



Report on

# **MODERNISING JOURNALISTS' TRADE UNIONS IN PAKISTAN FOR THE DIGITAL AGE**

**A Mapping of Challenges, Needs, and Solutions**



**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT**   
**STIFTUNG**  
FES Pakistan



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# **MODERNISING JOURNALISTS' TRADE UNIONS IN PAKISTAN FOR THE DIGITAL AGE**

**A Mapping of Challenges, Needs, and Solutions**

Conducted by

Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA)

For

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Pakistan  
and  
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

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## Acronyms

APNEC	All Pakistan Newspapers Employees Confederation
APNS	All Pakistan Newspaper Society
APP	Associated Press of Pakistan
BDM	Biennial Delegated Members
CBAs	Collective Bargaining Agents
CJMP	Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners
CPNE	Council of Pakistani Newspaper Editors
CPs	Content Producers
FEC	Federal Executive Council
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
HRCP	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
IRADA	Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development
ITNE	Implementation Tribunal for Newspaper Employees (ITNE)
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
KUJ	Karachi Union of Journalists
MWs	Media Workers
NECOSA	Newspapers Employees (Conditions of Service) Act, 1973

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NIRC	National Industrial Relations Commission
NPC	National Press Club
OMPs	Other Media Practitioners/Professionals
PBA	Pakistan Broadcasters Association
PBC	Pakistan Bar Council
PBC	Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation
PEMRA	Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority
PFUJ	Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists
PJSC	Pakistan Journalists Safety Coalition
PMDA	Pakistan Media Development Authority
PTV	Pakistan Television
RIUJ	Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists
UJs	Unions of Journalists
WJA	Women Journalists Association
WM	Media Workers
WMFP	Women Media Forum Pakistan

## Foreword

The role of journalists and media workers in shaping democratic discourse cannot be overstated. In Pakistan, where the media landscape has witnessed profound transformations over the past two decades, the necessity for strong, representative, and well-organized trade unions has become more pressing than ever. However, despite their critical role, journalists' unions face persistent challenges which have a severe impact on their ability to advocate for workers' rights, especially their own safety, and safeguard press freedoms.

This study, conducted by the Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA) funded by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Pakistan and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), provides a much-needed mapping and analysis of journalists' trade unions in Pakistan. It examines their structure, challenges, and opportunities, offering insights into how these unions can modernize, enhance inclusivity, and better protect media workers in an evolving digital and political landscape.

By identifying key gaps in labour rights, legal frameworks, and organisational strategies, this study aims to contribute to strengthening trade unionism in the media sector. We hope the findings and recommendations presented here will serve as a valuable resource for journalists, policymakers, and labour rights activists as well as academics committed to fostering a more democratic and rights-based environment for media professionals in Pakistan.

We extend our gratitude to all those who contributed to this research and reaffirm our commitment to supporting the social justice and democratic values in Pakistan.

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## Introduction

### **Working to build stronger media unions for a stronger media industry in Pakistan**

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is the world's largest organization representing media professionals, uniting 187 journalist trade unions and associations across 141 countries and advocating for the rights of over 600,000 journalists globally. Established in 1926, the IFJ serves as a leading voice for journalists within the United Nations system and the international labor movement.

Importantly, the IFJ does not subscribe to any given political viewpoint, but promotes collective action to defend human rights, democracy and media pluralism. It supports journalists and their unions whenever they are fighting for their industrial and professional rights.

Since 2020, the IFJ Asia-Pacific has been leading a major national strategy in Pakistan, targeting one of IFJ's core mandates: to secure wages, safe working conditions and to protect labour rights. We have been doing so with a diverse range of media stakeholders, including our Pakistan affiliate, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) – on work that is focused on building media union capacities around labour rights issues; diversity and inclusion; union transformation; and enhancing union leadership development and awareness of labour rights for media workers.

Secondly, but equally important to the IFJ's core platform is gender equality. Specifically, IFJ's work has been embedded in enhancing efforts and strategies to empower women working in the media. We have collaborated with and lobbied press clubs, media houses and media unions on the need for gender equity and equality in all areas of the media landscape. We continue to support women journalists to build stronger networks and enhance their leadership capacities, so they take up a rightful and more equitable seat at the bargaining table and in union and press club leadership. Because we know that a union is only as strong as its collective membership, but that membership must also prioritise advocacy and lobbying on gender specific issues in the media space, in work contracts and in collective bargaining if it is to be truly powerful and game changing.

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Through a long history of successful collaboration with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), IFJ commenced work on a new program with FES in 2023. The ***“Strengthening the Labor Movement and Journalists’ Labor Rights through Stronger Journalists’ Unions and Media Organizations in Pakistan”*** project is an important three-year strategy aimed at reinforcing and buttressing the role of journalists’ unions within the broader labor movement in the country.

Why is it needed? The answer is simple.

While Pakistan’s media has undergone a profound transformation and massive growth fueled by the advent of digital communications over the past two decades, that rapid growth has taken a brutal toll on the wages and labour rights of all media workers. It’s also taken a heavy toll on the efficacy and ability of journalists’ unions to effectively tackle the myriad of challenges that journalists and media workers now face.

Right now, change is not only needed, but also essential.

Media union leaders and their members, akin to their counterparts in sectors that have successfully negotiated new social contracts, must now work together to redefine the terms of engagement and reboot the importance of the right to association and to join and form unions. This involves formal union registration and advocating for fair compensation, equitable treatment, and workplace conditions that align with contemporary expectations.

The IFJ is pleased to have been part of the successful completion of the FES project’s first phase, ***“Mapping and Analysis of Journalists’ Trade Unions in Pakistan”*** and we look forward to further collaborating on key strategic areas identified as priorities for the future growth of Pakistan’s media unions. Things like the importance of alliance building, enhancing inclusivity, promoting financial transparency and improving democracy, representation and leadership transition.

Because there is no doubt that media unions play one of the most pivotal role in championing the rights and interests of the majority of media workers. But the internal reform and renewal of unions must be part of that process.

**In union,**

**Jane Worthington**  
**Director – IFJ Asia-Pacific**



## Background

Pakistan's media landscape has seen massive transformation during the first quarter of the 21st century. By the end of the last century, the country had an estimated 2,000 daily, weekly, fortnightly, and monthly news publications. This was essentially a print-dominated media landscape with about 2,000 working journalists including reporters and editors, and around 25,000 media workers and allied functionaries running this sector. This number did not include those who were part of the state-managed media establishments Pakistan Television (PTV), Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) and Associated Press of Pakistan (APP).

**Expanded worker universe:** In the new millennium, a new legal regime was introduced to allow the private sector to operate television channels and radio stations in the country. As a result, the sector by the time of writing this report expanded from state-run television channels and radio stations only to around 35 news and current affairs private current affairs TV channels and 245 FM radio stations. This expanded broadcast space opened new avenues and opportunities for human resource and workers in the media sector. Consequently, the estimated number of journalists increased to about 18,000 and media workers and allied functionaries from to around 250,000 by 2025. Between 2015 and 2025, the advent of digital / online media has brought another shift in the sector with many of its practitioners without conventional media experience but versed in a new current affairs dynamic. These developments have had a significant impact on how journalists and media workers are perceived and how they practice solidarity.

**More journalists, less solidarity:** Ironically, despite a larger footprint of workers in the expanded media sector, journalists and media workers' trade unions in Pakistan face numerous challenges that limit their ability to advocate for employees' rights effectively and deter greater solidarity amongst themselves. Journalists are divided into many factions of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), including one affiliated with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), the global umbrella alliance of national unions. Each faction claims to have its regional unions of journalists (UJs) as members. Significantly, none of these PFUJ factions are registered bodies under the national labour laws. Therefore, they do not have legal

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authority to represent workers as Collective Bargaining Agents (CBAs). The All Pakistan Newspapers Employees Confederation (APNEC), which is a registered trade union of media workers, is facing fragmentation, lack of adequate solidarity, and insufficient representation across the various sectors where media workers are employed.

**Inadequate legal framework:** The absence of a comprehensive legislative framework governing labour rights is another serious challenge in promoting and strengthening collective bargaining agency in the media sector in Pakistan. The Newspapers Employees (Conditions of Service) Act, 1973 (NECOSA), is applicable to the employees of newspapers only. There is no such law for workers in broadcast and digital media, which constitute an estimated three-fourths of the media industry workers. Absence of these frameworks that cater uniformly to all sectors of media is also leading to situations of exploitation and hazardous working conditions for many workers.

According to recent research by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Pakistan has at least 7,096 registered trade unions, including 1,390 CBAs, and at least 1,414,160 unionised workers. Union density in the formal sector is 15.55%, while overall unionisation is only 2.32% of the total workforce. Key challenges include difficult registration processes, limited legal protections, and the marginalisation of labour-related journalism. Media workers and journalists are not an exception here as they are also facing similar challenges.

Legal recognition for journalists' unions in Pakistan, as well as the requisite knowledge and abilities, would enable them to mature into legally sound, sustainable, accountable and transparent organisations. This transformation can enable them to effectively advocate for media employees' labour rights and forge strong links with the country's broader labour rights groups.

**Mapping journalists' unions and their needs:** In view of these key unresolved issues, there has been felt a strong need for a comprehensive research study that focuses on gathering data about the number of registered trade unions and journalists' unions operating as labor organisations or CBAs in Pakistan. Such a study can provide crucial insights into the current landscape of labour representation in the country and shed light on the extent to which these unions are officially recognised and legally empowered to bargain for workers' rights.

The mapping can help identify areas where improvements are needed in terms of workers' representation, collective bargaining power, and the protection of labour rights. This research can also serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, journalists, and labour activists, enabling them to make informed decisions and develop strategies to strengthen the labour movements and ensure a more just and equitable working environment, especially for journalists and other media workers, in Pakistan. This mapping is an attempt in that direction.



## Objectives of the Research

The following are key components of this research:

- Mapping and situational analysis of journalists' trade unions in Pakistan, including identification of the key stakeholders and advocacy opportunities for media workers' rights;
- Understanding existing organisational structures, hierarchies, working strategies, resources mobilisation, membership approach, organisational development, and accountability mechanisms of journalists' trade unions;
- Identification of structural, institutional and legal issues and challenges of labour movements in media sector;
- Examination of the legal framework governing journalists' unions;
- Recommendations and actionable interventions for the stakeholders to strengthen labour movement in Pakistan in general and promote media workers' rights in particular.



## Methodology

A mixed-methods approach has been used for collection of data for this study. This comprised a detailed desk review of existing literature related to the purposes of this study, along with surveys with a representative sample of journalists and other media workers, key informant interviews (KIs) with experts and a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) / stakeholders' consultations to review preliminary findings and recommendations, and their endorsements.

### Desk Research

The desk research focused on the following:

- Identifying any previous or existing literature on journalists' trade unions in Pakistan as well as key stakeholders, issues and challenges facing the unions;
- Identifying case studies on collective bargaining for media workers covering gender, youth and religious minorities groups;
- Informing the design of the research instruments for the field research.

The literature review contained an examination of previous baseline studies, impact assessments, evaluation, research reports and case studies published by national, international and multilateral organisations regarding the thematic situation in Pakistan related to the project and assignment objectives. Keyword search and the websites of relevant organisations were used to identify the documents for review.

### Field Research

This stage of the research was implemented through three methods:

- i. Survey;
- ii. Key Informant Interviews (KIs); and
- iii. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

## Survey

Surveys are ideal for mapping studies because they can provide generalisable findings about a target population and identify measurable metrics for the desired change. In order to make the research feasible and achievable for this assignment, the survey for this study collected quantitative data about the needs, existing capacity and attitudes of only one specific target group: **journalists and media workers**.

A survey questionnaire was designed to collect data from the target group of the journalists and media workers. The questionnaire focused on the journalists and media workers and included questions about knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) of journalists and media workers vis-à-vis journalists' unions, structures of journalists' unions, barriers for entry in the unions, capacity needs and challenges related to the evolving media sector.

The survey was conducted using a convenience sampling technique through a structured questionnaire. Sample size was determined keeping in view research validity consideration and resources available.

## Key informant Interviews (KIIs)

The KIIs were used to collect in-depth qualitative information from representatives of the target groups: former and existing union leaders. The information focused on understanding the reasons for the current policy environment and sociopolitical context for the labour movement in Pakistan, identifying the factors behind the target groups' engagement (or lack thereof) with the stakeholder and policy makers, and explaining other gaps and challenges identified through the surveys.

A total of at least 16 KIIs conducted with former and existing unions leaders in four provinces and federal capital. Informant selection was done on the levels of expertise and accessibility. Semi-structured, open-ended interview guides were developed for the KIIs.

## Focus Groups Discussion (FGDs)

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are meant to gather in-depth information and insights from participants on a specific topic or research question. This research tool provides an opportunity to the participants to share their viewpoints, experiences, and perspectives in a group setting, opening space for diverse opinions and generation of qualitative data.



The FGDs were conducted with media stakeholders, i.e., members/ office bearers of journalists' unions, working journalists such as reporters, editors and cameramen, and technical staffers. A total of five FGDs were conducted: one each at the provincial headquarter and one at the federal level. Semi-structured, open-ended questionnaires/ guidelines were developed for FGDs. Key findings from the survey and key recommendations from the KIIs were shared with FGD participants and their endorsements secured while inputs from them were incorporated in the final list of recommendations in this report.



# 1. Overview of Journalists' Unions in Pakistan

The historical background of journalist unions in Pakistan is deeply intertwined with the country's political evolution and the struggle for press freedom. The genesis of organised journalism in Pakistan can be traced back to the early years following the country's independence in 1947. Initially, journalists faced numerous challenges, including censorship and political repression, which prompted the formation of unions to advocate for their rights and interests.<sup>1</sup> The first significant union, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), was established in 1950, aiming to provide a collective voice for journalists across the nation. The PFUJ has since played a pivotal role in organising journalists and addressing their grievances, particularly in the face of authoritarian regimes and military rule.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Pakistan experienced political instability, which significantly impacted the media landscape. The imposition of martial law in 1958 curtailed press freedoms, leading to increased activism among journalists. During this period, the PFUJ emerged as a critical player in advocating for press rights, organising protests against censorship, and demanding the repeal of oppressive laws that restricted journalistic freedom. The union's efforts were instrumental in mobilising journalists against government repression, particularly during the tumultuous political climate of the 1970s, which saw the rise of the Bhutto regime and subsequent military coups.<sup>3</sup>

The 1980s marked another significant phase in the history of journalist unions in Pakistan, as the country was under the military rule of General Zia-ul-Haq. This era was characterised by severe restrictions on the media, leading to the formation of various regional unions alongside the PFUJ. These

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1. Sadia Jamil, "Culture of Impunity and Safety of Journalists: Is Safe Journalism a Distant Dream in Pakistan?" *World of Media: Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies* 1 (2019): 51-66, <https://doi.org/10.30547/worldofmedia.1.2019.3>.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

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unions sought to address local issues and provide support to journalists facing harassment and intimidation. The PFUJ continued to advocate for the rights of journalists, organizing strikes and protests to demand better working conditions and freedom from censorship.

The restoration of democracy in the 1990s brought some improvements in press freedom, but challenges persisted. The rise of private media outlets led to a more competitive environment, but also to precarious working conditions for journalists, including low wages and job insecurity. In response, journalist unions intensified their efforts to negotiate better terms for their members and to advocate for legal protections against violence and harassment.

In recent years, the landscape of journalist unions in Pakistan has evolved further, with the PFUJ and various provincial unions continuing to play a crucial role in the fight for press freedom and labor rights. The unions have been active in raising awareness about the dangers faced by journalists, particularly in conflict zones, and have worked to establish mechanisms for the protection of media workers. The ongoing struggle for press freedom in Pakistan remains a critical issue, with journalist unions at the forefront of advocating for the rights and safety of media professionals.

The PFUJ and its provincial counterparts have been instrumental in advocating for journalists' rights, addressing their grievances, and mobilizing collective action against censorship and violence.

While precise numerical strength can vary, PFUJ claims representation for thousands of journalists across Pakistan. The organisation comprises numerous regional affiliates and is also linked with the All APNEC, which includes various media workers beyond just journalists. However, internal divisions have weakened its overall influence and effectiveness. The landscape of journalist unions in Pakistan features several factions at both the provincial and federal levels, primarily stemming from divisions within the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ). Here's an overview of the key factions:

#### **Factions of PFUJ:**

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) has a complex history marked by fragmentation and the emergence of various factions. Here's an overview of the key factions and their developments:

## **PFUJ-Barna (Original)**

The PFUJ-Barna faction emerged after the original PFUJ split in 1977 during General Zia-ul-Haq's martial law. Minhaj Barna was a notable figure associated with this faction, widely recognised for his contributions to the union and the broader journalistic community in Pakistan. Following its formation, PFUJ-Barna faced further fragmentation, particularly in 2013, when it split into two groups.

## **PFUJ-Dastoor**

The second faction that emerged from the original PFUJ was PFUJ-Dastoor, formed by a right-wing group that broke away at the same time as PFUJ-Barna. This faction represents a more conservative viewpoint within the journalist community and has been involved in various advocacy efforts, albeit with a different ideological stance compared to its counterparts.

## **Post-2013 Divisions**

After 2013, the PFUJ-Barna faction experienced further division, resulting in the formation of two additional groups: the '**Afzal Butt Faction**' and the '**Rana Azeem Faction**'. The Rana Azeem faction is associated with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

## **PFUJ-Workers**

Another notable faction is PFUJ-Workers, led by Dr. Sadia Kamal, who made history as the first female president of this faction when elected in 2024. Dr. Kamal's leadership marks a significant step toward inclusivity within journalist unions in Pakistan. The faction was initially started by senior journalist Pervez Shaukat, who served as president of a previous faction, emphasising the need for representation and advocacy for workers' rights within the media sector.

## **Constituent Associations**

In 2024, the PFUJ Afzal Butt Faction comprised 13 constituent associations representing various regions across Pakistan. These associations include:

1. Abbottabad Union of Journalists
2. Balochistan Union of Journalists

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3. Bahawalpur Union of Journalists
4. Faisalabad Union of Journalists
5. Gujranwala Union of Journalists
6. Hyderabad Union of Journalists
7. Karachi Union of Journalists
8. Khyber Union of Journalists
9. Multan Union of Journalists
10. Punjab Union of Journalists
11. Rahimyar Khan Union of Journalists
12. Rawalpindi-Islamabad Union of Journalists
13. Sukkur Union of Journalists<sup>4</sup> (PFUJ, 2020)

These regional unions play a crucial role in representing local journalists and addressing specific issues faced by their members. According to the list of delegates for PFUJ (Afzal Butt) elections in July 2022, there were 284 delegates representing 7,958 members associated with these regional unions.

Similarly, as per the information shared by PFUJ (Rana Azeem Group), the group has 50 regional unions having 218 delegates representing 9962 members associated with these regional unions.

### Other Notable Organisations With Unionism Mandates

**All Pakistan Newspaper Employees Confederation (APNEC):** While not a faction of PFUJ, APNEC represents a broader group of media workers, including journalists, and collaborates with various unions for collective bargaining and rights advocacy.

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4. PFUJ (2020) From Layoffs to Lashes: *PFUJ's 70 Year Fight for Media Freedom*. Section 4: The Building Blocks. pg 132

## **2. Role of Journalist Unions in Pakistan**

The impact of these traditionally active and assertive unions on the overall labour rights movement in Pakistan has been significant. They have been instrumental in raising awareness about the precarious conditions generally faced by media workers, including issues related to job security, fair wages, and workplace safety.<sup>5</sup> (Aslam, R.2015.) Various PFUJ factions have organised protests and campaigns to demand better working conditions and to highlight the dangers journalists face, particularly in conflict zones where they are often targeted by militant groups.<sup>6</sup> (Baloch, and Andresen, 2020) By mobilising journalists and leveraging their collective power, these unions have occasionally been able to negotiate better terms for their members and advocate for legal protections against violence and harassment.

The role of journalists' unions in the labor movement of Pakistan has been significant, particularly through the efforts of the various factions of PFUJ and their affiliated regional unions. The original PFUJ and its subsequent breakaway factions have historically advocated for the rights and safety of journalists, striving to improve working conditions and ensure fair wages. This includes fighting against media owners' exploitation and demanding adherence to labour laws, such as the Wage Award, which mandates minimum salary standards for journalists. Unions have engaged in collective bargaining to negotiate better terms for journalists, addressing issues like job security, health benefits, and workplace safety. The PFUJ factions have variously organised protests and sit-ins to pressure media owners to fulfill their obligations under labour laws.

Moreover, the unions have also played a pivotal role in influencing public policies related to media and labor rights. Their advocacy efforts have, in general, led to increased recognition of the rights of journalists and media workers within the broader labour rights movement in Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> (Alam and

- 
5. Media, politics and the threats to journalists in Pakistan May 1, 2015 <https://search.informit.org/doi/abs/10.3316/INFORMIT.244710941949672>
  6. Reporting in Conflict Zones in Pakistan: Risks and Challenges for Fixers February 25,2020 <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/2514>
  7. Influence of Electronic Media on Public Policies and Narratives in Pakistan Post-2005 (2021) <http://sajms.iurc.edu.pk/issues/2021b/SAJMS150207.pdf>

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Wajid, 2021) The unions have collaborated with civil society organisations to push for legislative reforms that protect journalists from censorship and violence, thereby contributing to a more robust framework for labour rights in the media sector. This collaboration has not only improved the working conditions for journalists but has also fostered a culture of solidarity among media workers, encouraging them to stand together against injustices



### 3. Pakistan's Media Workers and Unionism: A Survey

The survey, for the purposes of this study, was conducted using a convenience sampling technique through a structured questionnaire. Sample size was determined keeping in view research validity consideration and resources available.

- **WHO:** Media Workers (MWs), including journalists and other media practitioners (as defined in the federal and Sindh laws on safety of journalists and "other media practitioners/professionals [OMPs]")
- **WHERE:** Federal capital + four provincial capitals (these regions represent a large majority of media workers represented in various unions)
- **HOW MANY:** Total number of MWs surveyed was dictated by (i) estimated figure of media industry comprising around 250,000 persons, (ii) existing unions and other representative associations in these five places (Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta). Target: 250 persons.

**REPRESENTATION/BIFURCATION:** Breakdown of target of 250 MWs surveyed:

#### Target interviewees (by category):

1. Journalists / Content producers (CPs): total 100
2. Other media practitioners / professionals: total 150

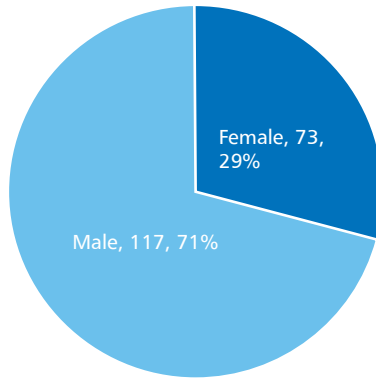
**Some of the basic demographics for this research are given below:**

#### 3.1. Basic Information

##### 3.1.1. Gender

Amongst the journalist respondents, 177 (71%) were male, and remaining 73 (29%) were female.

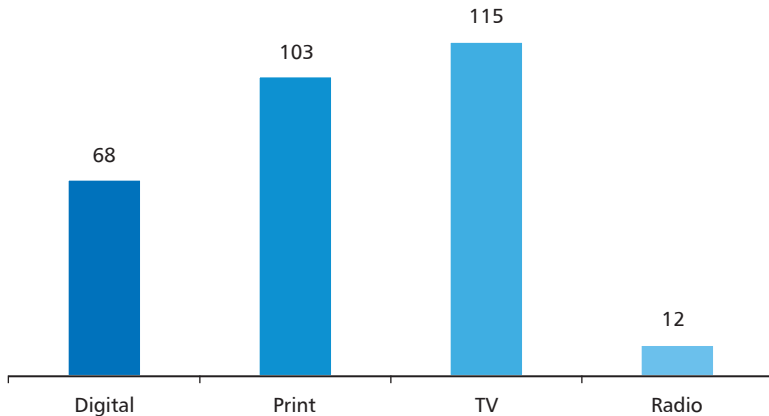
Figure 1: Gender base of respondents



### 3.1.2. Medium of the Journalist Respondents

Most of the respondents belonged to TV (115) and Print (103) medium, while remaining 68 respondents served Digital medium and 12 respondents belonged to Radio medium.

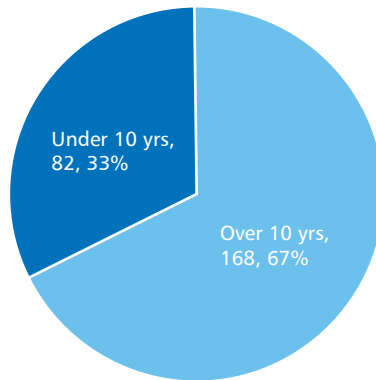
Figure 2: Medium of Journalist Respondents



### 3.1.3. Serving Experience of Journalist Respondents

Most of the journalist respondents (168; 67%) had serving experience of over 10 years, and remaining 82 (33%) respondents had under 10 years of job experience in the journalism field.

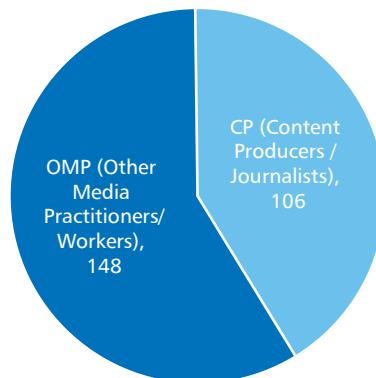
Figure 3: Serving Experience of Journalist Respondents



### 3.1.4. Category of Media Workers

Among the journalist respondents, 106 were content producers/journalists, while the remaining 148 respondents belonged to other media practitioners/workers.

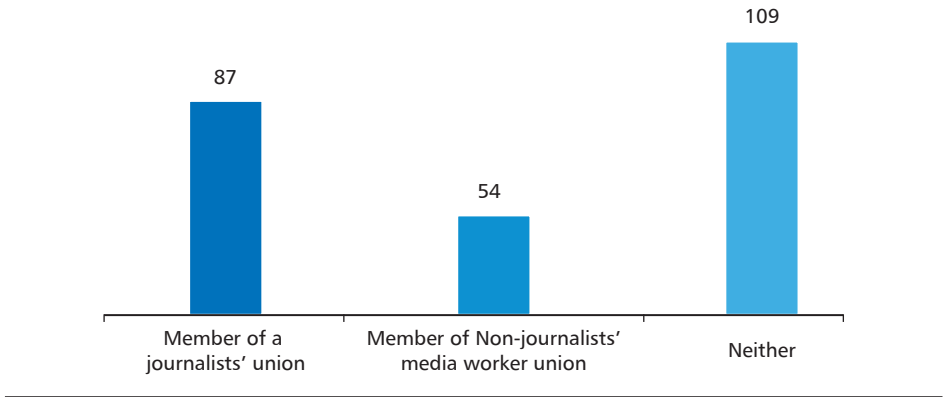
Figure 4: Category of Media Workers



### 3.1.5. Union Membership Status of Journalist Respondents

Most of the respondents (109) were not members of any journalist union, 87 respondents were members of a journalists' union, while the remaining 54 respondents were members of non-journalists' media workers unions.

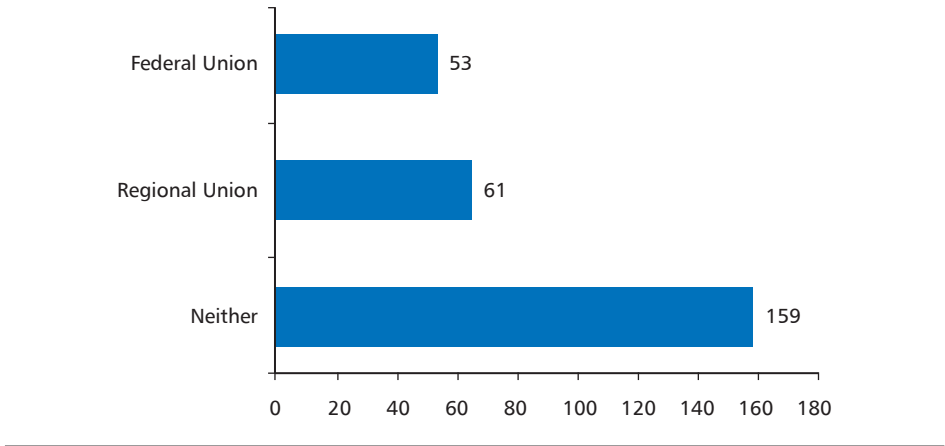
**Figure 5: Union Membership Status of Journalist Respondents**



### 3.1.6. Federal and Regional Union Membership

Most of the respondents (159) had no union membership, while 61 respondents had membership of a regional union, and 53 respondents had membership of federal union.

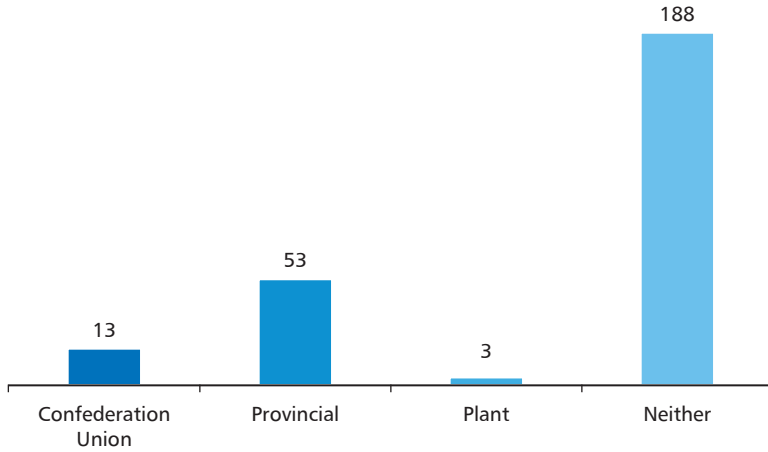
**Figure 6: Federal and Regional Union Membership**



### 3.1.7. Membership of Non-journalists' Media Workers' Union

Most of the respondents (188) were not members of any non-journalists' media workers' union, 53 of the respondents were members of provincial unions, while only 13 of the respondents were members of a confederation union, and only three were members of the plant.

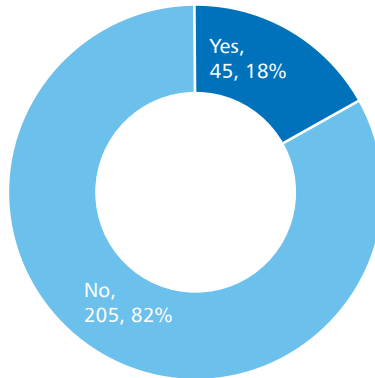
Figure 7: Membership of Non-journalists' Media Workers' Union



### 3.1.8. Member of Provincial Unions

Most of the journalist respondents (205; 82%) were not members of provincial unions, while the remaining 45 (18%) were members of provincial unions.

Figure 8: Member of Provincial Unions



### 3.1.9. Interested in Journalists' Union or Non-journalists' Media Workers' Union

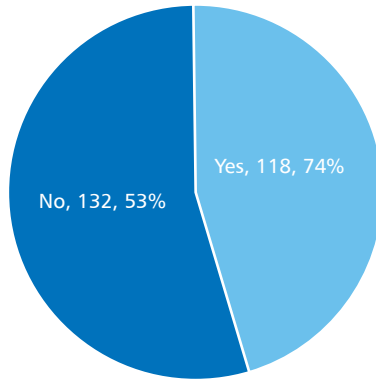
A large number of journalist respondents (132; 53%) replied that they were not interested to avail membership of any Journalists' Union or Non-

## Modernising Journalists' Trade Unions in Pakistan for the Digital Age

### A Mapping of Challenges, Needs, and Solutions

journalists' Media Workers' Union, while remaining (118; 47%) showed their willingness to avail membership of any union.

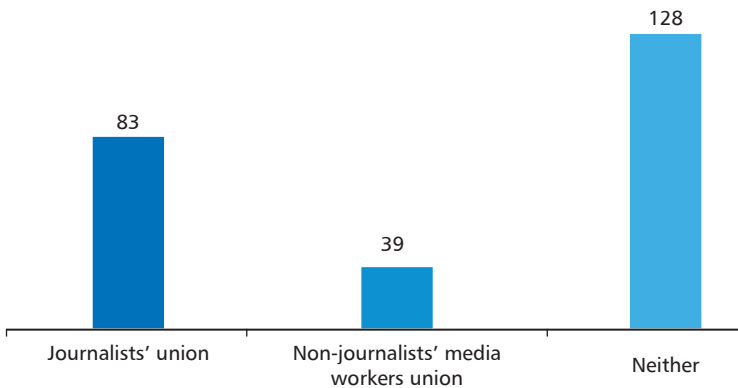
Figure 9: Avail Membership of Journalists' Union or Non-journalists' Union



### 3.1.10. Interested in Membership of a Union

Many of the respondents (128) said they would not like to be a member of any union, while 83 of the respondents said would like to be a member of journalists' union, and the remaining 39 of the respondents were interested in being a member of non-journalist media workers' union.

Figure 10: Like to be Member of Union

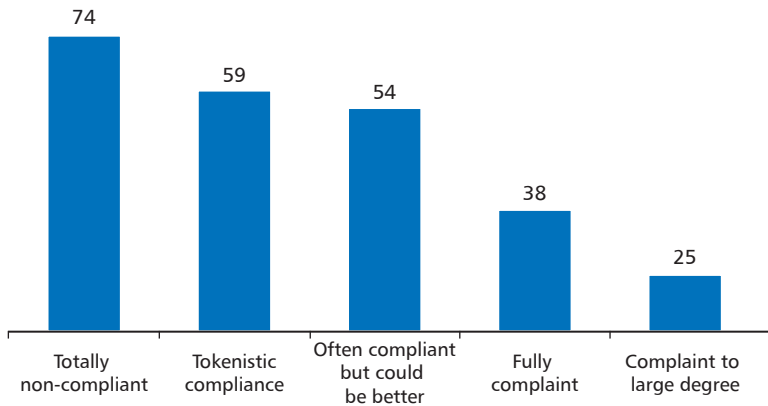


### 3.2. Attitudes

#### 3.2.1. Rating Performance of Unions for Core Functions: Modernisation of the Union

A large number of journalist respondents (74) replied that modernisation of the union is totally non-compliant, 59 said there is tokenistic compliance, and 54 said that modernisation is often compliant but could be better. Remaining 38 respondents felt they were fully compliant while 25 said that modernisation of the union is compliant to a large degree.

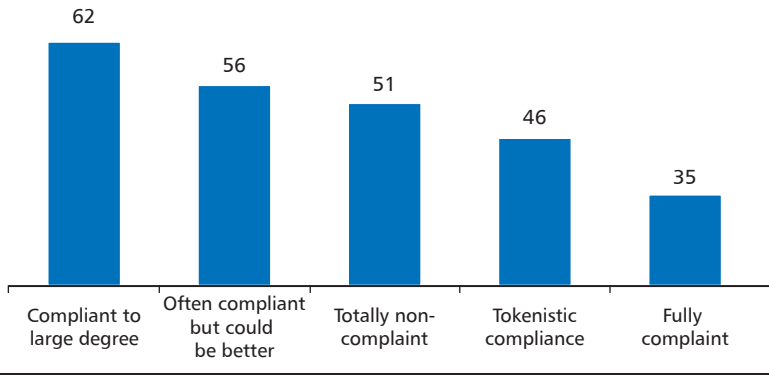
Figure 11: Moderanisation of the Union



#### 3.2.2. Rating Performance of Unions for Core Functions: Promoting Diversity and Pluralism in Membership

Many respondents (62) said that promotion of diversity and pluralism in membership is compliant to a large degree, 56 said it is often compliant but could be better, while 51 of respondents replied that promotion of diversity and pluralism is totally non-compliant. The remaining 46 responded that promotion of diversity and pluralism in membership is tokenistic compliance while 35 said that promotion is fully compliant.

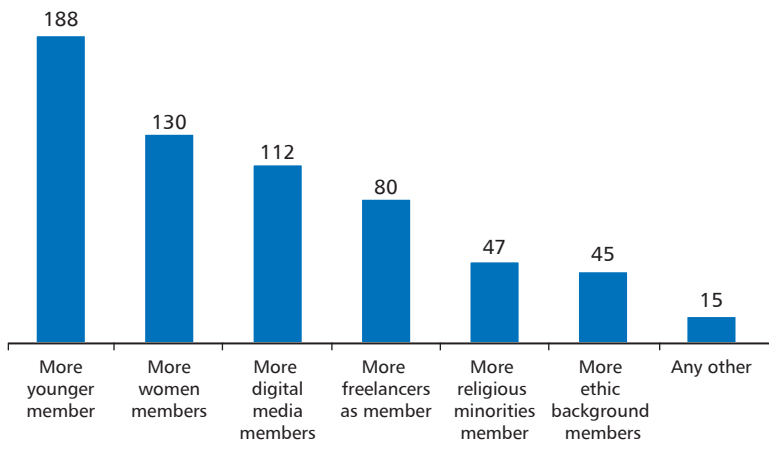
**Figure 12: Promoting Diversity and Pluralism in Membership**



**3.2.3. Actions to improve Performance of Union: Measures to Improve Membership Inclusivity**

Multiple journalist (188) respondents replied that union membership inclusivity can be improved by including more younger members, 130 said this can happen with more women members, and 122 said more digital media members can improve inclusivity. Some of them (80) said that more freelancers as members and 47 felt that more religious minorities members can improve inclusivity. Some of the media respondents said more members with ethnic backgrounds can improve membership inclusivity.

**Figure 13: Measures to Improve Membership Inclusivity**





## 4. Key Challenges of Journalists' Unions

There are numerous obstacles that journalists' unions in Pakistan encounter, which significantly impede their ability to advocate for the rights and welfare of member media workers. These challenges are the result of a precarious environment that is created by a combination of internal and external factors that affect journalists and their unions. These factors are discussed below.

### 4.1. Internal Challenges

#### 4.1.1. Reluctance to Adapt to an Evolving Media Landscape

One of the primary obstacles encountered by the media industry, particularly the journalists' unions, is their inability to adjust to the changing contemporary media landscape. Unions must evolve in response to the digital media landscape's progressive development, particularly among media workers. This lack of adaptability stems due to various reasons. Firstly, there is a level of mistrust towards digital media journalists (who are increasing in numbers) among the more senior journalists (who tend to come from conventional mediums like TV and print). This is primarily due to the unregulated nature of digital platforms and, by extension, digital media journalists. There is no proper check and balance on whether digital media journalists are adhering to proper journalistic ethics hence they are often frowned upon as "maybe not journalists yet". This leads to a growing trust deficit among members, leading to a hesitation towards allowing them to become part of the unions.

During the course of the KIIIs many of experts consulted reflected this view. **Fauzia Shahid**, former Vice President of PFUJ, said, "As for including digital journalists in our unions, there's reluctance due to concerns about their ethics. Digital media platforms often act as mouthpieces for political parties. Before considering them for membership, they must be trained in journalistic standards and start practicing ethical journalism. Without that, they aren't suitable for membership. We'll eventually need to amend the constitution to include both electronic and digital journalists, but their inclusion depends on how well they follow journalistic ethics."

“Further,” she added, “there is a dispute over what criteria should be kept in order to include digital journalists. A set policy is crucial to improving the involvement of diverse forms of journalists, who are expanding into various digital platforms. There is a lack of formal policy to introduce digital media journalists into the union structure. Additionally, the lack of formal policies and regulations further makes the process inefficient.”

**Amir Suhail**, the vice president of PFUJ-Rana Azeem faction said, “The rise of digital journalism has added another layer of complexity. Unions now need to accommodate new forms of media, which has led to the establishment of a social media club in Lahore, with thousands of members, including YouTubers and TikTokers. However, integrating these digital media professionals into unions requires clear membership criteria to ensure that the unions remain professional while adjusting to the evolving landscape. Factionalism within unions continues to be one of the most damaging challenges, hindering efforts to unify around these new realities.”

#### 4.1.2. Internal Divide and Rise in Factionalism

Factionalism within journalists' unions in Pakistan presents several significant issues that impact the integrity and effectiveness of the media landscape. This phenomenon is characterised by divisions among journalists based on personal interests and organisational loyalties, which can undermine collective action and the pursuit of shared goals. This compromises the overall unity among the journalistic fraternity, further enhancing the existing trust deficit.

Amir Suhail says, “Unions of journalists and media workers can embrace modern management practices by first addressing the internal challenges of factionalism and division that have historically hindered progress. Factionalism weakens the unions' ability to respond effectively to external pressures from politicians, government, and other interest groups. Building on existing digital infrastructure, such as websites, union members and officials should undergo capacity-building programs to familiarise themselves with modern management techniques.”

**Dr. Sadia Kamal**, the President of PFUJ-Workers faction, says, “A union's primary role is to advocate for the rights of journalists and media workers, encompassing both categories. However, our unions are divided, leading to the formation of new factions when conflicts arise. This division has significantly harmed the media industry, conveniently serving the state's interests. To

implement modern practices, we need a unified ideology and vision." She adds further, "Unfortunately, we have witnessed in the past that when anyone formed a union, it was often for personal gain or to promote their business interests. As a result, our unions have become havens for various mafias, failing to take a strong stand on real issues due to these practices. The union factions have become competitors rather than taking collective stands on issues affecting our community. Now, we struggle to even exercise our freedom of expression because of the divided media community. When one faction raises a voice against injustice, the other faction criticises that instead of showing solidarity."

**A H Khanzada**, General Secretary of PFUJ-Dastoor faction based in Karachi added, "Regular elections are essential for the proper functioning of unions. Currently, union leaders have entrenched themselves like feudal lords. Just as the end of student unions led national politics into the hands of landlords, capitalists, and feudalists, the absence of elections in journalistic unions has brought similar figures to the forefront. Today, union leaders have connections with ministers and various political and social figures, often aligning themselves with different factions rather than representing the true interests of the union members."

#### **4.1.3. Lack of Capacity and Awareness**

Pakistani journalists' unions struggle to adopt modern management practices due to inadequate professional management and leadership capacities among the leadership. This shortfall in capacities hinders their ability to adapt to innovative practices and welcome modernisation. There is also a limited understanding of labour laws and policies that can be better invoked in favour of the journalists' community. The younger generation of journalists exhibits a deficiency in awareness concerning unions, while leadership demonstrates a pronounced reluctance to alter their practices. Conducting capacity-building exercises can help improve awareness among members and encourage debate and discussion. These can help increase the openness among members to adapt to new ideas.

**Lubna Jerar Naqvi**, who is the General Secretary of Karachi Union of Journalists (KUJ), explains, "First, capacity building of members and leaders is necessary, which should be on a regular basis. Members should actively engage and interact with both fellow members and leaders to explore various ways to achieve their goals. We can also hire trainers from other organisations to build professional capacities. It is beneficial to connect with

strong unions in other sectors to foster interaction between their leaders and members and ours, helping everyone learn new methods for achieving goals.”

Naqvi says the community can also bring in industry trainers to educate members and leaders about labour laws. “Often, people join a union because they were asked, without understanding what a media trade union does for its workers, or what the union’s constitution and responsibilities are. Such members increase the headcount but do not become productive members. Therefore, there is a need for continuous capacity building of union members. They should be engaged through regular campaigns and communication, not just limited to election periods, she adds.”

**Shahzada Zulfiqar**, former member of PFUJ-Afzal Butt faction and member of its Federal Executive Council says, “I believe the primary need is for capacity building, both for leaders and members, in new technologies. Journalism is not an easy profession, and anyone pursuing it must focus on the demands of the field. No one can take responsibility for a journalist’s actions in the field; they must be fully aware of all safety protocols.”

**Fouzia Kalsoom Rana** from Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ) and co-founder of Women Journalists’ Association (WJA) says, “Conducting regular audits and capacity building of members and leaders can also help. Encouraging new ideas is also very important to adapt to modernisation.”

#### 4.1.4. Lack of Transparency and Increasing Trust Deficit

The decline in membership within larger journalists’ unions in Pakistan and emergence of newer factions is significantly attributed to a growing trust deficit among members, stemming from a lack of formal structures that promote transparency. The current organisational frameworks fail to provide clarity on critical issues such as data collection, fee utilization, voter lists, election processes, and policy changes. This absence of transparency not only alienates existing members but also deters potential new members from joining, further exacerbating the unions’ challenges in maintaining a robust membership base.

**Dr Touseef Ahmed**, a member of the Sindh Commission on Safety of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners, says “I would reiterate that the notion of union unity is a misconception because any leader that comes into power develops passive interests. The government tends to offer something

to each group, so unity is only possible if a selfless leader emerges in the union, who meets people, resolves their issues, and garners the support of the majority. Unity can only be achieved under such circumstances; otherwise, it is not feasible.”

Fauzia Kalsoom Rana laments: “Despite claims of embracing modern techniques, the unions’ actions contradict their words. Annually, they promise to launch a website that functions, but each new cabinet fails to deliver. The existing digital presence has incomplete representation within unions, which lack proper member databases. Even collected data is not streamlined, and the unions rely on unverified WhatsApp groups instead of official digital channels. This inconsistency raises doubts about their commitment to modernisation. Furthermore, the unions neglect democratic principles by appointing office bearers instead of holding regular elections, as seen in the case of the RIUJ. This lack of transparency and accountability undermines the unions’ credibility and effectiveness.”

Dr Sadia Kamal rues inadequate democratic commitments. “Many unions bypass democratic processes by selecting leaders instead of holding representative and fair elections, resulting in a lack of accountability and transparency. To address this, unions should register and follow established procedures, including displaying membership lists on their websites. Unfortunately, this is not happening, leading to the exploitation of media workers who are denied facilities and resources, which are concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. I fear this situation is unlikely to change in the near future.”

**Sheher Bano**, Vice President PFUJ Karachi Rana Azeem faction, says, “To ensure membership lists are non-controversial during union elections, unions should keep accurate, up-to-date records and conduct regular independent scrutiny. Promoting transparency through clear communication of election rules, secure voting systems, and incorporating member feedback can further enhance election credibility and trust. The process of scrutiny is practiced here in PFUJ that lists are displayed for all members to see and file objections, if any. If the proofs are authentic then any member can be removed from the membership.”

#### **4.1.5. Insufficient Resources**

Journalists’ unions in Pakistan face acute financial struggles. Economic instability, limited resources, and an entrenched mindset resistant to change significantly hinder the modernisation of the unions centered on

## Modernising Journalists' Trade Unions in Pakistan for the Digital Age

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financial viability. Political interference exacerbates these challenges, while a fragmented media landscape undermines unified representation. Unions face declining memberships driven to newer factions and insufficient funds for training and modernisation efforts, with little support from administration or government. To address these issues, unions need to focus on capacity-building, secure necessary resources, and collaborate with relevant organisations for financial independence and professional support. Essentially, they need to adopt a corporate approach to fundraising while keeping within ethical practices.

**Ghulam Dastageer**, a freelance reporter based in Peshawar, says, "Economic instability, limited resources and entrenched mindset - which always resist change - are some of the major factors that hinder unions of journalists and media workers to embrace modern management practices. Political interference is another phenomenon, which adds to this problem. Also, the fragmented media landscape adversely affects the unified representation and adaptation. The unions and media workers can resolve this issue by capacity building and training their members in modern practices, and by liaising with the relevant organisations for financial independence and professional support."

**Shujauddin Qureshi**, an outreach communication expert, concurs. "The lack of modernisation in unions is largely due to insufficient resources. Memberships are declining, and even the current members often fail to pay their fees. This leaves unions without the much-needed resources to pursue modernisation. Furthermore, the administration shows little interest in supporting these efforts, and political conflicts within the unions are rampant. Consequently, even the office bearers who run these unions are not showing a willingness to drive them toward modernisation. A potential solution is to enhance their capacity and ensure resources are available. This includes securing equipment needed for modernisation, which entails additional costs. If resources become available or if donor organisations step in, unions can indeed advance towards modernisation."

**Zeenia Shaukat**, a senior journalist and labour rights activist: "Resource constraints of unions are a major issue, with unions having no funds to organise training sessions on topics like social media communication, modernisation, or legal awareness workshops. Donor organisations have shifted their focus exclusively to NGOs and are no longer investing in unions. Moreover, unions receive no or very little funding from the government."

#### **4.1.6. Democratic Issues**

The unions of journalists in Pakistan face significant democratic issues, notably the lack of adherence to fixed term limits for leadership positions. This results in long-serving leaders who resist change, hindering the adaptation of modern management practices. Additionally, there is a lack of transparency in elections and voter lists, which further complicates the democratic process within these unions. These issues contribute to stagnation and limit the potential for new leadership and innovative ideas to emerge.

Sheher Bano says, "Making unions more democratic and ensuring greater inclusivity, particularly through steps like imposing term limits for key leadership positions, can significantly enhance their effectiveness and responsiveness. By implementing term limits and fostering inclusivity by giving leadership opportunities to diverse media fields, ensuring gender balance, and engaging members from some marginalised groups, unions can create a more dynamic and responsive organisation that better serves its members. These steps not only help in adapting to changing environments but also in ensuring that leadership is representative of and accountable to the entire membership."

She adds: "Long-serving leaders can create stagnation in unions by preventing fresh perspectives and ideas. Regular turnover in leadership positions, through term limits and diverse candidate pools, encourages accountability, transparency, and adaptability to changing conditions. A democratic decision-making process involving member inputs through forums and surveys promotes inclusivity. Developing second-tier leadership through continuous training ensures new leaders are prepared for the future. Establishing committees focused on innovation and maintaining open communication between leadership and members further supports a responsive and dynamic union environment. Regularly updating union rules and practices helps the union remain relevant and inclusive to its members' evolving needs."

**Siddique Anzer**, the central chairman of APNEC, also weighs in. "As per our constitution, a term shall not exceed two years. But there is no democracy in our unions or media organisations in general. Once someone gets to the main leadership position, they like to stay as long as possible. There are such many examples. [former PFUJ Barna faction] Pervaiz Shoukat lost the elections but he didn't want to go. Instead of letting the democratic process go on, he made his own PFUJ ['Workers' faction]. The same is the case with Dastoor group. The president always wants to stay president. In

the PFUJ faction led by Afzal Butt, he stays in power by bringing people who are not known and who follow his instructions. In a true democratic system, the new leadership is given a fair chance to grow and they come to power automatically as a result of the process.”

Amir Suhail, the vice president of PFUJ-Rana Azeem faction further agrees: “Unions can become more democratic by implementing best practices such as imposing term limits for key leadership positions. This ensures that leadership roles do not become entrenched, allowing for regular turnover and opportunities for fresh ideas and perspectives to emerge. Imposing term limits can also prevent stagnation and encourage a more dynamic, forward-thinking approach to union management.”

#### **4.1.7. Top-Down Approach, Not Grassroots Level**

Journalists' unions in Pakistan currently face significant challenges due to their reliance on a top-down approach, which prioritises maintaining the power of established leaders over addressing the needs of emerging journalists. This dynamic perpetuates stagnation within the union system, as new voices and issues are often overlooked. The lack of inclusivity and transparency further alienates upcoming journalists, hindering their engagement with the union. To foster a more responsive and effective organisation, unions must shift towards a grassroots model that empowers all members, encourages diverse leadership, and actively involves journalists in decision-making processes.

Fauzia Kalsoom Rana concurs: “Existing leaders may resist changes to the status quo, maintaining their grip on power. Absence of term limits or effective enforcement enables leaders to stay in power indefinitely. Members may be hesitant to challenge existing leaders or support new ones due to uncertainty or fear of reaction. Leaders may maintain power by rewarding loyalists and suppressing dissenting voices. Political or corporate interests may exert pressure to maintain a specific leadership or status quo. In addition, deep-rooted cultural and societal norms may prioritise seniority and experience over new perspectives and leadership. Another reason is the inadequate mechanisms for transparency, accountability, and internal democracy that enables leaders to maintain power unchecked.”

Dr Tauseef Ahmed says, “Journalists' unions today are not functioning as true trade unions rather as public relations entities focused on securing government funding instead of member contributions. The leadership is disconnected from the principles of trade unionism and avoids engaging



at the grassroots level to evade accountability to workers. Historically, unions were driven by journalists from the Left, but the influence of such groups has declined, and current leadership often engages in commercial practices, distancing themselves from genuine union activities." So, how to revitalise trade unionism? For this there must be increased awareness among journalists through workshops and training that emphasise the importance of unions for professional freedom and press freedom. Moreover, it's crucial to distinguish between journalism and other content creation, especially in the realm of social media."

## **4.2. External Issues**

### **4.2.1. Decline in Membership**

The decline in membership within journalists' unions is a pressing concern, exacerbated by a growing reluctance to include young media practitioners and digital journalists. This situation is attributed to several issues, including the lack of clear criteria for membership and concerns over journalistic ethics in digital journalism. The absence of these upcoming voices weakens the unions, making it difficult to address contemporary issues in journalism. Furthermore, when unions attempt to increase their numbers, they often compromise quality by neglecting a rigorous selection process, which undermines the integrity of the organisation.

Dr. Tauseef Ahmed, adds to the discourse. "Even journalists working on contracts are not being granted membership, and everyone involved in creative work, including those producing content, should be eligible for membership in organisations like KUJ and PFUJ. If necessary, laws should be amended to facilitate this inclusion. Membership should definitely be extended to all individuals who are genuinely involved in journalism, including those who are giving their creative efforts in a journalistic form, as well as those working on daily wages, contracts, or as third-party contractors."

A H Khanzada of PFUJ-Dastoor faction states, "There is a growing trend among social media activists who seek membership in press clubs and unions. However, if you are a social media activist or influencer, you should consider forming your own union. The core issue is that these practitioners want membership in the Karachi Union of Journalists without knowing the actual role of trade unions. KUJ factions are thinking of adding these

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social media practitioners to their union, but for our KUJ membership, they must align themselves with the definition of journalism. If they fit within this definition, we grant them membership. Being a social media activist alone does not qualify one for KUJ membership; one must prove they are a working journalist, demonstrate commitment to editorial judgment, and meet the criteria of journalism.”

**Mazhar Abbas**, former secretary general PFUJ, also explains, “The primary reason behind this is the lack of a clear membership criterion, which is currently a topic of debate within unions. Membership in any UJ is based on adherence to the journalistic code — whether the person is using digital media in line with journalistic standards or operating under another platform. If they meet the standards of the PFUJ journalistic code, they can qualify for membership. This issue also arose when electronic media first emerged, especially regarding whether anchorpersons of TV talk shows could be granted membership. It was decided that full-time anchors affiliated with a media organisation could qualify. Now, the debate has shifted to digital media. Just having a mobile phone doesn’t make one a journalist. For digital media membership, it’s crucial to ensure that individuals understand basic journalistic codes and that their digital platforms comply with these standards, whether they are YouTubers, bloggers or vloggers.”

He adds: “Furthermore, their primary source of income should be linked to their journalistic work. Given the vast number of people using digital media, it’s not feasible to grant membership to everyone, so it’s essential to adhere to PFUJ’s constitution and scrutinize the applicants, ensuring that their income source is from digital journalism only. Digital media is a reality of today, and excluding eligible digital journalists from membership would be unfair; therefore, proper scrutiny is necessary.”

Lubna Jerar Naqvi, General Secretary of KUJ-Rana Azeem faction opines, “First, it’s crucial to define who qualifies as a journalist, as not all digital media workers fit this definition. A recent incident illustrates this: a YouTuber spread misleading information without proper verification, which went viral internationally, damaging Pakistan’s image. It was later revealed that he was merely a private content creator, not a journalist. Organisations like the KUJ and PFUJ should maintain updated databases (the KUJ database is already being compiled) of their members, distinguishing freelancers in a separate list. This would help identify legitimate journalists and could be highly beneficial.”

She adds: "Awareness efforts are needed to engage members, especially those who become inactive after joining, and to highlight the union's role and its importance. KUJ has already made 300 members from the final semester journalism students from various universities. When these cadets will come into the field, they will have a fair idea of what a union is and how it is important for them to join one. Under IFJ's Provincial Lobbying Project 2022, done by Sheher Bano, some freelancers, who were doing serious journalism work were given KUJ membership."

Dr Sadia Kamal adds, "To integrate digital journalists into our ranks, we need to establish clear parameters. Journalism's purpose is to hold those in power accountable, not to serve the government. An impartial journalist council should determine the criteria for including digital journalists and the terms of their membership. During a recent FEC [federal executive council] meeting in Faisalabad, we discussed granting membership to digital media journalists, but the Gujranwala Union of Journalists resisted, and no decision was reached. We also need to consider the policies of other PFUJ factions before deciding. In my opinion, digital media journalists, who ethically report on public issues, should be given membership."

#### **4.2.2. Media Organizations' Exploitation**

In Pakistan, trade unions are in decline, significantly impacted by contractual and third-party employment systems that exclude many workers. While some media organisations maintain unions, they primarily consist of permanent employees, leaving contractual workers without representation. Media owners often discourage union membership among these workers, exploiting loopholes in labour laws to create fake entities that obscure their employment status. To revitalise trade unions, it is essential to include contractual workers and restore their strength, which is a prerequisite for modernisation and enhancing the unions' role in advocating for media workers' rights.

Nasir Zaidi, former secretary general of PFUJ Afzal Butt faction, adds, "The first step should be to determine membership, allowing contractual workers to be part of the unions. Media organisations discourage contractual and third-party employees from joining unions, recognising only permanent staff as journalists. Additionally, labour laws don't apply to contractual workers. Media owners exploit this by creating fake business entities, making it appear as though these workers are employed by those companies rather than the media outlet. Trade unions can only modernise when their strength

is restored. Once that happens, modernisation will follow. As of now, trade unions have no significant role.”

Mazhar Abbas, former PFUJ secretary general says, “Current CBA union leaders are also facing contractual employment challenges, with the constant threat of having their contracts terminated at any moment. There was a time when unions were strong. For instance, when computers were introduced, newspaper owners negotiated with unions to phase out the ‘Katib’ (calligraphers) department but offered a six-month period for those employees to learn the new technology and retain their jobs. Those who adapted kept their jobs, while those who didn’t, were sent packing. There was still a structured system in place. In contrast, there is no concept of trade unions in electronic media today, as there are no laws to support the establishment of unions in this sector, let alone in the digital sphere.”

#### 4.2.3. Issues with Registration

The registration process for journalists’ unions in Pakistan typically involves adherence to specific legal frameworks governing trade unions. At the federal level, unions must register under the Trade Union Act of 1926, which outlines requirements such as having a minimum number of members and submitting necessary documentation to relevant authorities.<sup>8</sup>

At the provincial level, similar regulations apply, with additional requirements that may vary by province. For instance, provincial labour departments oversee the registration process and ensure compliance with local labour laws. Despite these formal processes, many unions face bureaucratic hurdles and political interference that complicate their establishment and functioning.

There are mixed feelings regarding the registration process, while there are several benefits that can be acknowledged of registering unions, many find it difficult to commit and truly trust the process. During the course of the KIIs conducted for this study, the experts said that many in their fraternity believe that registration of unions would increase government control thus limiting their autonomy. However, lack of formal registration of union decreases level of professionalism, and further deteriorates the check and balance system.

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8. Zakaullah Khan Khalil, A Profile of Trade Unionism and Industrial Relations in Pakistan (Islamabad: National Industrial Relations Commission, 2018), International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/media/417381/download>

Registration of unions creates a sense of accountability. It also demands that the organisation streamline its manifesto/ agenda. It further enhances legitimacy, while also providing legal protection.

**Nasir Zaidi**, former secretary general PFUJ, says: “Unfortunately, no union, including PFUJ, is registered, except possibly the Karachi Union of Journalists. When we raise this issue in PFUJ meetings, we’re told that registration would make us vulnerable to government control. They fear that if we defy the government, our registration would be revoked. This perspective suggests that unions avoid registration. However, to access funds, registration is necessary.”

Amir Suhail also added, “Unions of journalists and media workers can become more professional and representative by prioritising formal legal registration as trade unions. Currently, many journalists’ unions remain unregistered, which limits their ability to be recognised as legitimate labour organisations under the law. Without registration, unions miss the opportunity to fully engage with labor rights institutions like the labour courts, the National Industrial Relations Commission (NIRC) and other relevant legal bodies that can address their grievances.”

He says, “The absence of registration means that these unions also fail to meet the criteria for being considered part of the broader labour movement as highlighted during a recent Asian Labour Conference. Formal registration would allow unions to engage with international bodies like the IFJ and other labour organisations on a larger scale. Right now, only the Rana Azeem faction of PFUJ is registered with the IFJ. To achieve this, unions must shift their focus from internal disputes and factionalism toward collective efforts and give their members access to better legal protections and representation.”

Fauzia Kalsoom Rana adds, “Registering with the government can enhance the professionalism of journalists’ and media workers’ unions, but leaders often resist this step due to vested interests. It could bring transparency and accountability, establish a system of checks and balances, protect members’ rights and interests. However, union leaders may oppose registration to maintain their unchecked power and avoid accountability. They may also disregard or even suppress dissenting voices, including members who criticise their actions.”

#### **4.2.4. Threats to Journalists’ Safety**

The International Federation of Journalists South Asia Press Freedom Report for 2023-2024<sup>9</sup> highlights significant challenges faced by journalists in Pakistan, a country that has unfortunately earned a reputation as one of the most perilous places for journalism. In this reporting period, four journalists were tragically killed—two in Punjab and two in Sindh—underscoring the heightened risks associated with the profession. A Freedom Network report monitoring impunity-related violations for 2024 said six journalists including a YouTuber, were killed in 2024.

The situation for journalists in Pakistan is marked by instability and uncertainty, particularly concerning employment. An IFJ survey led by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) Rana Azeem Group in 2023 revealed alarming statistics: only 39% of media personnel were in permanent positions, while a mere 28% had fixed-term contracts. This reflects a broader trend throughout the country, where precarious employment, low wages, and a lack of benefits are commonplace. Journalists face an environment where job security is minimal, making their roles increasingly difficult.

Amid these challenges, there have been strides towards improvement, particularly with the Sindh Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act 2021. This landmark legislation, a result of collaborative advocacy efforts by the Pakistan Journalists Safety Coalition (PJSC), is gradually moving towards practical implementation. The PJSC has been instrumental in mobilising the Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners (CJMP), established under this Act. Notably, in June 2023, the federal government allocated PKR 1 billion (about \$ 5.5 million) to provide health insurance for journalists, marking a significant step towards safeguarding their well-being.

Additionally, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government announced plans in October 2023 to amend endowment rules to enhance financial support for media workers facing crises, including those who have lost their jobs. These initiatives reflect a growing recognition of the need for systemic support for journalists in the country.

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9. Artificial Independence: The Fight To Save Media And Democracy, IFJ Report 2023-24: <https://samsn.ifj.org/SAPFR23-24/>

In December 2023, the Women Media Forum Pakistan (WMFP) launched the 'Pakistan's Media Needs Women' campaign, advocating for greater gender inclusivity within the media industry and press clubs. By January 2024, key stakeholders in the media industry reaffirmed their support for this campaign, committing to address core issues such as inclusivity, equal representation, and fair wages for women journalists. In conjunction, the National Press Club established a 'Women Journalists' Caucus' and created a working committee to develop strategies aimed at enhancing the skills and competencies of women journalists.<sup>10</sup>(South Asia Press Freedom Report for 2023-2024). A report produced jointly by Freedom Network and Women Journalists Association (WJA) in early 2023 revealed large gender gaps in newsroom staffing in the media organizations in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

#### **4.2.5. Professional Journalists versus Political "Workers": Splits in Journalists' Unions**

The fundamental purpose of a union, particularly within the context of journalism, is to serve as an advocate for the rights of its members. At its essence, a union embodies a democratic institution dedicated to promoting the interests and safeguarding the rights of workers. This democratic character is manifested through the election of representatives from among the membership, ensuring that the voices of those it serves are heard and considered in decision-making processes.

However, the landscape of journalistic unions in Pakistan presents significant challenges that impede the fulfillment of these core functions. A thorough examination reveals a pronounced deficiency in the democratic structures that are supposed to underpin these organisations. The environment in which these unions operate often exhibits monopolistic tendencies, where a few dominant entities exert disproportionate influence over the discourse and practices within the field. This concentration of power not only stifles dissenting voices but also undermines the very principles of representation and accountability that unions are meant to uphold.

The findings from recent surveys undertaken for the purposes of this study underscore the inadequacies within the current union framework, highlighting that many essential functions—such as effective advocacy, member engagement, and equitable representation—are not being met.

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10. IFJ's South Asia Press Freedom Report for 2023-2024 <https://samsn.ifj.org/SAPFR23-24/>

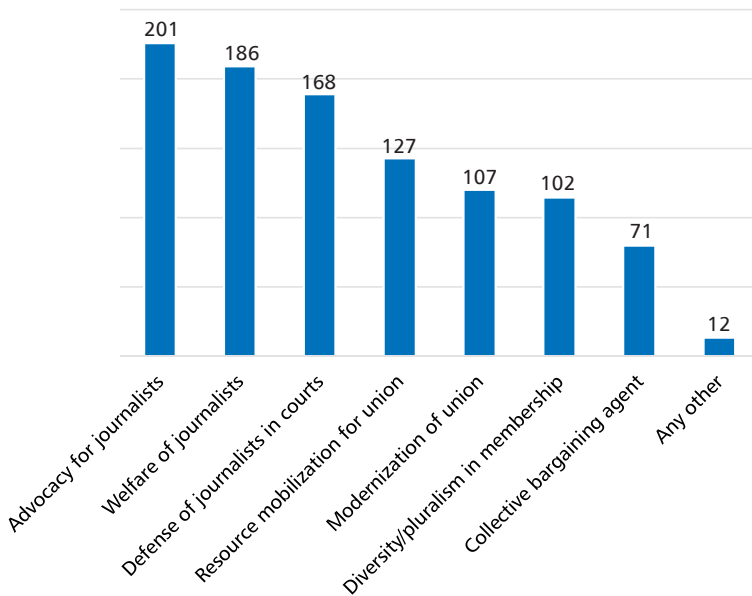
## Modernising Journalists' Trade Unions in Pakistan for the Digital Age

### A Mapping of Challenges, Needs, and Solutions

The implications of these shortcomings are far-reaching, as they hinder the capacity of journalists to effectively advocate for their rights and interests in an increasingly challenging media environment. In this context, it becomes crucial to reassess the operational structures and strategic objectives of journalistic unions in Pakistan, with an eye towards fostering a more inclusive, democratic, and functional advocacy framework that genuinely reflects the needs and aspirations of its members.

A large majority of those surveyed (201 out of 250) said that advocacy for journalists is core functions of representative union, 186 of the journalists said that welfare of journalists, and 168 said that defense of journalists in courts remained core function. A large number of journalist respondents said that modernisation of unions, 102 said promoting diversity and pluralism in membership, and 71 said collective bargaining agent were core function of a representative and effective union.

Figure 14: Core Functions of Representative Union



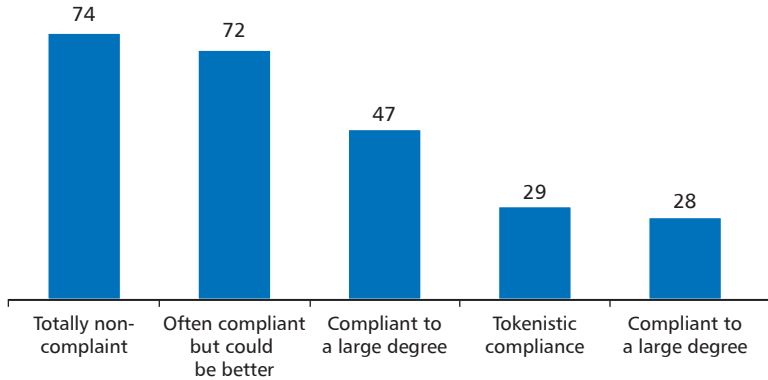
### Rating the Performance of Unions for Core Functions: Collective Bargaining Agent

Many respondents (74) said that current performance of unions is totally non-compliant, 72 said often compliant but could be better, and 47 replied



compliant to a large degree. The rest of the respondents (29) said there was merely tokenistic compliance while 28 said it was compliant to a large degree.

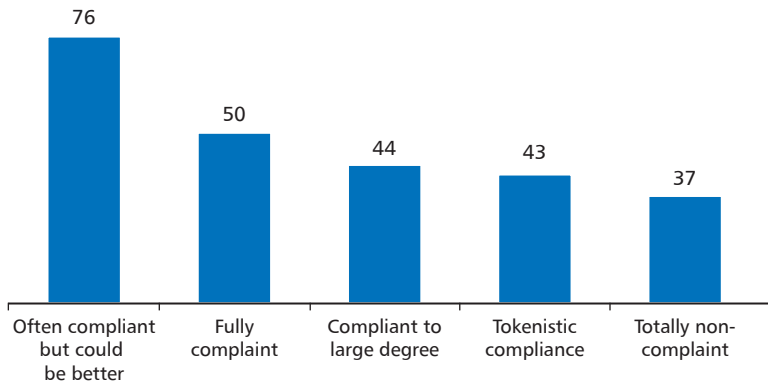
Figure 15: Collective Bargaining Agent



### Rating the Performance of Unions for Core Functions: Advocacy for Journalists/Media Workers' Rights

Many respondents (76) replied that in terms of core functions many are often compliant but could be better, 50 of them said they were fully compliant, while 44 said that functions are compliant to large degree. Similarly, 43 of the respondents deposed that functions are tokenistic in terms of compliance while 37 replied that functions were totally non-compliant.

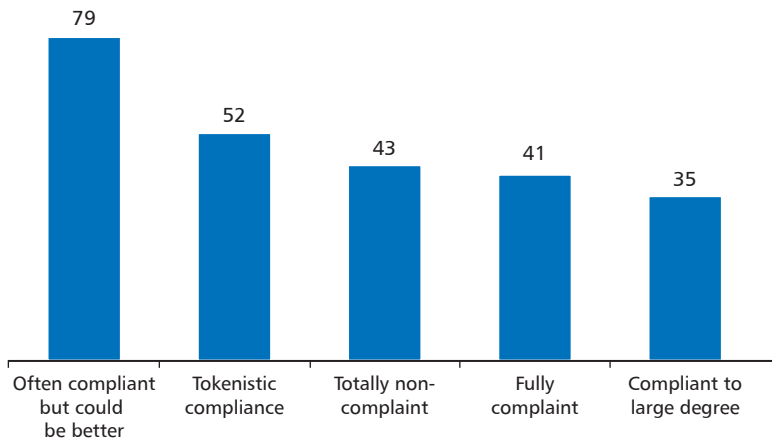
Figure 16: Advocacy for Journalists/Media Workers' Rights



### **Rating the Performance of Unions for Core Functions: Defense of journalists/media workers' rights in courts**

Many respondents (79) said that in terms of defending journalists/media workers' rights the unions are often compliant but could be better, 52 of the journalist respondents replied that there was tokenistic compliance while 43 said that unions are totally non-compliant in defending journalists in the courts. The remaining 41 respondents said in terms of defending journalists' rights the unions are fully compliant while 35 said they were compliant to a large degree.

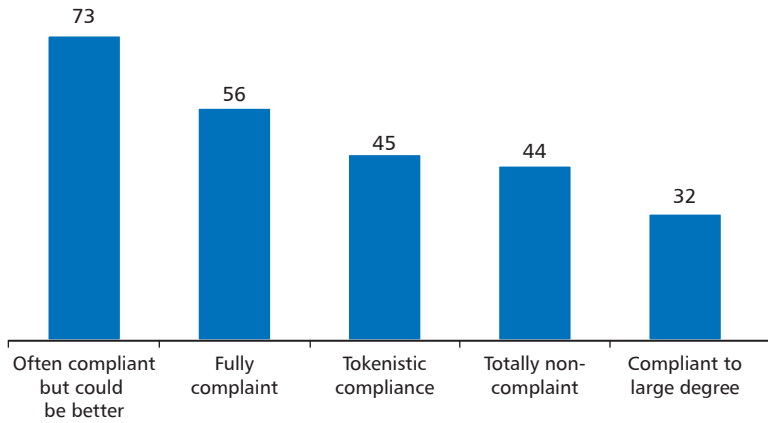
Figure 17: Defense of Journalists/Media workers' Rights in Courts



### **Rating the Performance of Unions for Core Functions: Welfare of journalists/media workers**

Many of the journalist respondents (73) replied that in terms of ensuring welfare of journalists/media workers the unions are often compliant but could be better, 56 said they were fully compliant while 45 replied that they were tokenistic in terms of compliance. The remaining 44 respondents said that ensuring the welfare of media workers the unions are totally non-compliant while 32 said they were compliant to a large degree.

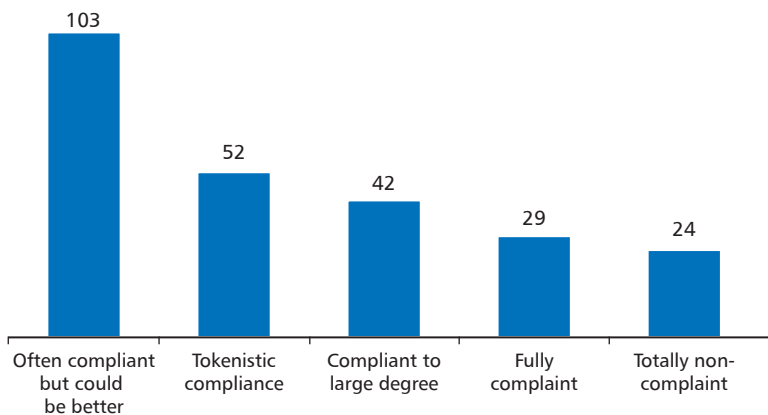
Figure 18: Welfare of Journalists/Media Workers



### Rating the Performance of Unions for Core Functions: Resource Mobilisation for the Union

Many of the journalist respondents (103) replied that in terms of adequate resource mobilisation the unions are often compliant but could be better, 52 said they were tokenistic in terms of compliance while 42 said they were compliant to a large degree. The remaining respondents (29) deposed that the needed resource mobilisation by unions is fully compliant while 24 said they were totally non-compliant.

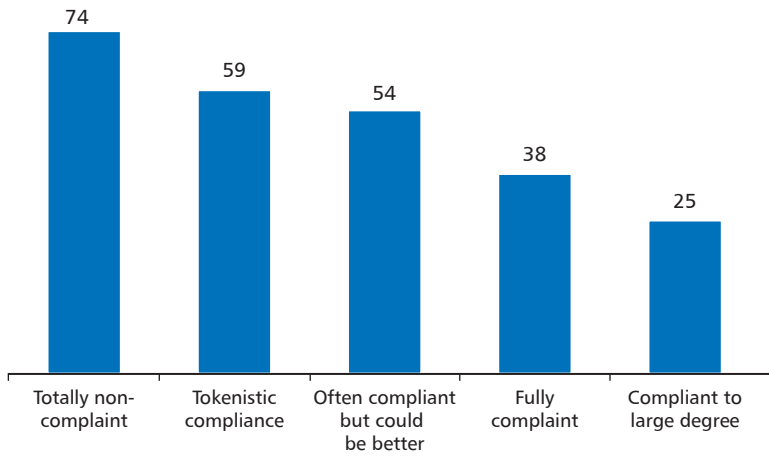
Figure 19: Resource Mobilization for the Union



**Rating the Performance of Unions for Core Functions: Modernisation of the Union**

A large number of journalists respondents (74) replied that in the pursuit of modernisation, unions are totally non-compliant, 59 said there was tokenistic compliance while 54 respondents said that the unions are often compliant but could be better. The remaining 38 respondents said the unions were fully compliant while 25 said that they were compliant to a large degree.

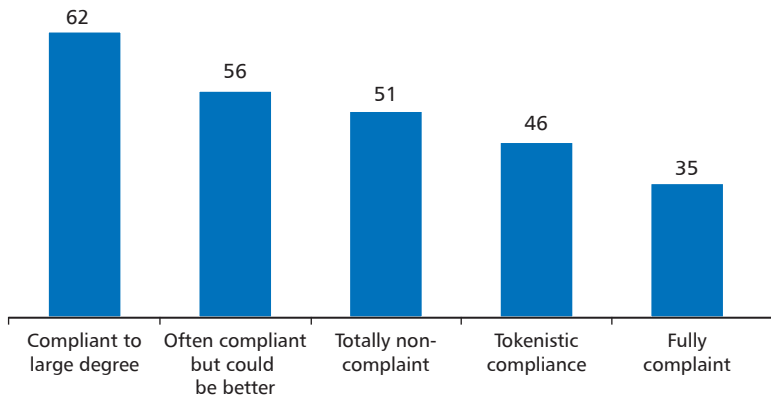
Figure 20: Modernization of the Union



**Rating the Performance of Unions for Core Functions: Promoting Diversity and Pluralism in Membership**

Many respondents (62) felt that when it came to promoting diversity and pluralism in membership, the unions are compliant to large degree, 56 said they were often compliant but could be better while 51 said they were totally non-compliant. The remaining 46 said responded that unions promoting diversity and pluralism in membership are tokenistic in compliance while 35 said that they were fully compliant.

Figure 21: Promoting Diversity and Pluralism in Membership

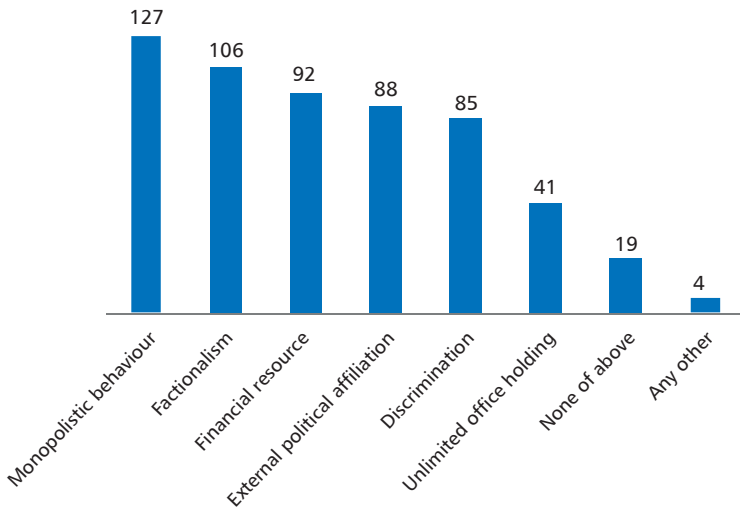


As the role of journalism continues to evolve in the face of numerous societal challenges, the revitalisation of union structures will be essential for empowering journalists and enhancing their ability to navigate the complexities of their profession. This calls for a concerted effort to strengthen democratic practices within unions, ensuring that they are not only representative of their members but also robust in their capacity to advocate for the rights and welfare of journalists in Pakistan.

One of the greatest barriers as identified by the survey participants to members joining unions is monopolistic behavior. The bifurcation of roles within journalist unions, wherein journalists increasingly adopt the mantle of political workers, is a critical factor contributing to the fragmentation of these organisations. As some members align themselves with specific political agendas rather than focusing on the collective interests of their peers, the essential purpose of unions—as protectors of journalists’ rights—becomes compromised. This shift not only blurs the boundaries between journalism and political advocacy but also fosters internal divisions that weaken the unions’ overall effectiveness. Thus, further distances unions from their core functions.

When asked this question, most of the journalist respondents (127) replied that monopolistic behavior is a barrier to becoming a member of journalists’ union, 106 said factionalism is a factor while 92 felt financial resources were a key barrier. Many of the respondents (88) said external political affiliation is a barrier, 85 responded that discrimination is a hindering factor while 41 said unlimited office holding is a key barrier.

Figure 22: Barriers in Membership of Journalists' Union



**Loyalty vs integrity:** In many cases, journalists within these unions may prioritise political loyalty over professional integrity, leading to an environment where the promotion of partisan agendas takes precedence over the fundamental rights and interests of all journalists. This political alignment can create rifts within the union, as differing ideologies and affiliations clash, resulting in a lack of cohesion and unity. When the focus shifts away from advocating for journalists as a collective group, the ability to address shared challenges and issues diminishes, further exacerbating the divide among members.

**Blurring identities:** The rise of social media and digital platforms significantly amplifies these tensions. In an era where information is disseminated rapidly and often without the rigorous standards associated with traditional journalism, the lines between journalists and non-journalists become increasingly blurred. This shift complicates the identity of journalists within unions and challenges the traditional norms of the profession. As many individuals on social media prioritise sensationalism and viewership over balanced reporting, they may inadvertently reinforce the political agendas that pervade the media landscape.

**Conflict of interest:** Digital media professionals often face immense pressure to align their content with the interests of political entities to attract audiences and maintain financial viability. This need for market-driven

content can lead to conflicts of interest, where the pursuit of viewership undermines journalistic principles. Consequently, the reliance on political narratives as a means of garnering attention can create divisions within unions, as members may disagree on the ethical implications of prioritising political agendas over journalistic standards.

**Not in coherence:** Moreover, the fragmentation within the media landscape exacerbates the challenges faced by journalist unions. With an increasing number of voices and platforms, it becomes difficult to establish a unified identity and purpose. This lack of coherence can lead to disagreements on membership criteria and the representation of journalists within the union. As different factions emerge—some advocating for the preservation of journalistic integrity and others embracing political alignment—internal divisions deepen, further straining the fabric of the union.

**Mission focus:** To address these issues, it is imperative for journalist unions to reaffirm their commitment to their core mission: protecting the rights and interests of all journalists. This requires a concerted effort to delineate the boundaries between journalism and political advocacy, ensuring that union matters are not subsumed by partisan agendas. Establishing a proposed code of conduct for digital media journalists could be a vital step in this direction, promoting ethical practices and accountability while reinforcing the importance of professional standards in an increasingly complex media environment.

**Redefining roles:** The dual identity of journalists as political workers within unions leads to significant divides that compromise the effectiveness of these organisations. The pressures of social media and digital platforms further exacerbate these challenges, complicating the landscape of journalism and diluting the core mission of advocacy. To foster unity and effectiveness, journalist unions must navigate these complexities by prioritising the protection of journalists' rights and redefining their role in the context of a rapidly evolving media landscape.





## 5. Assessment of Provincial and Federal Labour Laws to Protect the Labour Rights of Journalists

The constitutional framework in Pakistan provides some protections for press freedom; however, these are often undermined by legislative measures and state actions. Developments include the Punjab Defamation Bill, 2024, which has faced significant criticism from journalist unions for its potential to stifle free expression.<sup>11</sup> The legal environment remains hostile, with laws that can be used to penalise journalists for defamation or dissent against state authorities. The law currently under challenge by journalists and press organisations in the Lahore High Court replaces the Punjab Defamation Ordinance of 2002. It broadly defines terms such as “defamation” and “broadcasting,” extending their application to include social media platforms. The law allows for the initiation of defamation claims without requiring any proof, which constitutes a clear violation of Article 10-A (the right to a fair trial) of the Constitution. Critics argue that permitting such claims without evidence undermines the fundamental principles of justice and fairness enshrined in the legal framework.<sup>12</sup>

Over the past three decades, Pakistan’s media industry has undergone significant transformation, particularly after the privatisation of broadcasting and airwaves post-2002. This shift led to a dramatic increase in the number of media workers, rising from around 3,000 journalists and 25,000 media personnel in 2002 to 18,000 journalists and 250,000 media workers by 2018. The growth was largely fueled by the expansion of electronic media, including television, radio, and cable.

However, the rapid evolution of the media landscape, driven by technological advancements, has highlighted a lack of a comprehensive legal framework

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11. Pakistan province enacts harsh defamation law, Supreme Court presses legal action against 34 media outlets June 11, 2024 <https://cpj.org/2024/06/pakistan-province-enacts-harsh-defamation-law-supreme-court-presses-legal-action-against-34-media-outlets/>

12. Punjab defamation law challenged hours after its approval June 9, 2024 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1838774/punjab-defamation-law-challenged-hours-after-its-approval>

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to protect the rights of electronic and digital media workers. Currently, existing regulations, such as the NECOSA, primarily cover print media employees, leaving a legislative gap for those in electronic and digital media. This oversight has resulted in insufficient protections for labor rights, employment conditions, and grievance redressal mechanisms for journalists and media workers in Pakistan.

In 2023, the amendment to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance under section 20A, which mandates wage payments within two months, represents a step in the wrong direction. Firstly, the general wage law stipulates that payments must be made within seven days of the due date for establishments with fewer than 1,000 employees, and within ten days for those with more than 1,000. Therefore, PEMRA's provision contradicts the general wage regulations in the country. Secondly, granting PEMRA the authority to oversee wage payments for electronic media workers blurs the lines between regulatory and judicial functions, as the regulator lacks the necessary competence and institutional authority to safeguard the labor rights of media workers.

## 6. Understanding Organisational Strategies

### 6.1. Overview of Organisational Strategies

Most Pakistan Federation of Journalist Unions (PFUJ) factions are organised into a structured framework consisting of three primary bodies. This hierarchy begins at the grassroots level with various journalist unions and their constituent associations. These unions differ in size and number, reflecting the diverse landscape of journalism in Pakistan.

#### 6.1.1. Membership Categories

Membership in the PFUJ factions is technically open to all working journalists in Pakistan, including those employed by both Pakistani and foreign media organisations. The membership is divided into four categories:<sup>13</sup>

- a) **Full members:** Persons not less than 21 years of age, who are and have been full time members of journalistic staff for not less than one year or have been for not less than one year wholly dependent on their own journalistic works provided that they are not proprietors of any newspapers, electronic media, TV Channels directors or Managing Editors.
- b) **Junior Members:** Persons under 21 years of age but not less than 18 years of age, or persons who have not completed one year in the journalistic profession.

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13. See Article 3, Rule 3 of the Constitution of PFUJ – Rana Azeem Group. However, Rule 3 of the Constitution of PFUJ – Afzal Butt Group – is slightly different from Rule 3 of the Constitution of PFUJ – Rana Azeem Group.

As per Article II, Rule 3 of the Constitution of PFUJ – Afzal Butt Group, Full Members are “Persons not less than 21 years of age, who are and have been full time members of journalistic staff for not less than one year or have been for not less than one year wholly dependent on their own journalistic works provided that they are not proprietors of any newspapers, electronic media, tv channels, directors or Managing Editors.” Junior Members are “Persons under 21 years of age, but not less than of age, or persons who have not completed one year in the journalistic profession. Associate Members are “Persons who are proprietor-editors or managing editors of Pakistani language media groups, or persons of non-Pakistani nationality or persons working on the staff of periodicals other than weeklies.”

- c) **Associate members:** Persons who are proprietors, editor or managing editors of Pakistani language media groups, or persons of non-Pakistani nationality or persons working on the staff of periodicals other than weeklies.
- d) **Life Members:** Members who retire from work on account of age or remit or who have done outstanding service to the profession of journalism or the union may be elected to this category.

The term “journalistic staff” encompasses a wide range of roles, including reporters, cameramen, photographers, and producers in both print and electronic media. However, individuals employed in government departments or armed forces do not qualify as working journalists.

The PFUJ’s organizational structure is designed to promote democratic representation and advocacy for journalists across Pakistan. With a foundation of diverse journalist unions, a robust system of delegated representation, and an executive council to guide its activities, the PFUJ aims to uphold the rights and interests of its members in a complex and evolving media landscape.

#### 6.1.2. Base Level

##### Journalists’ Unions

At the base level, numerous journalists’ unions operate across Pakistan. Each of these unions comprises individual members who contribute to the collective mission of advocating for journalists’ rights and interests. The diversity in size and membership of these unions is essential, as it fosters a rich array of perspectives within the federation.

In general, affiliated unions are permitted to establish regional unions in district towns where there are at least eight full members. Each regional union or branch must elect a President, Secretary, and Treasurer. If the membership justifies it, they may also form a regional executive council. In major media centers such as Karachi and Lahore, separate regional unions are not required. Instead, the executive councils of the affiliated unions can serve as the governing body for these locations.

## **Plant Level Union / Unit**

Often, units may also be established within the offices of newspapers, electronic media, news agencies, TV news channels, or FM radio stations, provided there are at least three full members. These units are tasked with ensuring that union agreements are upheld within their respective workplaces.

Each unit will conduct secret ballot elections to appoint a Chief and up to two Deputy Chiefs. These leaders will handle issues related to working conditions, address member grievances, maintain records, manage contributions, and liaise with the executive council of the union. The unit Chief may serve as an ex-officio member of the executive council but without voting rights. Importantly, editors or heads of media organisations cannot be elected as Chiefs or Deputy Chiefs of a unit to avoid conflicts of interest.

### **6.1.3. Second Tier: Biennial Delegated Members**

The second tier of a typical PFUJ faction structure consists of the Biennial Delegated Members (BDM). This body is made up of delegates elected from the various journalist unions and constitute the plenary session of the PFUJ elections. In one faction, for example, "every affiliated Union is entitled to send one delegate for every 35 Full Members on their rolls as they existed on December 31 of the preceding year. However, an affiliated Union with less than 300 full members shall be entitled to send one delegate for every 15 Full Members." These Delegates are elected by affiliated Unions at their General Meetings held not later than three weeks prior to the date fixed for the Delegates Meeting and their names shall be intimated to the Secretary General of the PFUJ.<sup>14</sup>

The primary purpose of the BDM is to function as an electoral college. The members of the BDM elect the office bearers of the PFUJ, which include

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14. See Chapter VI (Delegates Meeting) of the Constitution of PFUJ – Afzal Butt Group – for election of Delegates Members.

According to Article 8 of the Constitution of Rana Azeem group, "Every affiliated union is entitled to elect one delegate for every 50 full members on their rolls as they existed on the voters list of the preceding year, provided that an affiliated union with less than 3 hundred full members shall be entitles to elect one delegate for every 20 full members. The delegate shall be the full member of the concerned affiliated union. The delegates shall be elected by the members of the affiliated unions at their General meeting/ elections held not later than two months prior to the date fixed for the delegates Meeting/PFUJ elections.

positions such as President, Vice President, General Secretary, and other key roles. Additionally, the BDM is responsible for appointing members to the Federal Executive Council (FEC).

#### **6.1.4. Executive Level: Federal Executive Council (FEC)**

The FEC serves as the executive body of the PFUJ and is composed of several elected officials. In one faction<sup>15</sup>, this includes a President, five female Vice Presidents (one from each province), eight additional Vice Presidents (two from each province), a Secretary General, and eight Assistant Secretaries General (two from each province). Furthermore, the council includes five female Assistant Secretaries General (one from each province and Islamabad) and a designated female Assistant Secretary General for a reserve seat. The FEC also features a Treasurer, a Secretary of Information, and 30 elected members.

The President, in consultation with the Secretary General, has the authority to nominate up to five additional members to the FEC to ensure representation from any media center, language group, or interest that may not have secured a position through the general election. Moreover, the Presidents and General Secretaries of affiliated unions serve as ex-officio members with full voting rights.

Elections for the office bearers of the FEC take place during the delegates meeting, and the elected members serve a term of two years. The PFUJ constitution specifies rules for conducting elections and bye-elections. If the FEC fails to announce an election schedule at least one month before the end of its term, any eight affiliated unions can convene a delegates meeting to arrange the elections. The FEC may delay elections for up to six months under extraordinary circumstances.<sup>16</sup>

#### **6.1.5. Election of Federal Executive Council (FEC) Members**

Elections for the office bearers and members of the Federal Executive Council (FEC) are conducted during the "Delegates Meeting." Elected officials serve

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15. See Article 6, Rule 1 of the Constitution of PFUJ – Rana Azeem Group.

16. According to Article V of the Constitution of PFUJ – Afzal Butt Group - the Federal Executive Council (FEC) shall consist of "a President, Four Vice-Presidents, a Secretary General, Four Assistant Secretaries General, a Treasurer and 25 Members of FEC, all elected. Besides, the Presidents of the affiliated unions shall be ex-officio members, with full voting rights."

a term of two years, which constitutes one full term for FEC members. This system provides a structured timeline for leadership changes and encourages regular participation from the membership.

### **6.1.6. Restrictions on Office Bearers**

To ensure a dynamic leadership structure within the factions of Pakistan Federation of Journalist Unions (PFUJ), specific restrictions are placed on office bearers. In general, no member may hold the same office consecutively for more than two terms, preventing the consolidation of power and promoting the inclusion of diverse voices. Additionally, a member cannot hold two offices simultaneously within the PFUJ or its affiliated unions, thereby ensuring that responsibilities are clearly defined and that leadership remains accountable.<sup>17</sup>

### **6.1.7. Financial Management**

The Secretary General, General Secretaries, an Assistant Secretary, or the Treasurer must sign all receipts for contributions or subscriptions. For special fund collections, other responsible members may be authorized by the Executive Council. All collected amounts must be submitted to the Treasurer or directly credited to the union's account at an authorized bank, with receipts provided promptly.

### **6.1.8. Membership Fees<sup>18</sup>**

**Full Members and Associate Members:** In one faction, an annual contribution of Rs. 480 is required, payable in advance in four equal installments, or Rs. 40 per month. Members who fail to pay their dues will lose their voting rights at elections or meetings until their dues are cleared.

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17. See Article 6, Rule 2 of the Constitution of PFUJ – Rana Azeem Group. No such provision is given in the Constitution of PFUJ – Afzal Butt Group.

18. See Article 17 of the Constitution of PFUJ – Rana Azeem Group. However, Article XiX of the Constitution of Afzal Butt Group states: "Full members and Associate Members shall pay an annual contribution of Rs.240 payable in advance in four equal installments or Rs 20 per month. A defaulting member shall cease to be a voter at any election or meeting of the union pending the clearance of his dues. Junior member shall pay half the contribution of Full Members. Life Members and members above the age of 60 shall be exempted from the payment of contributions. Unemployed members may be exempted for the period during which they are unemployed. Every member at the time of admission shall pay rupees 100 as admission fee, but in the case of junior members admission fee shall be rupees 50.

#### **Junior Members**

Junior members are required to pay half the annual contribution of full members, making it more accessible for younger journalists.

#### **Life Members**

Life members and those over the age of 60 are exempt from paying contributions. Additionally, unemployed members may also be exempt during their period of unemployment.

#### **Admission Fees**

Upon joining, every member must pay an admission fee of Rs. 500. Junior members are subject to a reduced admission fee of Rs. 300.

This structured approach to membership and leadership within the PFUJ is designed to promote accountability, inclusivity, and financial responsibility. By establishing clear rules regarding office terms, elections, regional unions, and membership fees, the PFUJ factions aims to create a robust framework that supports the rights and interests of journalists across Pakistan.

However, as noted in the previous chapter, journalists' unions are currently grappling with numerous challenges that jeopardise their sustainability. Within their organisational frameworks, several pressing issues have emerged. A significant concern is the way union meetings are financed. At present, attendees are responsible for covering their own expenses, which highlights the need for a more structured approach that includes formal membership and established annual fees. Membership fees are low, and many members are reluctant to pay, leading to financial strain where leaders often cover costs themselves.

Additionally, unions must demonstrate effective use of funds and provide transparency to build credibility and encourage member contributions. Accountability within journalists' unions in Pakistan is severely lacking, primarily due to unprofessional leadership practices and informal decision-making processes. Leaders often manipulate union charters for personal gain, compromising the integrity of membership by admitting unqualified individuals. Additionally, there is a culture of resistance against registering unions with the government, as leaders fear losing their unchecked power and accountability. This situation is further exacerbated by practices such as



individuals paying dues on behalf of others to secure votes, undermining genuine member engagement and commitment to the union. Despite unions being a democratic structure, overtime they have lost their democratic essence.



## 7. The State of Digital Media Workers / Freelancers

### 7.1. The Convergence of Digital Media and Technology in Pakistan

The convergence of digital media and technology in Pakistan represents a complex phenomenon that is significantly transforming the realms of journalism, civic engagement, and information dissemination. Over the past three decades, Pakistan's media market and industry have undergone significant transformation. At the start of the new millennium, the media landscape was predominantly composed of print newspapers and state-operated television and radio. However, following the privatisation of broadcasting and airwaves after 2002, there was a remarkable expansion in the broadcast and electronic media sectors, driven by new licensing opportunities for commercial entities.

This shift not only revitalised the media industry but also led to a substantial increase in human resources within the sector. In 2002, Pakistan had approximately 2,000 working journalists and around 25,000 media professionals. By 2025, these numbers had surged, with the journalist demographic reaching around 20,000 and the total number of media workers ballooning to an estimated 250,000. This growth reflects the dynamic changes occurring in the media landscape, emphasizing the shift towards a more diverse and commercially driven media environment.<sup>19</sup> (PFUJ legal brief IRADA)

Digital media has been undergoing rapid expansion in Pakistan, particularly evident in the advertising sector, which has experienced an annual growth rate exceeding 80% over the past three years.<sup>20</sup>(Syed Abdur Raheem, Akber and Hashmi, 2013) Major media organisations are increasingly

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19. PFUJ legal brief IRADA

20. Aspects and Importance of Digital Media in Pakistan (March 2013): [https://mpr.aub.uni-muenchen.de/46435/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_46435.pdf](https://mpr.aub.uni-muenchen.de/46435/1/MPRA_paper_46435.pdf)

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prioritising their online platforms, with prominent outlets such as Dawn and The Express Tribune enhancing their digital footprints.<sup>21</sup> (International Journalists' Network, 2018) The structure of digital media journalism in Pakistan is currently evolving, shaped by both major media organisations and emerging online content creators. As of January 2024, there were over 111 million internet users in the country, along with around 71 million social media users, which accounts for 45.7% and 29.5% of the population, respectively. Additionally, there were approximately 188.9 million active mobile connections.

This growth in digital access is linked to positive economic trends for the digital media sector. Revenue is projected to increase annually by 5.41%, with expectations of reaching a market volume of \$40.67 million by 2027. In-app purchase revenue was estimated at \$11.18 million in 2022. Furthermore, the number of social media users is expected to rise from 68.19 million in 2024 to around 111.96 million by 2029.<sup>22</sup>

These developments showcase the changes in digital media journalism in Pakistan, as traditional media practices increasingly blend with digital innovation, reshaping the media industry landscape. However, traditional media institutions often regard technology merely as a supplementary tool, rather than recognising it as an essential component of contemporary journalism.

The integration of technology into media practices signifies more than just the adoption of new tools, it represents a fundamental shift in the processes of news production and consumption. Journalists now find it imperative to adapt to digital workflows that merge conventional reporting techniques with emerging media technologies. This convergence has profound implications for audience engagement, fostering greater interactivity and participation through platforms such as social media. Such platforms facilitate not only the dissemination of news but also encourage public discourse and dialogue.

The intersection of diverse cultures—journalism, technology, and civic engagement—presents additional challenges in reconciling varied perspectives and practices. Within Pakistan's journalistic landscape, many find it difficult to adapt to the emerging trends of digital media. There is a

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21. Kickstarting a convergence of media, data and technology in Pakistan (October 30,2018) <https://ijnnet.org/en/story/kickstarting-convergence-media-data-and-technology-pakistan>

22. PFUJ Legal brief

reluctance to adapt to this new form of journalism. Access to social media provides everyone the ability to share their views and some traditional journalists believe that this discounts the credibility of journalism.

## **7.2. Legal Framework for Digital Media Workers**

Despite the evolving space for digital media and expanding numbers of digital media workers in Pakistan, even by the end of 2024, there were little efforts by the government to secure labour rights of digital journalists. There is a lack of legal recognition of digital journalists working in the digital space. Although the journalistic landscape is evolving, with new methods being introduced, the core nature of journalism remains unchanged. The role of journalists is tied to their constitutional right to gather and share information.

Despite the variety of technological advancements available to journalists today, the fundamental nature of journalism has not changed. Newspapers have begun to incorporate new production methods and utilise different sources of information. The role of a journalist is fundamentally tied to the constitutional right to gather and share information, a principle acknowledged by legal frameworks.

However, employees in media organisations outside of traditional newspapers often lack access to statutory labor rights and protections. This situation is discriminatory and perpetuates inequality within the media sector. Without these legal safeguards and effective enforcement mechanisms, journalists are vulnerable to exploitation, forced labor, and what can be described as corporate slavery. This lack of protection undermines the integrity of the profession and threatens the rights of those working within it.

Digital media and television journalists, along with other employees in these sectors, do not receive equal legal protections and benefits. Specifically, they lack access to essential social security provisions such as retirement pensions, gratuity, provident funds, unemployment allowances, sick pay, and maternity or paternity leave. This disparity in protections highlights a significant gap in the treatment of journalists across different media platforms, leaving many without the safety nets that are crucial for their well-being and financial security.

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The Constitution guarantees non-discrimination for all citizens and aims to prevent less favorable treatment of individuals with protected characteristics. The emphasis is on equal treatment rather than merely fair treatment. If one group within a broader category receives preferential treatment, it may violate Articles 4 and 25, which ensure equal treatment under the law. The Constitution also supports affirmative action and positive discrimination for disadvantaged groups based on characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, and gender, intending to address structural and substantive inequalities.

However, the current structure and institutional framework of the Implementation Tribunal for Newspaper Employees (ITNE) create a quasi-judicial forum that inadequately addresses wage disputes for journalists. The performance of the ITNE and the Wage Board has been static and dysfunctional, as evidenced by issues such as the non-formation of wage boards, a backlog of cases, insufficient enforcement powers, and a lack of diversity among board members. This situation reflects regulatory capture by the executive branch of the government. Originally intended to provide effective judicial remedies, the ITNE has struggled to fulfill this role due to its lack of oversight from the judiciary. Additionally, these bodies do not apply to electronic media workers, undermining the principles of judicial independence, equality, representation, and the separation of powers enshrined in the Constitution.

The National Employment Code of Social Accountability (NECOSA) established the Wage Board under Section 9 and the ITNE under Section 12A. However, the ITNE operates as part of the Ministry of Information, Broadcasting, and National Heritage, following the Tribunal for Newspaper Employees (Procedure and Functions) Rules of 1977. The constitution, appointment, and functioning of the ITNE tribunal are determined by the Federal Government, leading to a troubling breach of the separation of powers doctrine. This overlap merges executive and judicial powers, jeopardizing the guarantee of a free and fair trial as stipulated in Article 10A.

Article 10A emphasises the importance of an independent and impartial judicial forum, distinct from other branches of government. Article 4 affirms the right to due process, which includes proper notification of proceedings affecting one's rights and the opportunity to defend oneself. Furthermore, the adjudicatory forum must be constituted to assure impartiality and possess appropriate jurisdiction.

The constitution and composition of the Wage Board under NECOSA also conflict with Article 25(2), which prohibits discrimination based on gender and sex. The absence of diverse gender representation in the Wage Board hinders efforts toward inclusivity, gender representation, and gender equity, further exacerbating systemic inequalities within the media industry.

The discussions surrounding journalists' unions have increasingly highlighted the critical importance of legal registration. Legal registration serves as a foundation for accountability and enhances professionalism within these unions. By being legally recognised, unions are bound by specific obligations, including conducting regular audits and elections. This structure not only fosters transparency but also strengthens the democratic processes within the union.

Currently, a significant number of journalists' unions operate without legal registration, which severely limits their recognition as legitimate labor organisations under the law. The absence of registration restricts these unions from fully participating in labor rights institutions, such as labor courts and the National Industrial Relations Commission (NIRC). Consequently, unregistered unions lack access to essential legal mechanisms that could address their grievances and advocate for their members' rights effectively.

Legal registration is a vital step toward empowering journalists' unions. It enables them to engage with established labor rights frameworks and enhances their ability to negotiate on behalf of their members. Furthermore, registered unions can better advocate for improved working conditions and fair treatment in the workplace, ultimately contributing to the overall advancement of labor rights within the journalism profession.

The Industrial Relations Act has been in place since 2013, allowing unions to register; however, many remain unregistered, which limits their recognition and rights under the law. Legal registration enhances unions' credibility, enabling them to negotiate with employers, file cases, and protest injustices. Additionally, it mandates formal governance structures that improve transparency and accountability within the unions.

Registered unions are also required to adhere to financial reporting and auditing standards, fostering better management practices and building trust among members. Moreover, union leaders should focus not only on registration but also on understanding labor laws to effectively challenge management and advocate for workers' rights. To facilitate this process,

unions should engage with the government to streamline the registration process, promoting better financial management and accountability within their organisations.

### **7.3. Unionising in Digital Media**

There is a growing sense of mistrust towards digital media journalists among traditional journalists. Thus, normalising inclusion of digital media journalists among unions is seen as a difficult task. Unionising digital media journalists in Pakistan faces several challenges, primarily due to the lack of a proper legal framework that differentiates between electronic and print media. Currently, labor laws do not adequately cover digital media workers, which hinders the establishment of unions for this growing sector. To address this gap, there is a call for amendments to existing laws to include digital journalists and ensure their rights and interests are protected. Efforts are being made by organisations like PFUJ to adapt their charters and manifestos to accommodate digital media workers, but resistance persists from some union leaders who are concerned about maintaining ethical standards and accountability among new members.

Furthermore, initiatives such as training programs for digital journalists and outreach efforts to engage freelancers and students are underway to strengthen union membership and relevance in the modern media landscape. Unions like the KUJ have already begun integrating laid-off journalists who transitioned to digital platforms, thereby recognising their contributions. However, for these efforts to be successful, unions must overcome internal resistance and establish clear membership criteria that reflect the evolving nature of journalism in the digital age. Collaboration with NGOs and capacity-building initiatives will be essential in modernising union structures and ensuring that both traditional and digital journalists can effectively advocate for their rights.

Mazhar Abbas, adds to this point saying, "Labour laws do not apply in the same way to electronic media as to print in terms of forming unions. The issues of electronic media are raised through PEMRA, the regulatory authority. Without a proper legal framework, unions in electronic or digital media cannot be established and the government can allow this by changing laws. Unions of journalists should also enhance their efforts by providing proper training and equipping their members with the skills to utilise digital



platforms effectively and efficiently, especially in the face of unemployment”

Sheher Bano of KUJ says, “The Karachi Union of Journalists under the guidance of PFUJ [Rana Azeem faction] was the first one to continue membership of those members who were laid off before, during and after the COVID-19 and later became YouTubers, or digital journalists. These also include women who were working from home as freelancers. Secondly, they went to the media departments of various universities teaching journalism and made around 300 cadet members from the final semester’s students, so that when these cadets come in the field, they would already know about their UJ and PFUJ and could work as future human resource for the union. PFUJ keeps on doing the capacity building of these cadet members on topics like modern journalism, labour laws, and other important topics.”

Under IFJ’s Provincial Lobbying Project, freelancers were also given the opportunity to become members and those who were doing serious journalism work were offered membership.

Amir Suhail, PFUJ Rana Azeem puts forth his take: “Unions cannot afford to delay the reform and modernisation of their charters and manifestos if they want to remain relevant in the 21st-century media landscape. The rise of new media and digital journalism has fundamentally changed the industry, and unions must adapt to include and protect these new types of media workers. However, achieving this requires consensus among union members and leadership on the approach. This will provide legal cover to the digital journalists. Collaboration with NGOs and civil society organisations that offer capacity-building support can also help unions modernise their structures and approaches.”

He adds: “Unfortunately, even press clubs have been slow to make constitutional changes in this area, reflecting a larger reluctance within the media sector to adapt to the digital shift. In recent years, we have taken several steps toward modernisation. One significant effort has been the digitalisation of some processes, which has made union operations more efficient and accessible to members. Additionally, unions have organised workshops focused on the safety and security of digital journalists, reflecting the growing importance of addressing the unique challenges faced by media professionals in the digital age.”

Suhail added: “Collaboration with independent organisations like Freedom Network and Individualland have also played a key role in this effort. Through

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partnerships with these organisations, unions have arranged capacity-building activities and ensured that union-related matters are included in various training programs. By continuously involving union representatives in these activities, unions are becoming more engaged in addressing the evolving needs of their members. These efforts have generated positive results, as the unions are gradually transforming to better serve the interests of both traditional and digital journalists, helping them stay relevant in a rapidly changing media landscape.”

## 8. Mapping and Assessing Engagement Strategies: Alliance Building, Negotiation and Partnerships

The PFUJ Afzal Butt faction initiated the “Save the Journalists Movement” to press their five-point demands, as reported on JournalismPakistan.com on January 8, 2020. Then PFUJ President Shahzada Zulfikar and Secretary-General Nasir Zaidi gave the call for protests in wake of a severe media crisis. The demands included the formation of a Parliamentary National Media Commission, immediate lifting of both announced and unannounced censorship, an end to retrenchment of media workers, the reinstatement of those dismissed, and the unjustified delay and cuts in their salaries, and service structure for electronic media and linking the 8th Wage Award with government advertisements.<sup>23</sup>

On 28th May 2021, PFUJ Afzal Butt faction, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) rejected the proposed Pakistan Media Development Authority (PMDA) Ordinance 2021 that the Imran Khan government intended to impose. The proposed heavy fines and penalties would not be acceptable to the PFUJ or any journalist in the country, they said, adding that this was aimed at undermining the freedoms enshrined in the constitutional guarantees under Articles 19 and 19-A. they said the proposed law was ultra vires of the constitution and must be immediately withdrawn, failing which countrywide protests would be launched by journalists and concerned citizens.<sup>24</sup>

On April 13, 2020, journalists union leaders in Pakistan negotiated a Covid-19 relief package in Punjab which included a monthly pension of Rs 10,000 to the families of journalists who die due to coronavirus and a relief fund of Rs 1 million to the family of a journalist who die due to the disease, while

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23. <https://www.journalismpakistan.com/pfuj-launches-save-the-journalists-movement>

24. <https://hrcp-web.org/hrpweb/pfuj-hrcp-pbc-term-proposed-media-ordinance-an-attempt-to-impose-media-martial-law/>

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masks and protective equipment would be provided, and to meet financial losses media houses would receive tax exemptions of up to Rs 18 billion.<sup>25</sup>

On May 29, 2021, the Sindh Assembly passed a law protecting journalists and media practitioners. The law ensures that journalists' rights to life, safety, and security are safeguarded, allowing them to work in conflict-affected areas without fear of threats or prosecution. It promises the government will take steps to protect journalists, launch a website for online complaints and also coordinate with PFUJ, All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS), Council of Pakistani Newspaper Editors (CPNE) and Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA) to ensure provision of adequate insurance of and training of journalists.<sup>26</sup>

On July 21, 2023, the National Assembly unanimously approved 'PEMRA Amendment Bill 2023' which allows media workers to file complaints in the Council of Complaints for the first time, protecting them from being fired for demanding salaries. The law also defines fake news, disinformation, and misinformation and expands the scope of public entertainment, education, and information. Additionally, it guarantees that electronic media employees must be paid within two months, and the PFUJ and PBA now have representation under the new PEMRA law. The news channels' code of conduct also includes a condition of not broadcasting disinformation<sup>27</sup>

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25. <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/article/pakistan-union-secures-punjab-covid-19-relief-package>

26. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2302191/sindh-assembly-unanimously-passes-journalists-protection-law>

27. <https://www.moib.gov.pk/News/54753>

## 9. Journalist Unions and Inclusivity

### 9.1. Gender

The representation of women in mainstream media remains significantly limited. In the early 2000s, women comprised less than 5% of the journalism workforce in Pakistan. Although there has been a gradual increase in the number of female journalists since the expansion of print and electronic media outlets after 2010, fewer than 1,000 of the estimated 20,000 professional journalists in Pakistan are women. This significant underrepresentation of women, who make up a vital segment of society, highlights the persistent gender disparity within media institutions. Such disparities reflect institutional barriers that restrict women's access to resources and opportunities, resulting in a less favorable status and overall well-being compared to their male counterparts. (IFJ Gender Disparity report) <sup>28</sup>

Women journalists in Pakistan encounter additional layers of adversity. As a minority within the media landscape, their contributions often go unrecognised, and they experience harassment both online and offline. A mapping exercise conducted by the Women's Media Forum Pakistan (WMFP) in December 2023, with support from the IFJ and the National Press Club (NPC), revealed that, although women constitute 5-30% of the media workforce in certain areas, their representation in decision-making positions is alarmingly low—less than 10% or nonexistent. Moreover, their participation in unions and press clubs remains severely underrepresented, perpetuating gender inequality within the media sector.<sup>29</sup> (South Asia Press Freedom Report for 2023-2024)

A recurring theme is the need for structural changes within unions to increase women's representation, particularly in leadership roles. While some unions have made strides—such as having women occupy positions on executive committees or establishing reserved seats—these efforts often fall short of ensuring genuine participation. For instance, many women face intimidation

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28. IFJ Gender Disparity Report

29. IFJ's South Asia Press Freedom Report for 2023-2024 <https://samsn.ifj.org/SAPFR23-24/>

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and job insecurity when attempting to engage with unions, highlighting a systemic barrier that discourages their involvement. This creates a culture where women's voices are marginalised, despite existing policies like reserved seats intended to empower them. The fear of job loss and social repercussions further compounds these barriers, indicating a systemic issue that needs urgent attention. Even when reserved seats are created, women often hesitate to run for elections, reflecting a broader societal reluctance. To genuinely amplify women's voices, many speakers advocate for not only reserved seats but also for encouraging women to contest general positions on merit. The emphasis on creating a supportive environment through mentorship and outreach is crucial for building confidence and increasing female participation in unions.

Ultimately, gender inclusion in journalist unions is not merely about meeting quotas; it's about fostering a culture of equality and respect. Unions can also be a great form of support and safety for female journalists. By addressing the unique challenges women face and actively promoting their leadership, unions can become more representative and effective advocates for all journalists, thereby enhancing their overall impact in the media landscape.

Nasir Zaidi says, "About women journalists, we need to have more women members. We have a detailed discussion on that. In all UJs, we need to ensure women participation. As I told you before, we are bringing amendments in the constitution to change the definition of journalists as well to include digital and electronic."

Fauzia Shahid, former secretary general of PFUJ, says "Incorporating women and young media practitioners will strengthen unions but integrating digital journalists without ensuring they adhere to ethical standards and checks and balances poses a risk. To mitigate this, clear rules and regulations must be established and enforced."

Sadia Kamal of PFUJ Workers faction says, "To effectively address the upcoming challenges in media and trade unions, it's essential to include more women and young media practitioners in our ranks. It will strengthen the unions and would amplify the voices of unions. Bringing new journalists, including digital journalists, women, and young media practitioners, under union rules will significantly strengthen both the unions and these media professionals. For unions, expanding membership to include these groups will increase representation and diversity, making the unions more reflective of the modern media landscape. This broader membership base can lead

to greater solidarity. For digital journalists, women, and young media practitioners, union membership provides essential protections and a support network. The unions offer legal shelter and advocacy, as demonstrated in cases like Imran Riaz, where the union played a critical role in ensuring that his legal rights were protected”.





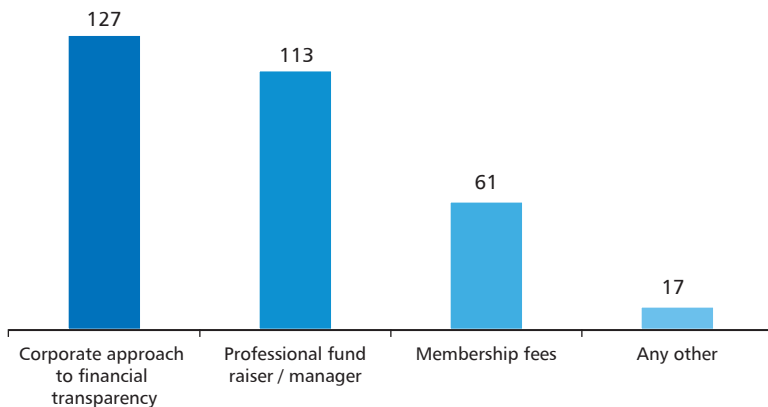
## Recommendations

### Financial Transparency

To enhance financial transparency, unions should adopt mandatory reporting standards similar to those in Canada and the US, requiring detailed annual financial statements. This includes itemising expenditures above a specified threshold and making these reports easily accessible to members. Creating a public database for financial reports can foster accountability and trust among members and the public.

When surveyed, almost half of the respondents (127) replied that corporate approach to financial transparency can improve financial transparency in the unions, 113 said professional fundraiser/manager can do that, and 61 deposed that membership fees can improve it.

Figure 23: Improve Financial Transparency in Unions



### Capacity Building of Leaders

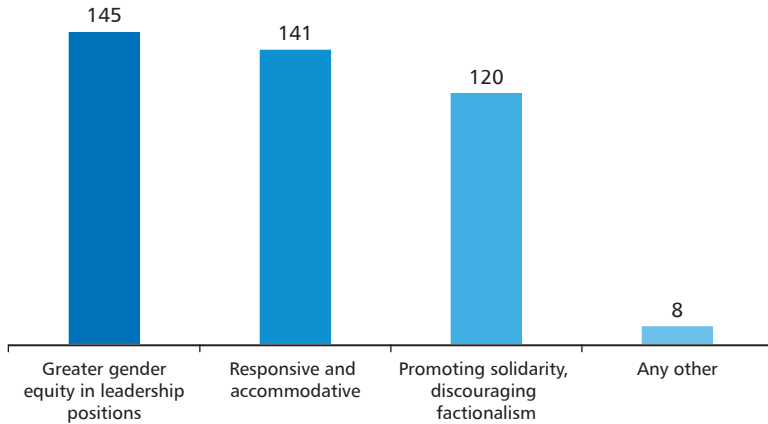
Unions should implement regular training programs for their leaders focused on financial management, negotiation skills, and digital literacy. This will empower leaders to effectively navigate modern challenges. Additionally,

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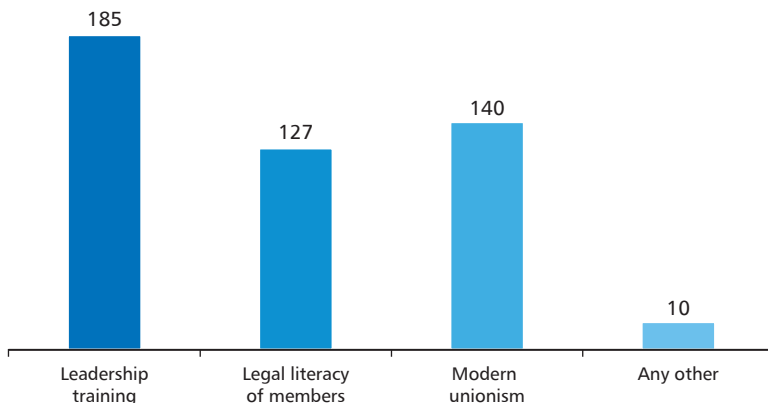
mentorship initiatives that pair experienced leaders with emerging ones can facilitate knowledge transfer and skill development within the union.

Figure 24: Enhance Professional Leadership in Unions



Unions should offer digital literacy programs to equip members with skills relevant to modern journalism practices as digital media continues to evolve. Developing crisis management protocols will also enable unions to respond swiftly and effectively to issues affecting journalists, such as harassment or censorship. Most of the respondents (185) replied that leadership training can improve capacities for unions, 127 said legal literacy of members would strengthen them while 140 said modern unionism practices can strengthen unions.

Figure 25: Capacity-building Measures for Unions



## Better Resource Mobilisation

To improve resource mobilisation, unions should explore diverse funding sources beyond membership dues, such as grants, partnerships with NGOs, or crowdfunding initiatives. Successful examples from various global unions highlight the effectiveness of these strategies. Furthermore, creating resource-sharing networks among unions can help them exchange best practices for fundraising.

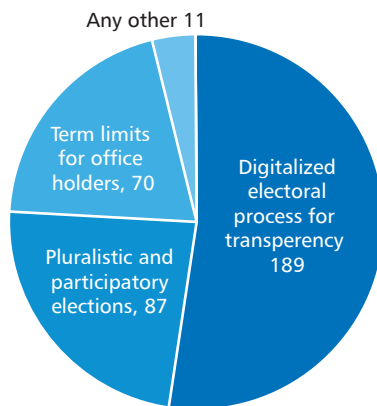
## Improving Democracy Within Unions

Unions need to ensure regular, transparent elections for leadership positions and consider implementing term limits to encourage fresh ideas and perspectives. Facilitating town hall meetings where members can voice their concerns and suggest initiatives will enhance democratic engagement within the union.

### Fixed Term Limits

Implementing fixed term limits for elected officials can enhance accountability and prevent the entrenchment of power. By establishing clear timeframes for how long individuals can serve in specific positions, voters are given more opportunities to evaluate performance and make informed choices. A majority of the respondents (189) said that digitised electoral process for transparency can ensure fair elections in the unions, 87 replied pluralistic and participatory elections can do this while the remaining 70 said that term limits for the office holders can ensure fair elections.

Figure 26: Changes to Ensure Fair Elections in Unions



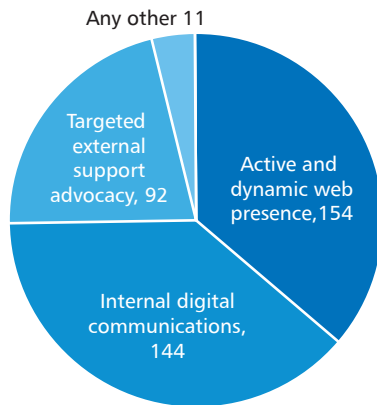
## Transparency for Member Lists

Maintaining an updated and publicly accessible list of union members can promote accountability and engagement. Additionally, implementing verification processes will allow members to easily confirm their membership status, ensuring that all voices are represented.

## Improving Information Awareness Regarding Unions

Utilising social media platforms for campaigns can effectively disseminate information about union activities, achievements, and membership benefits. Developing user-friendly online platforms or apps will enable members to communicate, access resources, and participate in discussions more easily. Most of the respondents (154) replied that active and dynamic web presence can enhance communications and outreach for unions, similarly 144 said internal digital communications, and 92 witnessed that targeted external support advocacy can enhance.

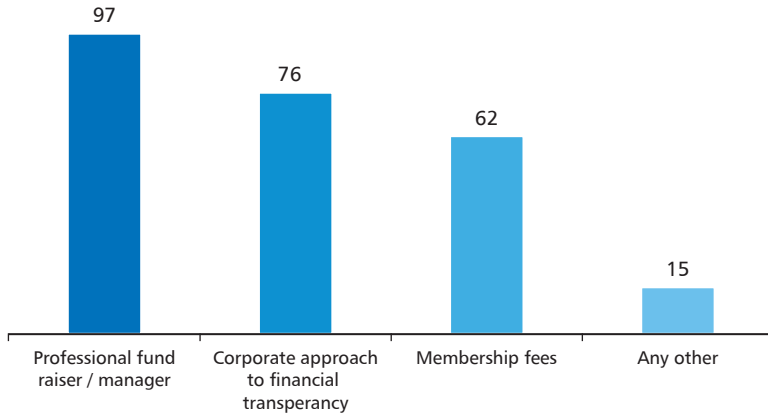
Figure 27: Methods to Enhance Communications and Outreach



## Improve Mobilisation of Resources

Many of the media respondents asserted that recruiting professional fundraisers/ managers can improve mobilisation of resources by the unions, 76 said a corporate approach to financial transparency can assist this process while 62 felt that ensuring membership fees are collected optimally can also help.

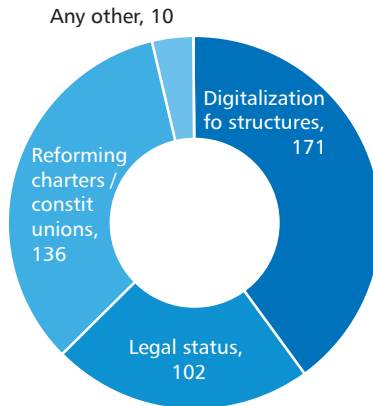
Figure 28: Improve Mobilisation of Resources



### Steps to Help in Modernising Unions

When asked, most of the journalist respondents (171) replied that digitalisation of structures can help in modernising unions, 136 said reforming charters/constitutions can assist this process while 102 felt that acquiring legal status can help the pursuit of modernisation.

Figure 29: Steps to Help in Modernising Unions



### Improving Inclusivity

To foster inclusivity, unions should actively recruit members from diverse backgrounds to ensure representation across gender, race, and socio-economic status. Implementing accessibility programs will also ensure that

meetings and resources are available to all members, including those with disabilities or language barriers.

## **Greater Voice for Women in Leadership Positions**

Establishing leadership training programs specifically aimed at empowering women within the union can help increase female representation in leadership roles. Additionally, considering quotas or targets for women's representation can promote gender equality within the union's leadership structure. Many of the journalist respondents (145) said that greater gender equality in leadership positions can enhance professional leadership in the unions, 141 replied responsive and accommodative leadership can help while 120 felt that promoting solidarity and discouraging factionalism can enhance leadership quality.

## **Global Examples of Incorporation**

Many of these recommendations have been successfully implemented by journalist unions worldwide. For instance, Canadian unions have enhanced financial transparency through mandatory reporting requirements that allow member scrutiny of finances. The IFJ promotes capacity building through training programs globally, while the National Union of Journalists (UK) has made strides in increasing diversity and promoting women into leadership positions.

## **Key Recommendations from FGDs:**

- Unions should offer utilitarian resources like healthcare/insurance facilities to encourage membership.
- Build a distinct profile for digital media journalists and workers and incorporate them into charters to bridge disparities in guarantees for journalists and workers of all mediums.
- Reform the electoral process by making polling digital, setting term limits for leadership positions, and regular elections with enhanced and accessible accountability mechanisms.
- Adopt a corporate approach to union-management, emphasising membership fees, professional fundraising, and active membership.

- Commission independent audits and accountability measures to ensure transparency and build trust.
- Promote diverse representation and develop new leadership to engage with younger journalists and workers.
- Develop proactive and digital communication strategies and establish written communication policies. Separately establish active external communications for public advocacy and internal communication for inclusivity. Use digital platforms for both types of communications.
- Develop in-house technical expertise on advocacy and pursue collaboration and partnerships with civil society on common agendas of freedom of expression, right to information and combating disinformation.
- Central unions are as strong as the weaknesses of their regional chapters, including challenges related to limited resources, communication expertise and online presence. Build their capacities in areas like unionism, legal rights and proactive digital footprints.
- Distinguish between professional journalists and political activists and discourage external political linkages and class dominance within unions.





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The IFJ is the world's largest organisation of journalists, representing 600,000 media professionals in more than 141 countries. The IFJ and its affiliates are actively engaged in developing a program of strengthening unions in an evolving labour rights landscape amid the impacts of digital disruption, media transformation, increasing contractualisation of workers and the evolution of a gig worker economy. The IFJ is the organisation that speaks for journalists within the United Nations system and within the international trade union movement. It has consultative status with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Intellectual Property Organisation. IFJ is a member of the International Trade Union Confederation.

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