

## *The Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression in Pakistan*

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### **Abstract**

*A worldwide recognized fundamental human right, freedom of speech and expression is upheld by democratic constitutions wherever. This right is protected under Article 19 of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, granting all citizens the freedom to voice their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. However, there are several obstacles and limitations that prevent this right from being entirely utilized. The legal, social, and political aspects of freedom of speech and expression in Pakistan are examined in this article. It analyzes the restrictions imposed by laws and state institutions, critically evaluates the constitutional provisions, and underlines the value of this freedom in the growth of democracy. The study additionally demonstrates how regular residents, journalists, and activists often encounter harassment, censorship, or even legal action for voicing opinions deemed controversial or critical of influential institutions. Particularly on digital platforms, laws like the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) have made matters complicated. A healthy society and political accountability depend on free speech, but it must be used wisely to prevent hate speech, defamation, and incitement to violence. This article seeks to present a fair assessment of Pakistan's right to free speech, considering seriously both its importance and the current limitations on it. It ends with suggestions for building a society that is more democratic, tolerant, and open so that everybody are allowed to speak up without fear.*

### **Keywords**

*Freedom of Speech, Expression, Constitution of Pakistan, Media Censorship, Human Rights*

### **Introduction**

One of the most fundamental human rights and a pillar of any democracy is the freedom of speech and expression. It allows people to freely voice their thoughts, feelings, and convictions without worrying about consequences or restriction. Personal growth, societal advancement, and the operation of an open, accountable government all depend on this right. With the development of digital platforms and global belonging, which give people a plethora of options for expressing oneself and information sharing, the freedom to talk, write, and communicate has become increasingly essential in this day and age.

Article 19 of the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan provides the right to freedom of speech and expression in Pakistan. It makes it highly clear that all individuals have the right to freedom of expression and speech, as well as freedom of the press. However, in the interest of Islam, national security, public order, morality, and the integrity of the nation, this freedom is subject for certain acceptable limitations. Though sometimes required, these constitutional restrictions are frequently read in ways that suppress free expression, stifle opposition, and control media narratives. Concern over the declining scope for open speech has grown over time in Pakistan. For expressing opinions that contradict established institutions or touch on delicate subjects, journalists, human rights advocates, and even everyday individuals have been subjected to intimidation, legal action, or even violence. Major issues regarding digital freedom and privacy have been highlighted by laws such as the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), which have been criticized for being used to target online challenge.

A comprehensive investigation of Pakistan's right to freedom of speech and expression is the goal of this article. It will examine this fundamental right's past history, constitutional protections, real-world challenges, and social and political implications. In addition to emphasizing the value of striking a balance between freedom and responsibility, the paper will conclude with suggestions for ensuring that all citizens can freely express their opinions while respecting the law and other rights enjoyed by others (Hellgren & Hobson, 2008).

### **Freedom of Speech in Pakistan: A Constitutional Right Under Constraint**

"Freedom of Speech under the Pakistan Constitution" examines the constitutional, historical, legal and practical aspects of Pakistan's law for freedom of speech and expression. This begins with both the international human rights framework and the Pakistan constitution, particularly Article 19 of the 1973 Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech, but allows for appropriate restrictions on the interests of Islam, national security, public order and morality. The author provides a historical overview of pursuing the development of UK free speech from India in Pakistan's current constitutional framework. They discuss how the concept of fundamental rights has evolved around the world, particularly the implications of English customs law, the US Constitution, and postwar international human rights instruments such as the UDHR and ICCPR.

This paper critically analyzes how Pakistan's criminal law, counter-terrorism laws, and blasphemous ASP laws are used to limit free expression. It also highlights the role of traditional and social media in the design of public discourse and determines challenges such as censorship, biased reporting, and foreign influence.

Finally, this article examines judicial and case law interpretations related to the issues of language, particularly the courts and national security, and argues that current restrictions often contradict the spirit of democratic freedom. The author concludes with a recommendation to revise the Restrictions Act in favour of a more open, more tolerant and democratic society. (Javed, (2021))

### **Voices in Chains: Understanding Freedom of Expression in Pakistan**

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that is both global and important to the functioning of democracy. But it is not an absolute free democracy, as if the United States imposes restrictions on public order and security. In Pakistan, freedom of expression is constitutionally protected, but is subject to restrictions on religion and national security. Qualitative studies conducted in selected districts Punjab and Sindh (particularly with high cases of blasphemous Asp) used interviews and focus groups used to examine the current status of free expression. Important results highlight abuse of blasphemous law, religious intolerance, and restrictions that disproportionately affect minorities and dissidents. Literature studies highlight how the conditions of Pakistan's legal and political framework promoted religious extremism, particularly after Zeas, after limited freedom. Hass' speeches, access to information is limited, and the lack of space for various opinions remains an important concern. The law is supposed to regulate expression, but it often protects strong groups, suppresses non-violent voices, and leads to social polarization. (Abbas, (2020))

### **The Legal Landscape of Free Speech in Pakistan**

The legal environment for free speech includes certain safeguards regarding accurate and fair reporting of public proceedings, particularly in political and judicial contexts. For example, in Congress, a committee meeting or court hall, official documents or communications can be said within the framework of statutory privilege. However, this protection does not extend to statements that involve malicious intent or official external tasks. Test (1936). In this test, you will be asked whe

ther the declaration reduces applicants in the eyes of reasonable members of the company.(Aftab, (2024))

### **Between Rights and Restrictions: Speech and Expression in Pakistan**

Most importantly, the murder of Salman Tayser, then governor of Punjab, was a key moment in the struggle of his own security guard Mumtaz Kadri, on bright days and before cameras, in the struggle of religious extremism and freedom of expression. Kadri was later convicted and executed by the Pakistan Supreme Court for murder. However, his actions were driven by a radical interpretation of religion, not by the true spirit of Islamic teaching. Islam is a comprehensive concept that includes political, social, religious, legal and economic systems. The word "Islam" comes from the Arabic word "salam" and means peace. It emphasizes harmony, tolerance and coexistence. The Prophet Muhammad (peace with him) was a defender who convinced him to respect freedom of speech, various views, and inter-religious harmony. However, Islamic freedom of speech does not include mock laughter, humiliation, or insult, especially in a civilized democratic society. Therefore, Islam does not promote or permit the exploitative or harmful use of this right, as in Muhammad Ayub (2018) against Pakistan. Furthermore, national security remains an important and justified limitation of freedom of expression. Free expression cannot put national integrity or public security at risk. The Pakistan Constitution Prevention Act and Article 19 restrict certain types of speeches to maintain propaganda that promotes order, particularly war, religious extremism, or violence. These restrictions are governed by the international contracts on bourgeois and political rights. Nationalism and extremist rhetoric can be done if they are not checked. Hate speech, for example, has led to increased Islamophobia and discrimination against some Muslims in Europe. This speech cannot be protected by a free outfit. It lies outside the limits of responsible expression. (Javed, (2021))

### **Pakistan's Free Speech Framework: Promise vs. Practice**

With the rise of Pakistan's internet and social media, platforms such as Facebook and mobile communications have had a major impact on freedom of speech. These technologies pave the way for citizen engagement and human rights activities, but they also strengthened religious polarization, particularly the state's blasphemous ASP law. Research by Aday et al. On the one hand, it allows conservative and militant groups to strengthen their narrative, suppress objections and trigger public outrage over suspicions of blasphemy. These platforms are used to spread misinformation, mobilize protests and in some cases cause violence. This study combines at least 18 cases of blasphemy in Pakistan directly with the use of mobile phones and social media. Online comments and contributions have often had serious consequences, including harassment, violent attacks, and murder. Radio media such as radio and television also play a role in conservative circles, particularly by reinforcing and spreading such content (Henderson, 1998). Despite these dangers, human rights activists in Pakistani continue to use social media as a means of resistance. Progressive Facebook pages and other online platforms have made significant contributions to counter hate speech, promoting religious tolerance and promoting severe legal reforms. However, these efforts were often challenged, sometimes raising awareness and succeeding in changing public discourse.

The study reflects concerns voiced by scientists warning that social media can create echo chambers and ghettoizations, strengthen existing biases and promote tensions. While it has great potential for positive effects, its abuse can lead to serious human rights violations, especially in unstable socio-religious contexts such as Pakistan. (Korai, 2023)

### **Article 19 and Beyond: Exploring Free Speech in Pakistan**

Article 19 of the Pakistan Constitution guarantees citizens the right to freedom of expression and expression. However, this right is not absolute and is subject to several restrictions, including Islam, national security, public order, morality and decency interests. Constitutional clauses promote democratic values, but their practical application is often limited by legal constraints, political interests and social pressures. The reality of Pakistan's free speech remains complicated. Legal measures are often used to criticize, particularly national institutions, religious beliefs, and government policies. Political dynamics have allowed opposition votes to be restrained, often in the name of national security or public interest. Furthermore, cultural and religious sensitivities influence what can be publicly expressed and create an environment in which self-censorship is common.

The Electronic Crime Prevention Act (PECA) 2016 further limits digital freedom. Originally designed for cybercrime, it has been criticized for its vague definition and abuse of journalists, activists and social media users. Authorities grant broad authority to block content, access personal data and capture individuals for online print. Article 19 promises freedom of expression, but its implementation in Pakistan is questioned by overlapping legal, political and social factors. To promote a truly democratic society, reforms are necessary to protect freedom of speech and to align national laws with international human rights standards. (N. Ahmad, & Malik, M. E., 2020)

### **Silenced Voices: The Struggle for Free Expression in Pakistan**

The Pakistan Constitution guarantees the right to free speech. However, this fundamental right is often influenced by a combination of legal restrictions, political dynamics and social norms. The interaction of these factors led to a culture of self-censorship and a reduced room for free expression.

**Legal Restrictions:** Pakistan's legal framework includes laws such as the Electronic Crime Prevention Act (PECA) 2016. These laws may be used to suppress different voices and limit freedom of expression. For example, it shows that Pakistan's data distance inquiries have increased significantly from companies such as Google since the PECA was implemented. This indicates an increase in efforts to control online content.

**Political Dynamics:** Pakistan's political environment has a major impact on freedom of expression. Journalists and media practitioners often stand out from threat, harassment and even physical violence, especially when reporting on sensitive issues. The influence of government control and strong institutions on media references contributes to the challenges faced by those committed to free expression.

**Social Standards:** Cultural and religious norms play an important role in the design of Pakistan's free speech limits. Discussions about topics that are considered blasphemous or shaming of social values can lead to serious consequences such as legal action and social exclusion. These social pressures often lead to individuals and avoid topics that can attract controversy or danger.

**Case Study:** The tragic case of journalist Sabeen Mahmud highlights the extreme risks associated with free expression in Pakistan. Mahmud was known for hosting events that encouraged open di

alogue on taboo topics. Her murder in 2015 highlighted a dangerous environment for those who work for freedom of speech.

#### Research Gate

Despite these challenges, civil society organizations and human rights activists continue to express free expression and strive to bridge the gap between constitutional rights and social realities. Your efforts are essential to promoting a more open and integrated society where you can hear different voices without fear of retaliation.(Iqbal, (2024))

#### **The Right to Speak: Legal Perspectives on Expression in Pakistan**

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right fixed in Article 19 of the Pakistan Constitution, ensuring that citizens have the right to freely express their thoughts, opinions and beliefs. However, this right is not absolute and is subject to legally stipulated restrictions for national security, public order, decency, or morality. These restrictions must harmonize individual freedom with social interests and values. Despite constitutional guarantees, the practical application of Pakistan's free speech faces considerable challenges. Various laws, such as the Electronic Crime Prevention Act of 2016 (PECA) and the Punjab Repeal Act of 2024, have been issued to regulate expression, particularly on digital and media platforms. These laws aim to contain disinformation and protect individuals' calls, but they are criticized for their latitude and vague provisions, which could lead to censorship and suppression of different voices. The interaction of legal frameworks, political dynamics and social norms creates a complex environment for free expression in Pakistan. Journalists, activists and ordinary citizens are often exposed to legal consequences, harassment and even violence in order to exercise their right to speak freely. This situation underscores the need for a differentiated understanding of the legal perspective on freedom of expression and the ongoing struggle to protect this fundamental right in Pakistan.(Asad, 2022)

#### **Navigating Censorship: Freedom of Speech in Pakistan's Democracy**

In Pakistan's democratic framework, freedom of speech, as per Article 19, is protected by constitutional law, ensuring that citizens have the right to express their own thoughts and opinions. However, this right is often influenced by state censorship and legal restrictions, creating a complex landscape for free expression. Censorship imposed by the Government: The Pakistani government is actively involved in content, classified as important to national institutions, religious sentiments, or national security. This includes blocking certain content that question websites, social media platforms, and official stories. For example, Pakistan's Telecommunications Agency (PTA) has blocked access to numerous websites and social media platforms under the pretext of maintaining public order and national security.

#### Reasonable Voice Pakistan

Legal Framework that Affects Expression: The Electronic Crime Prevention Act (PECA) Act of 2016, including the comprehensive authority for the monitoring and management of online content. Peka aims to combat cybercrime, but he was criticized for abuse due to his broad definition and possibilities, which took into account freedom of speech.

#### Pakistani lawyer

Journalists and Media Impact: Pakistani journalists face considerable challenges, including threats, harassment and physical violence, particularly when reporting sensitive issues such as corruption, human rights abuses and military activities. A study by the Progressive Communication Association showed that around 88% of Pakistani journalists practice self censorship and reduce possible impacts to avoid issues related to religion and safety.



**Civil Society and Activism:** Civil Society organizations and activists striving for free expression often encounter state resistance. For example, activist Marlan Baroque in 2023 could be excluded from a trip to New York to attend the next event, perhaps due to her legal profession for Bertzi's mitigation and criticism of national politics.

**International Concerns:** The European Union has expressed concerns about Pakistan's human rights law, including freedom of speech. The EU has warned that the benefits of Pakistani trade, such as Generalization Setting Scheme Plus (GSP+), could be at risk if no significant reforms are being implemented to resolve issues related to media freedom and human rights. (Saqib, 2022)

### **Constitutional Freedom or Conditional Privilege? Speech Rights in Pakistan**

Article 19 of the Pakistan Constitution fixes the right to freedom of expression and expression, and provides that all citizens have the right to freely express his thoughts, opinions and beliefs. However, this right is not absolute and subject to legally defined restrictions for national security, public order, decency, morality and other specific reasons. This conditional framework raises important questions about the true nature of Pakistan's linguistic rights. Pakistan's legal landscape reflects the complex interaction between constitutional guarantees and legislative measures that impose restrictions on freedom of speech. For example, the 2016 Electronic Crime Prevention Act (PECA) grants authorities' extensive authority to regulate online content. Similarly, the Punjab Repeal Act 2024, issued by the State Assembly, provides strict measures against spreading of misinformation, including the expansion of severe fines and the establishment of special courts to determine defamatory loss cases. These developments have sparked protests by civil society journalists and organizations claiming such laws against such laws against freedom of the press and rights to violate information lawyers.

Furthermore, the application of the Bloody ASP Act in Pakistan continues to create a landscape of freedom of speech. The Pakistan criminal code contains provisions that criminalize religious feelings as insulting behavior, with fines extending to the death penalty. These laws were used to pursue religious minorities and regulate personal competition, leading to expressions that were freely exposed to their abuse and horrifying effects. Given these factors, the right to freedom of expression in Pakistan appears to be more of a conditional privilege than absolute constitutional freedom. The Constitution provides a framework of free expression, but the actual application of this right is strongly influenced by legal restrictions, political dynamics and social norms. This complex interaction requires continuous dialogue and reform to ensure that the fundamental rights of freedom of expression are confirmed in both law and practical terms. (Javed, (2021))

### **Expression Under Watch: The Reality of Free Speech in Pakistan**

While the fact that freedom of speech and expression is safeguarded by Article 19 of the Pakistani Constitution, the actual situation on the ground is quite different. Media, activists, and people who voice opinions critical of the government, military, or other influential institutions have been exposed to increasing restrictions in recent years. In its 2023 report, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) highlighted that violence, threats, and harassment against journalists still happen. Sensitive subjects include religious issues, civil-military relationships, and political corruption which frequently end in censorship or reprisals. Similarly, in their 2023 World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) placed Pakistan at position 150 out of 180 countries, suggesting substantial limits on press freedom.

There are major issues with the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) of 2016. Social media users are frequently arrested or silenced on the basis of broader charges such as "hurting national interest" or "spreading false information." The Islamabad High Court ruled that certain provisions

of the PECA were unconstitutional in 2022 after changes to the statute expanded penalties and state control over internet companies. In addition, online areas are being watched more closely. Many digital activists, particularly women and minority voices, are subjected to organized harassment and threats aimed at suppressing dissent, according to Amnesty International.

These trends paint a concerning image of speech freedom being monitored while democratic values and civic liberties—both necessary for an innovative society are being eroded. (Abbas, (2020))

### **Words Under Surveillance: The Legal Framework of Free Expression in Pakistan**

Article 19 of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's 1973 Constitution serves as the primary basis for the nation's judicial system relating to free speech. Every citizen's freedom of speech and expression, as well as freedom of the press, are guaranteed by this article. The state may, however, restrict this privilege under a number of circumstances, such as those pertaining to public order, decency, morality, national security, and the glory of Islam. Although these restrictions could make sense in theory, their murky nature and extent allow for abuse. Laws designed to control offensive or damaging content are frequently used to punish competitors of powerful institutions, limit media coverage, and stifle political opposition. This has led to the physical and digital surveillance of a variety of public speech.

The Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016, which controls cybercrime and online material, is a crucial piece of legislation in this regard. PECA has often been used to target journalists, bloggers, and activists for speaking critical views, regardless its stated goal of combatting digital threats like as hacking and cyberbullying. Human rights organizations and legal experts have voiced worry about the act's ambiguous provisions, and could result in selective and politically motivated enforcement.

Additionally, blasphemy laws, the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997, and the Defamation Ordinance of 2002 have all been applied to stifle language, usually with serious repercussions and legal harassment. Therefore, even while the legal system supports free speech under the constitution, when it is used in an opaque or accountable manner, it permits undue control and monitoring. Legal reform is becoming more and more vital for maintaining citizens' rights while sustaining social cohesion and national unity. (Aftab, (2024))

### **Free Speech in Pakistan: Rights, Responsibilities, and Roadblocks**

Under Article 19 in the law of Pakistan, every Pakistani citizen enjoys the freedom to voice their thoughts, opinions, and convictions. This freedom does, however, come with responsibilities, just like every other freedom. In addition to supporting free speech, a robust democracy makes sure that it does not promote violence, promote enmity, or disrupt the peace. Pakistan upholds these democratic principles in theory, but in reality, an assortment of impediments hinder free expression from being fully achieved. Humans have to grapple with a complicated climate when speaking out against political narratives, faiths, or human rights abuses which may end in threats, legal repercussions, or societal backlash. People are frequently put in danger just for expressing their beliefs due to the abuse of blasphemous laws, the Pakistan electronic crime statute (PECA), and the ambiguous definition of "national interest."

Also there is growing pressure on students, activists, and journalists to self-censor. Media groups that publish content critical of influential institutions have faced warnings, closures, or fines. Once an arena for open debate, social media is now under surveillance and users are frequently called in by authorities for expressing dissension on the web. Defending social order and national security

is necessary, but it's also critical to make sure that these precautions don't be used to silence reasonable criticism. To protect both liberty and unity, a modern Pakistan must find a balance within allowing citizens to candidly and responsibly voice their views and making certain the law is enforced in an equitable and open way.(Mahsud, 2016)

### **From Constitution to Courtroom: Speech and Expression in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, Article 19 of the 1973 Constitution ensures the liberty of free speech and expression. However, there are "reasonable restrictions" on this freedom that pertain to public order, national security, and religion. Though the goal of these clauses is to maintain unity, they usually act as pretext for restricting free expression. In actuality, Pakistan's legal system has provided uneven protection for free speech. The Islamabad High Court's 2022 decision, which found provisions of the PECA Amendment Ordinance illegal and restricting of democratic space, is one example of how courts have occasionally respected the right to freely utterance.

Yet, courts have consistently maintained limited interpretations of other situations, particularly those involving blasphemy, national security, or criticism of government organizations. Writers, journalists, and residents continue to participate in legal disputes over publicly or digitally conveyed beliefs due to vague regulations including the Defamation Ordinance (2002) and PECA (2016). Courts must interpret these rights in light of democratic standards and human rights commitments in order to fully maintain the spirit of the Constitution, guaranteeing that freedom of expression is respected rather than stigmatized.(Javed, (2021))

### **Voicing Dissent in Pakistan: Legal Protections and Political Pressures**

Dissent is both a right and an indicator of a robust and active political culture in a democracy. Article 19 of the Pakistani Constitution includes the right to dissent as well as other freedoms of speech and expression. However, there are still lots of obstacles to voicing disagreement in the actual world, particularly with regarding governmental policies or influential institutions. Protests, social media, journalism, and scholarly analysis are all means of political dissent that frequently face opposition. People who criticize the military, the politicians, or the court may be arrested, nervous, or subject to social media crackdowns. Numerous instances of journalists, activists, and students being harassed or imprisoned for mild criticism are regularly publicized by human rights organizations like Amnesty International and HRCP.

Regulations like the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Pakistan electronic crime statute (PECA) are commonly utilized to silence anyone who is deemed as "anti-state" or "a danger public order." These rules are frequently enforced greatly, enabling authorities to view criticism as defamatory or disloyal. Civil society is nonetheless resisting these influences. People who routinely speak out against injustice and undemocratic practices include the media, lawyers, students, and social media users. Their actions demonstrate the need for stricter legal protections as well as an environment in politics that values debate rather than punishes it. Pakistan will have to make sure that legal safeguards are maintained and that political disagreement is accepted as an opportunity rather than a crime as it is to grow as a democracy.(Ahmed, 2010)

### **The Right to Speak Freely: A Legal Analysis of Article 19 in Pakistan**

The freedom of speech and expression is granted to the individuals from Pakistan by Article 19 of the Constitution, subject to a number of "reasonable restrictions" relating to morality, public order, national security, and religion. Since the goal of these restrictions is to preserve social peace, their wording can sometimes be unclear facilitating selective enforcement. Particularly in digital areas, legislation like the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 and laws against blasphemy are



commonly utilized to stifle dissent. Even while courts like the Islamabad High Court have made decisions in support of free speech on occasion—for example, in its 2022 ruling against the PECA Amendment judicial protection of this right is still contradictory. Pakistan requires legal reforms that explicitly outline prohibitions and judicial commitment to protect constitutional freedoms in order for Article 19 to be executed effectively. (N. Ahmad, & Malik, M. E, 2020)

### **Echoes of Silence: Examining Speech Rights in Pakistan**

Despite having been guaranteed by the nineteenth article of the Constitution, freedom of speech in Pakistan is frequently restricted in reality. For voicing opposing viewpoints, citizens, journalists, and activists frequently suffer constraints, accusations of legal action, or intimidation. Apostasy statutes and laws like the Pakistan electronic crime statute (PECA) are frequently implemented to stifle criticism and promote self-censorship. Social media users who question official narratives are frequently attacked, and media outlets is monitored. A chilling effect is produced by this environment, putting discourse riskier than silence. Civic engagement and democratic values are at danger due to an increasing lack of free discourse. Pakistan must guarantee freedom from fear and bolster legal protections for speech rights to have any genuine significance. (Hussain, 2021)

### **Pakistan's Speech Laws: A Balancing Act Between Liberty and Control**

Article 19 of the legal framework of Pakistan protects freedom of speech, while this right is constrained by certain "reasonable restrictions." These include concepts that are typically ill-defined and subject to varying clarifications, such as morality, religion, even national security. Speech has been restricted by laws such as the Defamation Ordinance 2002, the Pakistan Online Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, and blasphemy laws, particularly when they contradict established institutions or official narratives. As a result, in order to avoid social or legal repercussions, journalists, activists, and people sometimes self-censor. Pakistan must modify these laws so as to ensure clarity to prevent abuse and safeguard public order and national interests through specific legislation in order to establish a balanced approach. (Korai, 2023)

### **Free to Speak? Constitutional Guarantees vs. Practical Realities in Pakistan**

Though freedom of speech is guaranteed by the 19th chapter of the Pakistani Constitution, social, legal, and political barriers frequently impede its application. Although the legislation allows for "reasonable restrictions," in reality, these are usually employed to stifle opposing viewpoints, especially those that are critical of the government, military, or judiciary. Journalists, researchers, and regular people feel forced to self-censor due to laws like PECA 2016 and blasphemy statutes. Open expression has recently been further curtailed by legal intimidation and technological crackdowns. Despite the existence of constitutional protections, they are frequently compromised by ambiguous legislation, uneven court interpretation, and pressure from influential organizations. Legal clarity, institutional reform, and an open-minded mindset are required to close the gap between legal rights and actual freedom. (Niazi, 2022)

### **Framing Free Speech in Pakistan: Law, Society, and the State**

Freedom of speech in Pakistan is influenced by the Constitution as well as the interplay of state institutions, legal systems, and social standards. Although Article 19 guarantees freedom of speech, laws like as the PECA, blasphemy laws, and defamation statutes, which are frequently used to suppress opposition, limit its application. Another important factor in restricting expression is societal constraints, such as political divisiveness, cultural taboos, and religious sensitivities. Even in cases where rules are not rigorously enforced, widespread censorship by themselves is encouraged by fear of negative consequences. The state has a crucial role in controlling speech and

occasionally stifling it. In addition to legislative changes, a truly free atmosphere necessitates public backing for free speech and tolerance for opposing viewpoints.(Ahmad, 2024)

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