



Six Months Report

July-December 2016

Exclusive Report : Analysis of violence against Journalists 2012-2016

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AJSC
AFGHAN JOURNALISTS SAFETY COMMITTEE

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Summary

- The year 2016 is considered the bloodiest year for journalists in the history of Afghanistan's media. In this year, the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) has recorded 101 cases involving killing, assault, intimidation, abuse and wounding of journalists. Thirteen journalists were killed and other 88 incidents of violence against journalists have taken place over the year. Taliban carry the responsibility for at least ten cases involving killing of journalists. Besides the 13 cases of killing, 30 cases of beating, 35 cases of intimidation, 6 cases of journalists being wounded and 17 cases of abuse and mistreatment have been documented.
- During this year (2016) violence has not only become heavier qualitatively, but the number of instances of violence against journalists has witnessed a 38 percent increase relative to 2015 in which the committee had recorded a total of 73 cases of intimidation and violence. Government officials have been responsible for 50 % of cases of violence against journalists in 2016 whereas Taliban have the responsibility for 20 % and unknown individuals have been responsible for 14 % of cases of violence against journalists. In this year, the highest number of incidents of violence and intimidation has occurred in Kabul Zone consisting of Kabul and its northern provinces.
- Increasing number of cases involving killing of journalists has turned Afghanistan into one of the most dangerous countries for journalists. Afghanistan features as the second most dangerous country for journalists in the annual worldwide round-up on journalists by Reporters without Borders (RSF).
- In the second six months of 2016, a total of 47 cases of intimidation, commission of violence and killing of journalists has taken place. In these six months, 3 instances of killing, 14 incidents of beating, 15 incidents of intimidation, 3 incidents of sustaining wounds and 12 cases involving mistreatment and abuse of journalists have been reported. These figures constitute a 38 % increase relative to the second six months of the year 2015, in which 34 such cases had been documented. In the second six months of 2016, individuals belonging to the government have been responsible for most of the violence and threats against journalists, which is 64 percent. Taliban come in the second rank carrying the responsibility for 15 % of the violence. Unknown individuals have been responsible for 11 % of the instances of violence; local strongmen for 6% and those in charge of media have been responsible for 4 %. In this period, most of the violence has taken place in the Western Zone of the country.
- An increase in the level of threats and attacks against journalist and media by the Taliban has not only transformed the nature of threat environment but also forced extensive self-censorship on journalists who work in the insecure areas of the country. Taliban, besides issuing threats also attempt to control the publication and broadcast material of local media in the insecure provinces of the country. They force local media not to publish or broadcast certain materials such as commercial announcements and notices by the security forces, peace messages, music, female voice, and in certain situations entertainment programming by employing a variety of means and methods especially threatening or intimidating journalists. The most recent systematic attempts made by the Taliban to control media content have been reported in Logar, Ghazni, Wardak, Paktiya and Paktika provinces.
- Expansion of the threat environment against journalists and media pose a serious threat to the future of freedom of expression and free press that has been the most significant achievement of Afghanistan in the past 15 years.

- Now there is need more than ever for increasing cooperation and coordination amongst government, media, journalists and freedom of expression activists in order to improve safety of journalists. Unless such close coordination is created, the effectiveness of measures for safety of journalists will diminish.
- The year 2016 witnessed a number of positive developments in the form of measures taken by the government of Afghanistan to improve the safety and security of journalists. One can name among them the passing of the procedure on safety and security of journalists by the National Security Council on the basis of which, a joint committee made up of high-ranking security officials and representatives of journalists is formed in Kabul and all provinces of Afghanistan to work for safety of journalists. However, this procedure can only have practical implications in improving the safety of journalists when it is seriously and fully implemented. Selective implementation of this procure cannot be responsive to the serious threats against journalists.

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Introduction

The year 2016 is considered the bloodiest year for journalists and media in the history of Afghanistan. In this year, 13 journalists were killed, a figure that is unprecedented in the history of journalism in Afghanistan. In spite of the fact that the threats are posed by a variety of groups including government officials, a shift in the conduct of Taliban vis-à-vis journalists and media is the main driver of the increase in the level of threats and deadly violence against journalists.

Still the year 2016 has also witnessed a number of achievements in the area of safety of journalists. The most significant achievement is the preparation and passing of the procedure on security and safety of journalists by the government of Afghanistan that has been finalized as a result of consistent advocacy and efforts on the part of media support organizations in the country. This procedure, if implemented well, can address a large part of the security and safety issues that journalists face in Afghanistan.

This is the 8th six-monthly report by Afghan Journalist Safety Committee (AJSC) that reviews the safety condition of journalists in the second six months of 2016 across Afghanistan. The data and figures appearing in this report have been collected and consolidated on the basis of the procedures and policies of AJSC, defining matters concerning violence against journalists in specific terms. This means that AJSC has clear and distinct definition in documenting cases of violence against journalists such that incidents that are not related to journalism work, have not taken place while performing a journalistic task or has no relevance to journalism and reporting, are not recorded by AJSC as a case of violence against journalists.

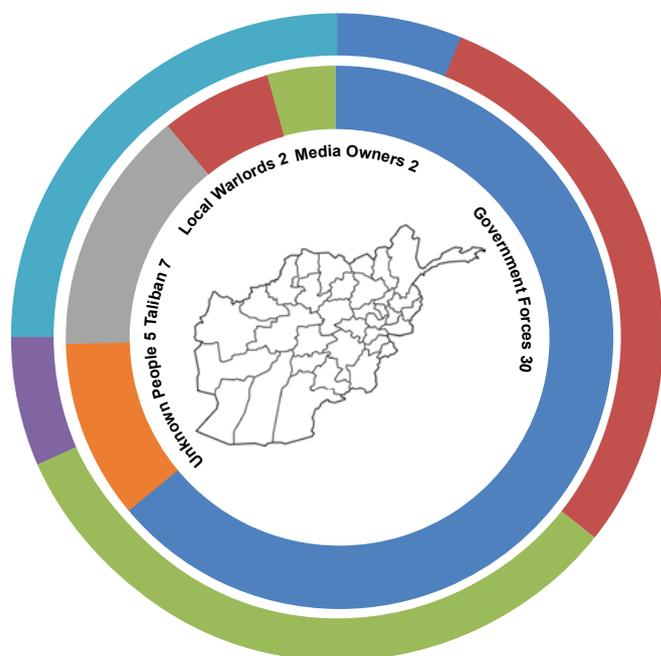
Because violence has been a primary factor against freedom of operation for journalists, AJSC has also reviewed and analyzed in this report data, sources and types of violence in five years from 2012 through the end of 2016 so that a clearer picture of the nature and scope of the threats against journalists emerge as well as any trend of growth of violence against journalists come to light. In this framework, AJSC has divided the type of violence against journalists into four categories (killing, wounding, beating and intimidation/threats). Likewise, the perpetrators of violence against journalists have been divided into four groups (government, unknown individuals, Taliban and local strongmen). In this report each type of violence against journalists as well as each perpetrator category have been separately reviewed during the four years.

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Violence in the Second Six Months of 2016

In the second six months of 2016, AJSC has recorded a total of 47 cases of intimidation, violence and killing of journalists. In these six months, there have been 3 cases of killing, 14 cases of beating, 15 cases of threats, 3 cases of wounding and 12 cases of mistreatment and abuse of journalists. These statistics indicate a 38 percent increase relative to the second six months of 2015 in which 34 cases had been recorded. In the second six months of 2016, individuals belonging to the government have been responsible for most of the violence and threats issued against journalists, which is 64 percent. Taliban come second and have been responsible for 15 % of violence committed against journalists. Unknown individuals have been responsible for 11 % of violence while local strongmen have been responsible for six percent; media heads have also been responsible for four percent. In this period, most of the violence has taken place in the Western zone of the country. The data and percentages on incidents of violence against journalists have further been illustrated in the charts featuring in this report. Although the Taliban are responsible for fewer cases of violence against journalists quantitatively, the type of threats and violence committed by Taliban remain far deadlier compared to those committed by other groups, meaning that mostly the Taliban intentionally and deliberately kill journalists.

killed	3	
assault	14	
threat	15	
injured	3	
verbal abuse	12	



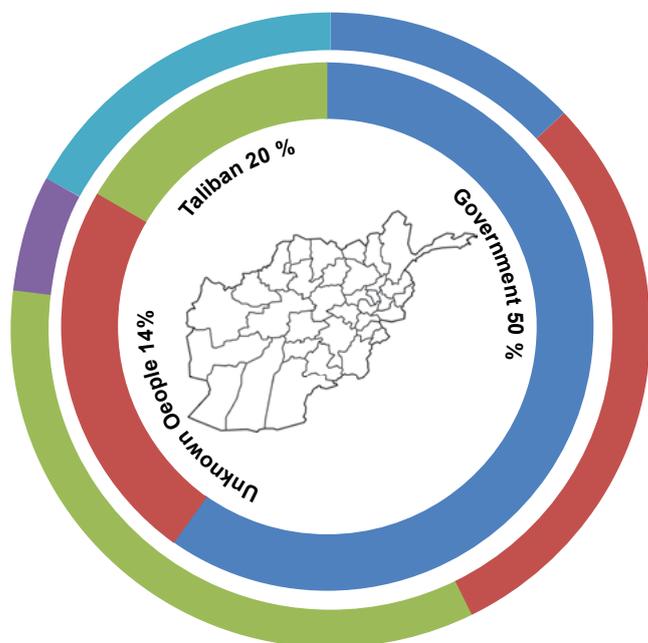
western zone	13 Cases
Central Zone	10 Cases
Southern Zone	8 Cases
South Eastern Zone	5 Cases
North Eastern Zone	3 Cases
Northern Zone	4 Cases
Kabul Zone	4 Cases
Eastern Zone	0 Cases

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Violence in 2016

The year 2016 is the bloodiest year for journalists in the Afghan history of media. During this year, 13 journalists were killed. Taliban carry the responsibility for at least 10 cases involving killing of journalists. In this year, the committee has recorded 101 cases of intimidation and violence against journalists including 13 cases of killing, 30 cases of beating, 35 cases of intimidation, 6 cases of wounding and 17 cases of abuse and mistreatment of journalists. In this year, the violence has become heavier not only qualitatively but also in terms of the number of cases of violence, which has witnessed a 38 percent increase compared to the previous year in which a total of 73 cases of violence and intimidation against journalists had been recorded by the committee. In the year 2016, individuals belonging to the government are responsible for 51 cases; Taliban have been responsible for 23 cases; unknown individuals are responsible for 11 cases; protestors are for 8 cases; heads of media agencies are for 5 cases and strongmen are responsible for 3 cases. In the year 2016, government officials have been responsible for 50% percent of the cases of violence against journalists; Taliban have the responsibility for 20 % and unknown individuals have been responsible for 14 % of the cases of violence against journalists. In this year, most cases of violence and intimidation have occurred in Kabul Zone consisting of Kabul and its northern provinces. Percentages of all cases have been further illustrated in the chart below. It is unfortunate that in numbers, the government of Afghanistan still carries the responsibility for most of the cases of violence and intimidation committed against journalists.

killed	13	
assault	30	
threat	35	
injured	6	
verbal abuse	17	



Western Zone	17 Cases
Central Zone	18 Cases
Southern Zone	11 Cases
Eastern Zone	4 Cases
North Eastern Zone	10 Cases
Northern Zone	7 Cases
South Eastern Zone	10 Cases
Kabul Zone and Northern Provinces	24 Cases

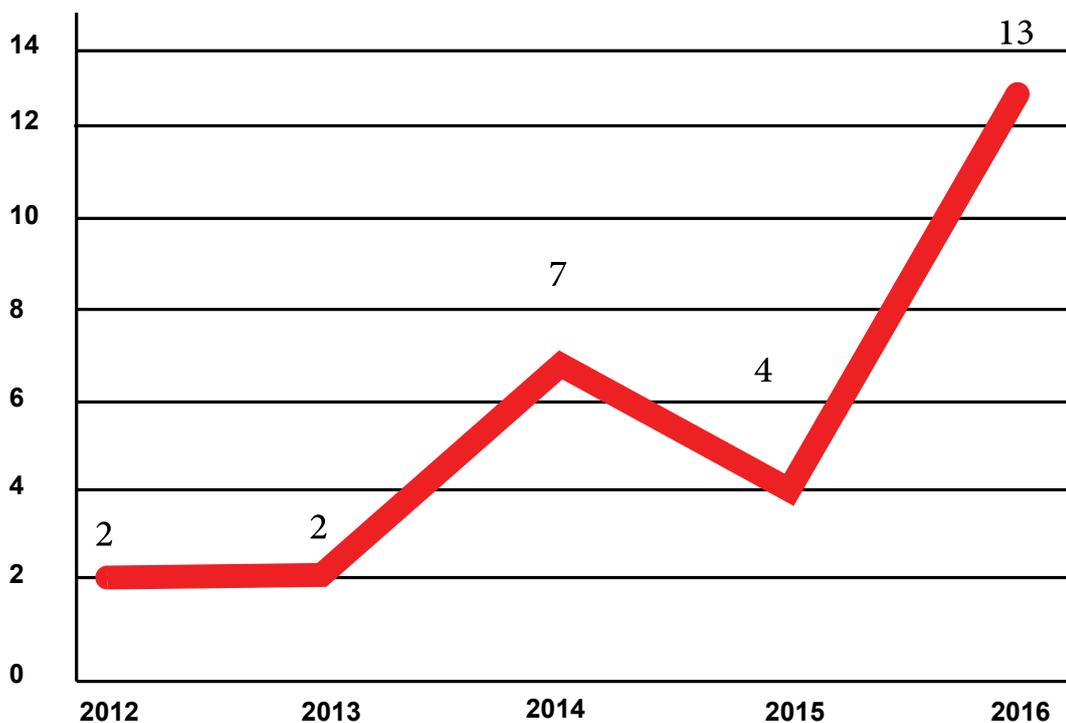
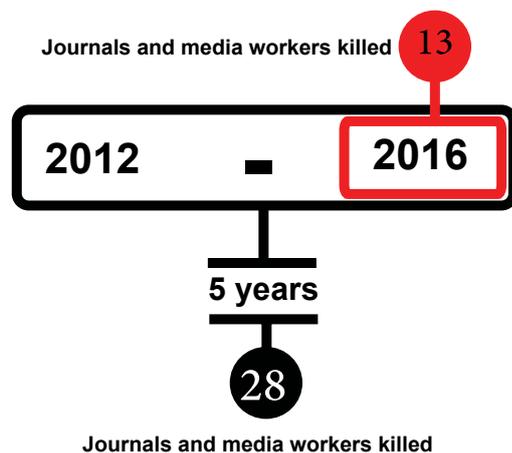
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Types of Violence

Journalists Killed

Since 2012, the graph of incidents involving killing of journalists has had an upward trajectory; 28 journalists and media workers have been killed in the country over the past five years. The year 2016, having witnessed the loss of 13 journalists and media workers, emerges as the deadliest year for journalists during this period. The causes of the killings of journalists and media workers over these five years differ. The main reason for the increase in the level of violence against journalists in 2016 has been a major shift in the conduct and policy of Taliban vis-à-vis press and journalists as well as increasing insecurity and instability in the country. The increasing killing of journalists has not only turned Afghanistan into one of the most dangerous countries for practicing the profession of journalism but has also forced extensive self-censorship on journalists in Afghanistan, especially those who work in the insecure areas of the country.

In 2014, the number of journalists killed spiked as result of insecurity that came about because of the transition of security responsibilities from foreign forces to the Afghan forces as well as the holding of presidential elections in that year. In the past five years, different groups have been behind the killing of journalists including Taliban, Mafia and groups loyal to local strongmen as well as unknown individuals and groups.

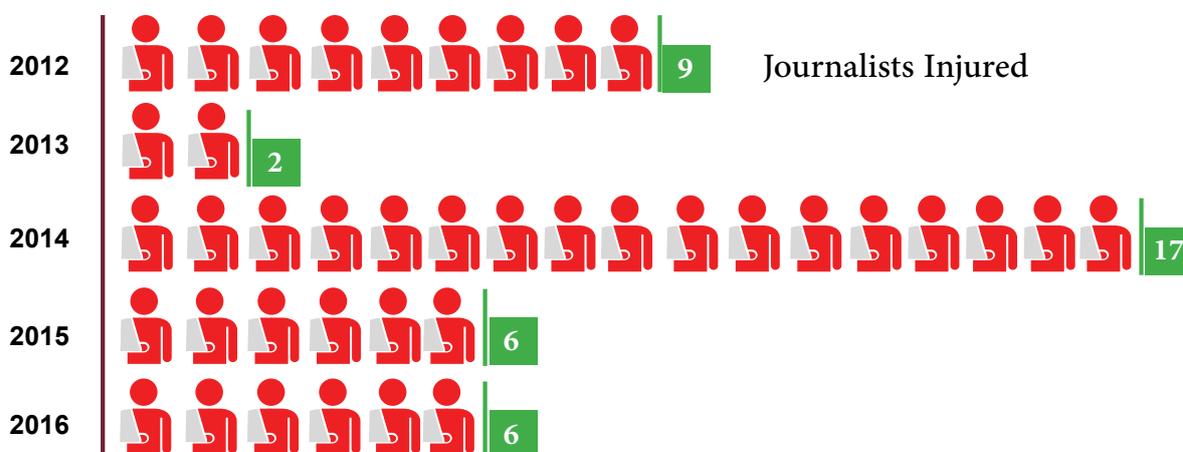
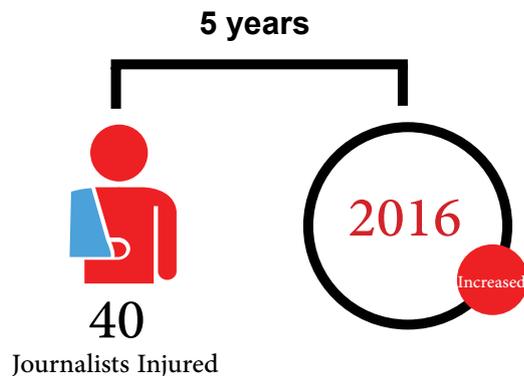


Journalists Killed

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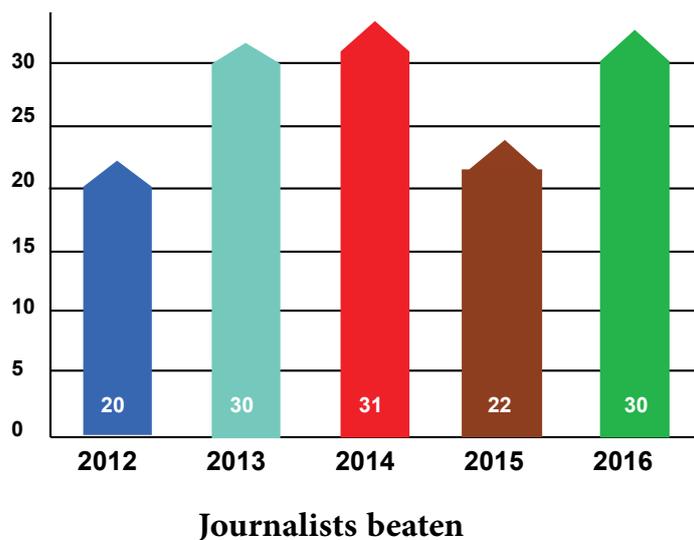
Journalists Injured

In the past five years, there have been 40 incidents of journalists having been wounded while at work or for reasons of journalistic work. In most cases, journalists have been wounded during coverage of incident on the site either by explosions or security forces. The number of cases of journalists being wounded went up in 2014 because of the Presidential elections and transition of security responsibilities from the international forces to the Afghan forces.



Journalists Beaten

Over 100 cases of beatings of journalists in five years demonstrate that violence against journalists is a major issue that journalists have to tackle and still there is a large mass of those who oppose freedom of expression and free press in Afghanistan. It is unfortunate that the government and security forces are responsible for most of the incidents involving beating of journalists. According to AJSC's data, the majority of cases of beatings of journalists have occurred while they were reporting from the site and in certain circumstances, beatings have been deliberate and intentional. In some cases that journalists have been beaten, their equipment have also been destroyed and more often the cases of beatings have been closed following mere apologies issued by the security forces and government officials and as such they have not been prosecuted seriously.

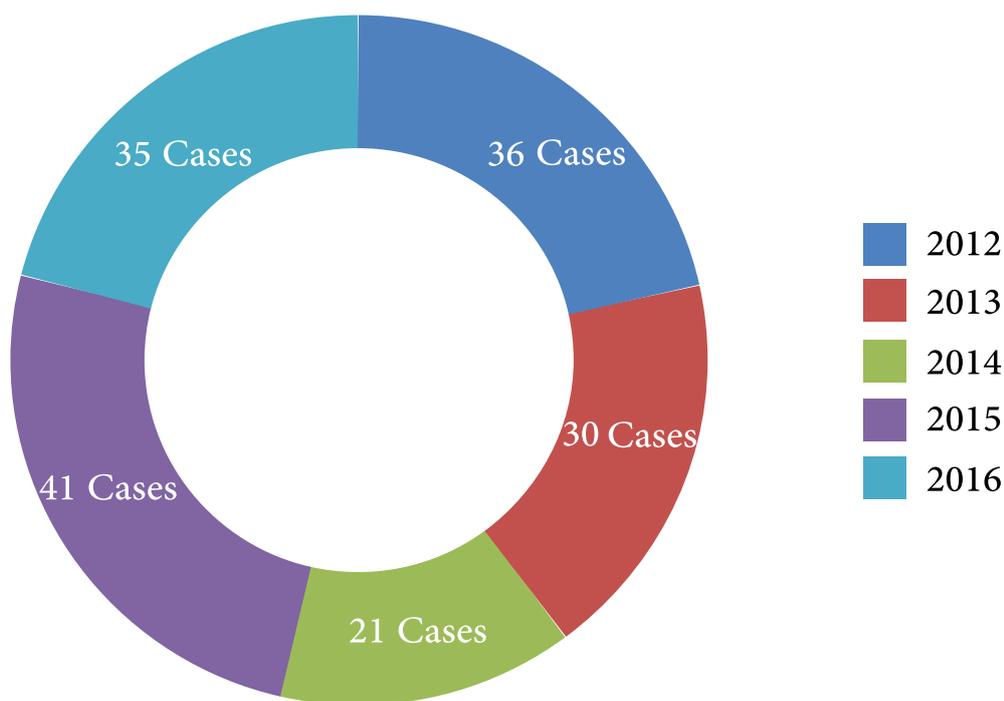


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Journalists Intimidated

Journalists are intimidated and threatened by different groups. Most cases of the intimidations are carried out by the government, Taliban and local strongmen. In most instances, journalists are intimidated for reasons that have to do with their reports not being to the liking of potential intimidators or that it is because journalists resist the demands of intimidators to publish or broadcast their orders and news releases. The threats that are issued by government officials and local strongmen mostly have to do with the reports that reveal corruption, nepotism and/or bad governance. In 2016, in areas where Taliban exercised most presence and influence, they demanded that media avoid broadcasting or publishing certain matters, which involved broadcasting or publication of commercial announcements by the security forces, peace messages, female voice, music and other types of entertainment programming. The most recent instances of such attempts by the Taliban to censure local media have been witnessed in the provinces of Wardak, Ghazni, Logar, Paktia and Paktika. In addition, Taliban have attempted to force journalists and media, through intimidation, to cover news concerning their activities. Such attempts mainly happen in insecure provinces where Taliban have large presence. These attempts are being broadened indicating the Taliban's goal to firmly control media agenda and content in the country. Following emergence of Daesh, also known as ISIS, in Afghanistan, this group has also made many attempts to force media to publish or broadcast contents concerning their activities and operations by intimidating and attacking them. The attacks on Radio Kilid, Radio Safa and Pajhwok News Agency in Jalalabad in October 2015 by Daesh were carried out primarily because of the resistance of these media agencies to publish or broadcast 'on order' news, which are instances of the kind of threats that journalists have to cope with. Media and journalists also get threatened and intimidated by local strongmen mostly for reasons that have to do with dissemination of news on oppression or violations of human rights committed by individuals and groups loyal to them.

In sum, with diminishing sovereignty and authority of government over the country, the level of threats against journalists and media has gone up. Besides, as a trend appears showing that remote provinces are more vulnerable as media and journalists are threatened and intimidated more in those areas.



Journalists Intimidated

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Perpetrators of Violence

In the past five years, a variety of groups have been behind violence against journalists in the country under different conditions. In certain circumstances, journalists have been on the receiving end of violence by public or have been victims of violence committed by local strongmen. The point to be highlighted here is that two groups have consistently committed violence against journalists; one of these groups is the government of Afghanistan that has been responsible for most of the cases of violence and the other consists of anti-government armed groups, especially Taliban who have perpetrated the most dangerous forms of violence resulting in death of journalists. Other groups are local strongmen, unknown individuals and even heads of media organizations. Since the data on violence committed by other groups have not been collected every year, only the data concerning violence committed by the government of Afghanistan and Taliban are analyzed here.

Government

Based on a review of data, the government of Afghanistan has, on average, been responsible for commission of over 40 cases of violence against journalists and media workers annually. The irony is that it is the government of Afghanistan that always calls freedom of expression and the growth of media as one of the most significant achievements of the country. However, fortunately, the number of cases of violence that government is known to be responsible for has dropped as is observable in the above chart. The main reason for such drop is the measures taken by the National Unity Government in preventing violence and holding government-associated individuals accountable following persistent advocacy on the part of journalist support organizations. For example, in the beginning of 2016, the National Unity Government issued a decree on the safety of journalists and non-intervention of the Attorney General's Office in the affairs of journalists and press. The government appointed a person, who as ambassador of freedom of expression, facilitated access of media support organizations to the President and has been very helpful in prosecution of the cases of violence against journalists and media. Besides, in mid autumn 2016, the government of Afghanistan passed the procedure on security and safety of journalists. Enforcement and implementation of this procedure can, to a large extent, address the safety and security issues and concerns of journalists.

However, this doesn't mean the the attitude of government officials has completely shifted towards journalists, there still are many government officials who has very unprofessional conduct with journalists. For instance; on 27/8/2016 Sadaam Daudzai Khurshid TV reporter was verbally abused by one of the deputies of National Olympic Committee because he wasn't interviewed for a story that involved the clashes between dupties of National Olympic Committee. Although, the conflict was an internal matter, but the deputy took it out on the journalist.

In another case; Massood Ansar reporter of Killied Radio said that when he was on his way to cover the inaguaration of Storay Palace in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he was threatened by the Presidential Protection team. He said when he filmed the traffic jam that resulted because president's entourage was passing through the road. The President's body guards verbally abused him and took his camera phone and threatened to imprison him for six months because of his filmming.

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On 11/8/2016 Hussain Nekkhowah reporter of Isteqlal TV was beaten and verbally abused by Head of Crimes Unit of Police HQ in Herat. Mr. Nekkhowah was making a story on a crime suspect when he was pushed and verbally abused by the Head of Crimes Unit and his bodyguards. He was unlawfully imprisoned for 30 minutes in the third district police station.

All of these cases shows that the government hasn't delivered on his promise to train the government officials on how to treat journalists and the work that is done so far is not enough.

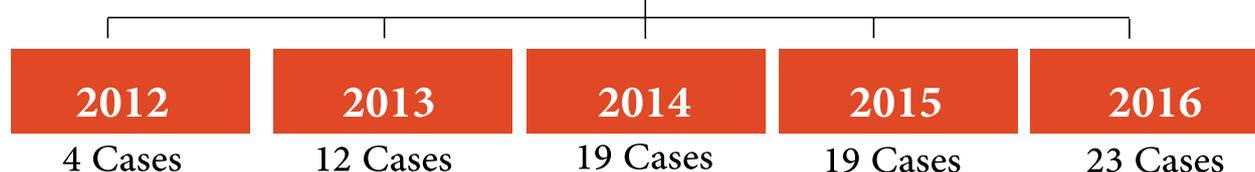
Government



Taliban and Armed Opposition Groups

Instances of Taliban intimidating journalists drastically increased in 2016. Initially, the Taliban's policy vis-à-vis media aimed to create friendly relations with the press. Taliban were hopeful that maintaining friendly relations with the press and journalists would provide better grounds for coverage of their activities in the news and improvement of their image in public. But this soft approach of Taliban vis-à-vis media did not bear fruit for the group. For this reason, by shifting their media policy and employing a different strategy, the Taliban group attempted to change the paradigm by forcing coverage of their activities and improving their image through intimidation and prevention of the broadcast and publication of matters that would benefit the government of Afghanistan. In 2016, the Taliban's level of threat and violence against journalists and media not only reached its maximum, but it also became much more intense and deadlier as in this year 13 journalists were killed and Taliban carry the responsibility for killing at least 10 of them. Parallel to their violence, the Taliban also increased and intensified their efforts to control the publication and broadcast contents of media.

Taliban and Armed Opposition Groups



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A Shift in the Paradigm of Threats Against Journalists and Media

Towards the end of the year, 2015 with the intensification of the war in different parts of the country, especially following the fall of Kunduz province to the Taliban in September of that year, the Taliban's conduct vis-à-vis the media changed, an event that transformed the nature of threats against journalists and shifted the paradigm of threat environment. With expanding intensity and scope of war, Taliban sensed that unless the news coverage of war is compatible with their propaganda strategy, their military gains could not have the necessary impact on the national and international opinion and political theater. Hence, by shifting their approach and conduct towards journalists, they attempted to directly intimidate and target media and journalists. These threats started with issuance of an official press release by the Taliban against Tolo TV and 1TV, in which both media organizations were called legitimate military targets. Subsequent to the threats, in January 2016, a vehicle transporting Tolo TV staffers was attacked, killing seven and wounding over twenty of Tolo staff. This attack by Taliban was not only the deadliest on media workers, but also big enough to generate extensive terror within journalists and media community across the country. Following their attacks, the Taliban intensified their attempts to control the agenda and programming of media in the insecure provinces of the country. They made attempts in different provinces of the country to stop the media from publishing or broadcasting of certain programs by use of threats and violence. The instances involving the Taliban attempting to exert control were mainly focused on stopping broadcast of female voices on radio and female images on TV as well as preventing entertainment programming especially programs that involved broadcast of female voices, announcements by the security forces, peace messages, infomercials that highlighted the achievements of the government and other contents that presented a better picture of the government to public. In certain areas, the Taliban provided broadcast and publication guidelines to the media to strictly obey. Most recently, guidelines were handed to media outlets in December 2016 in Logar province and media were asked to adjust their programming based on the guidelines.

Besides the Taliban, the Daesh forces have also attempted to influence media content and releases by exerting pressure and employing different kinds of means of violence to maintain a more prominent presence in news media's headlines. In Nangarhar province, given the considerable presence of Daesh there, the media have been under increasing pressure by Daesh to provide coverage of their attacks and vandalizations. They would disseminate messages and news releases concerning their activities to the press so that media cover and highlight them. At the same time, they would threaten the targeted media with attacks should they dare refuse to publish their materials. In the latest instance, Radio Kilid and Radio Safa were bomb-attacked by Daesh because of their resistance to broadcast the material that Daesh had disseminated to them.

Given the success of Taliban in creating fear amongst journalists and increasing insecurity and instability in the country, 2017 is also expected to be a difficult year. As the year 2016 is considered to be the deadliest year because of the killing of 13 journalists, it is probable that the level of violence and killings in the year 2017 go up as well.

Individual attacks on journalists and heads of media organizations emerge as the latest method being employed nowadays to muzzle freedom of expression. In the most recent incident, Qazi Nasir Ahmad Mudasir, head of Radio Paygham Milli (national message) was killed in December 2016 in Logar Province. Although the Taliban did not officially claim responsibility for this attack, Qazi Nasir and Radio Zinat had several times been threatened by Taliban for the contents of the radio's programming that involved broadcast of female voices, entertainment and political programs as well as infomercial spots of the National Security Forces. On July 16, 2016 Radio Zeenat received a letter from the Taliban ordering the radio to stop broadcasting female voices and the radio's staff to reform their conduct according to Islamic principles.

These threats and attacks have inevitably generated an environment of fear and self-censorship within the media community in areas the Taliban exercise control and influence. In such areas, they have managed to obtain control over the publication and broadcast material of media, something that is a source of serious concern for AJSC. Under these circumstances, the media cannot fulfill their basic obligation that is to work independently and impartially towards providing information to public.

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Conclusion

2016 is considered the bloodiest year for journalists in the history of media in Afghanistan because of the killing of 13 journalists. A shift in the nature of threats and their becoming deadlier in this year has made Afghanistan one of the most dangerous countries for the practice of journalism in the world. According to the annual worldwide round-up on journalists by Reporters without Borders, Afghanistan ranked second only to Syria in being the most dangerous country for journalists. An increase in the level of threats has generated extensive fear among journalists and the press, and has forced them into self-censorship, being especially felt in the insecure areas of the country. Although the government of Afghanistan has taken a number of measures to ensure safety and security of journalists in the country, especially the passing of the procedure on security and safety of journalists and media by the National Security Council, the safety of journalists still remains an urgent matter as well as the single most important threat against freedom of expression and free media in the country, which has been the biggest achievement of the country in the past 15 years. The profession of journalism is often seen as a problem within the lower and middle tiers of the government bureaucracy and thus journalists are not treated well and their work is not respected. Access to information still remains to be a challenge and despite a number of measures by the Government of National Unity, the challenge remains to be mitigated. Abuse of journalists, their mistreatment, neglect and downplaying and disrespecting journalistic work, employing force and exerting pressure are other forms of mistreatment that journalists have to deal with on day-to-day basis.

If we take a look at the past five years and review the scale of violence against journalists, it can be seen that the number of instances of violence over these five years fall within the range of seventy and slightly over 130 instances per year. Although the number of instances of violence in 2015 and 2016 has fallen compared to 2014, (political, security and economic transitions and an increase in instances of insecurity) in 2016 violence has become much deadlier and more intense and the level of threats have gone up as well.

Another notable point is the increasing number of instances of violence and intimidation committed by government officials against journalists as the government, by law, principle and morality is obliged to ensure safety and security of journalists.

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Recommendations

1. Given that 2016 has been the deadliest year for journalists and media in the country, the government of Afghanistan should implement the procedure on ensuring security and safety of journalists with full seriousness in all the provinces of the country. AJSC welcomes passing of this procedure, which enshrines a comprehensive and practical framework for the safety of journalists, and sees its effectiveness in its serious and full implementation. 2017 could be equally as violent as 2016. Threats could even rise more if parliamentary elections are organized in 2017.
2. The Government of Afghanistan should integrate guidelines on ways to treat journalists into the curriculum of the National Security Forces and launch an awareness campaign to inform government employees of the rights of journalists to report. The national security forces are responsible for a large number of incidents of threats and violence against journalists; hence, this issue must be raised and addressed.
3. Given the depth of the threats against media workers and journalists, media organizations should take the security of their staff seriously and take practical actions to that end. Ensuring security of their workers, is the legal, administrative and moral obligation of media and negligence in this area cannot be justified at all. Media organizations should organize Hostile Environment Training courses for their staff or request AJSC to arrange them.
4. Journalists should put their safety and security at the top of their priorities. Safety measures should be taken prior to any reporting excursions, particularly those that involve unsafe areas. Journalists should enroll in the short-term Hostile Environment Training courses that AJSC offers as part of its mission to enhance safety for journalists.
5. Media support organizations should work closely with the government of Afghanistan towards implementation of the Procedure on the Safety and Security of Journalists and also improvement of the legal framework. A strong and conducive legal framework will help mitigate challenges journalists face, particularly those concerning employment safety and access to information.
6. The international community should place safeguarding journalists, media and freedom of expression at the top of its priorities. The increasing level of violence could silence media and freedom of expression, therefore, international community should urge the Afghan government to wholly implement the safety measures the government has taken in 2016. The international community has played a prominent role in the growth of freedom of expression, multiplicity and diversity of media in Afghanistan, and thus, protecting these achievements remain the shared responsibility of the government of Afghanistan and the international community.
7. As financial challenges of the media increase, international community should increase funding allocated to media development and freedom of expression. This would not only help preserve media outlets but will also help them improve protection of their organizations and their staff. Preserving the vibrant media environment is not only a critical need of building democracy but also a key element of reporting humanitarian crisis emerging from increasing violence and return of tens of thousands of refugees from Pakistan.
8. Women's role and presence in the media should increase. Media organization need to adopt affirmative action so that women can secure a more prominent role in the media and acquire active presence in the reporting domain.