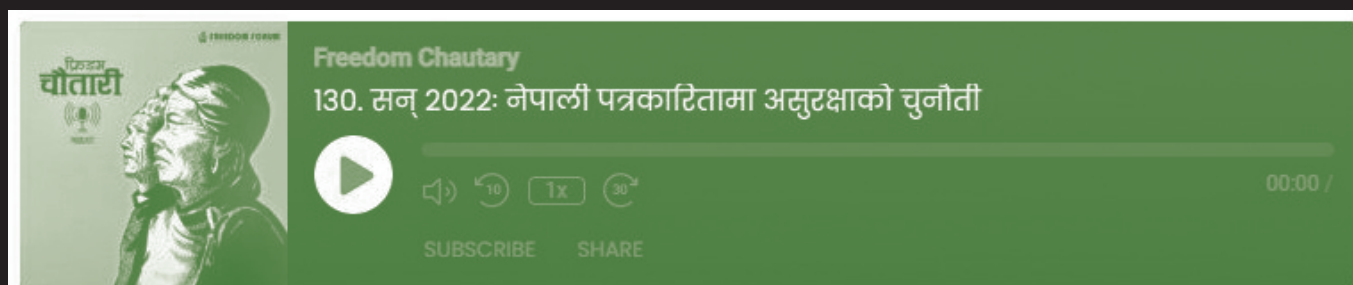


# Self disclosure update

<b>Type and Nature of Organization</b>	NGO working for Democracy, Right to Information, Freedom of Expression, Fiscal Transparency and Open Data, Media Policy and Law, Internet Freedom
<b>Legal Status</b>	Registered at District Administration Office Kathmandu. DAO Registration Number: 127/062/63, SWC Affiliation Number: 18518
<b>Location</b>	Adarsa Marga, Prasuti Griha Road, Thapathali, Kathmandu
<b>Staffs and Roles</b>	<b>Taranath Dahal:</b> Executive Chief, coordinates overall organizational and administrative affairs
	<b>Aruna Adhikari:</b> Finance and Administration Officer, looks after accounting and administrative affairs and performs responsibilities as the Information Officer.
	<b>Nanu Maiya Khadka:</b> Gender Monitoring Officer, responsible for monitoring media content on gender perspectives
	<b>Aditya Dahal:</b> RTI App and website operator
	<b>Manju Ojha:</b> Front Desk Assistant, <b>Ganga Kumari Gurung:</b> Office Assistant
<b>Consultant/Researchers</b>	<b>Krishna Sapkota, Narayan Ghimire, Subash Dahal</b>
<b>Services and Activities</b>	Research, capacity development and policy advocacy including media monitoring, trainings on RTI and journalism, meetings, workshops, seminars and other campaigns to promote issues of democracy, RTI, FoE, fiscal transparency, human rights, local governance. It also provides legal aid to journalists, media and information seekers.
<b>Responsible Authority</b>	<b>Chairperson:</b> Hari Binod Adhikari, <b>Executive Chief:</b> Tara Nath Dahal
<b>Decision Making Process</b>	<b>General Assembly:</b> Making policies, rules and regulations of organization <b>Executive committee:</b> Formulation of action plans as per constitution of organization, rules and regulation <b>Management team:</b> Running projects and daily operational affairs and reporting timely to the Executive Committee.
<b>Past/Current Activities</b>	Please follow the link: <a href="http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/">http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/</a>
<b>Information Officer</b>	Aruna Adhikari
<b>Financial Information</b>	Freedom Forum received grants amounting Rs. 757,407.75 (October to December 2022).
<b>Official Website</b>	<a href="http://www.freedomforum.org.np">www.freedomforum.org.np</a>
<b>Publications of Freedom Forum</b>	Freedom Forum has over 50 Publications (printed) Please Follow the Link: <a href="http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/">http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/</a>
<b>Annual Report</b>	<a href="http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports/">http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports/</a>
<b>Information Dissemination</b>	Websites- <a href="http://www.freedomforum.org.np/">http://www.freedomforum.org.np/</a> ; <a href="http://www.nepalpressfreedom.org">www.nepalpressfreedom.org</a> , and Newsletter-Free Expression

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<http://freedomforum.org.np/content/podcast/>



# 1,668 journalists killed in past 20 years

-RSF

At the end of a year in which the number of journalists killed in connection with their work rose again, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has compiled and analysed the figures for journalists killed during the past 20 years – two especially deadly decades for those in the service of the right to inform.

What with murders, contract killings, ambushes, war zone deaths and fatal injuries, a staggering total of 1,668 journalists have been killed worldwide in connection with their work in the last two decades (2003-2022), according to RSF's tallies based above all on its annual round-ups. This gives an average of more than 80 journalists killed every year. The total killed since 2000 is 1,787.

"Behind the figures, there are the faces, personalities, talent and commitment of those who have paid with their lives for their information gathering, their search for the truth and their passion for journalism. In each of its annual round-ups, RSF has continued to document the unjustifiable violence that has specifically targeted media workers. This year's end is an appropriate time to pay tribute to them and to appeal for full respect for the safety of journalists wherever they work and bear witness to the world's realities," views Christophe Deloire, RSF Secretary-General.

## Darkest years

The annual death tolls peaked in 2012 and 2013 with 144 and 142 journalists killed, respectively. These peaks, due in large measure to the war in Syria, were followed by a gradual fall and then historically low figures from 2019 onwards.

Sadly, the number of journalists killed in connection with their work in 2022 – 58 according to RSF's Press Freedom Barometer on 28 December – was the highest in the past four years and was 13.7% higher than in 2021, when 51 journalists were killed.

## 15 most dangerous countries

During the past two decades, 80% of the media fatalities have occurred in 15 countries. The two countries with the highest death tolls are Iraq and Syria, with a combined total of 578 journalists killed in the past 20 years, or more than a third of the worldwide total. They are followed by Afghanistan, Yemen and Palestine. Africa has not been spared, with Somalia coming next.



## Most dangerous European countries

Russia continues to be Europe's deadliest country for the media, with the biggest number of journalists killed during the past 20 years. Since Vladimir Putin took over, Russia has seen systematic attacks on press freedom – including deadly ones – as RSF has repeatedly reported.

They include Anna Politkovskaya's high-profile murder on 7 October 2006.

The war that began in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 is one of the reasons why this country has Europe's second highest death toll. Eight journalists have been killed in Ukraine since Russia invaded. But an additional 12 were killed there during the 19 preceding years.

France ranks as the fourth deadliest European country as a result of the massacre at the satirical weekly Charlie Hebdo in Paris in 2015.

## Journalists killed in war zones

During the past decade, reporters have run the greatest risks in areas where armed clashes were taking place. Of the 686 killings since 2014, 335 have been in war zones (including Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen). The five deadliest years were from 2012 to 2016, with 94 killed in 2012, 92 in 2013, 64 in 2014, 52 in 2015 and 53 in 2016.

Some slight encouragement can be derived from the fact that the annual total of journalists killed in war zones has not exceeded 20 during the past three years. Aside from a decline in the intensity



of some wars, these figures reflect the effectiveness of preventive and protective measures taken by news organisations as well as, sometimes, reporting precautions and restrictions.

"Zones at peace" where journalists are also in danger

Countries where no war is officially taking place are not necessarily safe for reporters and some of them are near the top of the list of those where killings have occurred. In fact, more journalists have been killed in "zones at peace" than in "zones at war" during the past two decades, in most cases because they were investigating organised crime and corruption.

With 47.4% of the journalists killed in 2022, America is nowadays clearly the world's most dangerous continent for the media, which justifies the implementation of specific protection policies. Four countries – Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Honduras – are among the world's 15 most dangerous countries. Asia also has many countries on this tragic list, including the Philippines, with more than 100 journalists killed since the start of 2003, Pakistan with 93, and India with 58.

(Source: <https://rsf.org/en/1668-journalists-killed-past-20-years-2003-2022-average-80-year>)

Freedom Forum is an independent, non-governmental and not-for-profit civil society organization working for the cause of social accountability, democracy and human rights focused on press freedom, freedom of expression and right to information in Nepal. Incepted in 2005, Freedom Forum has emerged as a prominent national organization in promoting access to information and freedom of expression through dialogue, research, training, public advocacy and campaign and programme implementation. Currently, the organization is working on the issues of public finance management, budget transparency, open data and aid governance, political and parliamentary accountability, freedom of expression online and open government partnership (OGP) based on its on-hand experience and learning.

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