



RESEARCH PAPER

The Impact of the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 on Media Freedom and Accountability

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the impact of the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 (PDA 2024) on freedom of media and accountability to the populace in Pakistan. The law was enacted on June 7, 2024. It attempts to combat both print and online fake news but it has been criticized due to special tribunals it establishes and massive fines of at least PKR 3 million. The study provided a qualitative and comparative legal analysis of PDA 2024 and the Defamation Ordinance 2002, the Pakistani Penal Code, and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 to compare the three laws. The results indicate that the legislation has unclear definitions and expedients and poses a threat to free speech and fair trials. The research advises to clarify the definitions of the law, provide fair trials, and consult the stakeholders in order that the freedom of the media and protection against defamation should have a balance.

KEYWORDS Punjab Defamation Act 2024, Media Freedom, Defamation Laws in Pakistan, Freedom of Speech, Constitutional Rights in Pakistan

Introduction

Punjab Assembly passed the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 on May 20 2024, and it became effective on June 7 2024 (Dawn, 2023). It tends to combat fake news on print, online, and social media (such as YouTube, Tik Tok, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) by holding individuals accountable in the sharing of fake information about ordinary citizens and officials. The legislation establishes special tribunals to complete the defamation lawsuits within six months. They are able to enforce punishment, fines up to PKR 3 million (The News, 2023). There are, however, numerous doubts regarding the way the law is implemented and the degree of its fairness:

Unfulfilled Enforcement

As much as the law demands special tribunals, critics fear that this could negatively affect the impartiality and independence of the courts.

Strict Penalties and Misuse

The fines are huge and the ability to suspend or block an account on social media along with the ambiguous phrasing is a cause of alarm. According to lawyers, such regulations might be applied to intimidate journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens who criticize the authorities.

Inequality

The legislation appears to be biased towards the officials of the society. Critics argue that it allows the Punjab government to take decisions that cannot be seen by the people, and this has resulted in an unfair system that allows the officials to escape criticism.

Literature review

Punjab defamation act 2024 has the potential to transform a lot of how the media operates and how they are held accountable. It is designed to guard the names and reputation of people; however, it could cause the press to be more conservative in what it writes. The Act reveals the difficulty with maintaining the balance between the security of people and the freedom of the press and its honesty.

Impact on Media Freedom

The Act has the potential to exacerbate the current issues of the media, including politician intrusion and censorship which already jeopardize its independence and credibility (Patnaik and Chauhan, 2024). The law of defamation such as in Punjab, frequently silences reporters and makes them less willing in investigating or criticizing as they are scared of lawsuits (Barendt et al., 1997). International principles tend to provide that restrictions on speech must be fair and no larger than necessary. This implies that the Punjab Act is not necessarily in line with global practices over press freedom (Hassan et al., 2025).

Responsibility and Legalities

The Act is interested in the media being liable to false reporting, but it is also concerned that news outlets can be punished on comments that turn out to be defamatory. This would prevent them to be free when talking (Thukuse, 2025). Its regulations may also influence the reporters self-censoring which harms their capacity to report on significant issues relating to the population and questioning the government (Patnaik et al., 2024, p. 4; Hassan et al., 2025).

Social and Political Bigger Picture

Such laws in Punjab are a continuation of a wider trend of governments controlling the news through regulation and maintaining order in the name of preserving reputation (Sharma and Waseem, 2024). Although it is positive to guard individuals against lying, there is a tangible threat that these laws may be utilized against those who disagree and suppress freedom of press (Sharma & Waseem, 2024).

Simply, the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 attempts to address the actual defamation issues and poses significant threats to the freedom and responsibility of media. Striking the right balance between reputation protection and free press is very critical, and the consequences of the Act have to be reviewed keenly to ensure democracy is not compromised.

Material and Methods

This paper employed the comparison of laws. We have considered the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 and the Defamation Ordinance in Pakistan of 2002, some sections of the Pakistan Penal Code, and the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016. We found

the points of coincidence between the laws, where they clash, and what new concepts they present. We compared the Act to Articles 19, 10-A and 25 of the Constitution to determine whether it complies with the rights to free speech, to equal treatment and to a fair trial. We also collected information on official legal materials and parliamentary proceedings, and filings of the court and other sources like news articles, civil-society statements and international human-rights commentaries. We have adjusted the findings to international standards in order to place the findings in context, which are the Articles 19 of the ICCPR, defamation laws in the UK and USA, and regional best practices. We provide the analysis in the form of tables and narrative summary.

Primary legal sources, Full texts of PDA 2024, the Defamation Ordinance 2002, the Pakistan Penal Code and PECA 2016. Secondary sources: Articles in the constitution, 19, 10-A, 25; national and international reports on human-rights; judicial precedents; and commentary of civil-society organizations, journalists and lawyers.

Data Collection and Analysis

Primary Legal Documents

Full texts of the Punjab Defamation Act 2024, Defamation Ordinance 2002, Pakistan Penal Code, and PECA 2016.

Secondary Legal Documents

Constitutional provisions (Articles 19, 10-A, 25), relevant national and international human rights reports, and judicial precedents from the superior courts of Pakistan.

Expert Commentary

Legal analysis and critiques published by civil society organizations, media bodies (e.g., PFUJ, CPNE), and digital rights activists.

Comparative Legal Analysis

Key comparison points:

Defamation Ordinance 2002

Consider such words as defamation, journalist, newspaper, minimum damages, fines, and where do cases go, district courts or tribunals.

Pakistan Penal Code (PPC)

The difference between civil and criminal liability, whether they overlap or not and the danger of being sued concurrently.

Place of Prevention Electronic Crimes Act 2016

Can it be compared with its treatment of online defamation and its provision of a means to block or suspend social-media accounts?

The core of the methodology will be a Comparative Legal Analysis, a qualitative research method. This involves systematically comparing the content and potential effect of the PDA 2024 with different legal instruments.

Comparative Study

This phase compares the PDA 2024 with existing Pakistani laws to highlight areas of duplication, conflict, or significant departure.

Table 1
Comparative analysis of PDA 2024 with existing laws

Comparative Law	Focus Areas for Comparison	Expected Outcome
Defamation Ordinance, 2002	Definition of 'Defamation,' 'Journalist,' and 'Newspaper'; Minimum damages/fines; Jurisdiction (District Courts vs. Tribunals); Evidentiary standards (applicability of Qanun-e-Shahadat 1984); Provisions for public officials.	Establish the degree of severity of the new law and identify procedural changes (e.g., shift to tribunals).
Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) (Sections 499 & 500)	Civil vs. Criminal liability distinction; Overlap in penalties; Potential for dual prosecution (civil and criminal).	Assess the cumulative "chilling effect" on speech due to multiple, overlapping laws.
Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016	Scope of digital/online defamation and cybercrimes; Definitions of digital media/platforms; Power to block/suspend accounts/content; Jurisdiction (FIA vs. Tribunals).	Analyze how the PDA 2024 expands control over online speech beyond existing cyber laws.

Constitutional and Rights-Based Analysis (Domestic)

This is a direct comparison of the PDA 2024's text with key articles of the Constitution of Pakistan.

Table 2
Constitutional provisions and PDA 2024

Constitutional Article	Focus Area in PDA 2024	Research Question
Article 19 (Freedom of Speech)	Vague and broad definitions ('Journalist,' 'Defamation'); Prohibition of commenting on pending proceedings (Section 12); Power to block social media accounts.	Does the PDA 2024 constitute a reasonable restriction on fundamental rights?
Article 25 (Equality of Citizens)	Differing procedures for cases involving 'Constitutional Office' holders compared to private citizens.	Does the law create a discriminatory legal class for public officials?
Article 10-A (Right to Fair Trial/Due Process)	Allowing claims "without proof of actual damage or loss"; Exclusion of the Law of Evidence (Qanun-e-Shahadat 1984); Establishment of specialized Tribunals.	Does the new framework erode due process safeguards?

International Comparative Study (Global)

This phase uses a selected set of international jurisdictions or standards as a benchmark to assess the "draconian" nature of the PDA 2024.

Table 3
International comparative standards

Comparative Standard	Focus Areas for Comparison with PDA 2024	Rationale
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (Article 19)	Requirement of proportionality for penalties; Necessity and legality of defamation restrictions.	Assess Pakistan's international legal compliance regarding freedom of expression.

Selected Common Law Jurisdictions (e.g., UK, USA)	Requirement of proving fault (negligence/malice); Defense of truth/public interest; Distinction between private and public figure plaintiffs; Exclusion of criminal defamation.	Determine if the PDA 2024 deviates from the evolutionary trend of decriminalizing defamation and establishing high burdens of proof.
Regional Best Practices (e.g., Jurisprudence on Defamation and Media Regulation)	Role and independence of judicial bodies (Tribunals); Severity and nature of civil/punitive damages; Scope of online content regulation.	Contextualize the PDA 2024's procedural mechanisms and penalties in a global context.

Analytical Framework

Our approach to the study was thematic-comparative, i.e., we organized our findings into thematic categories based on: (i) the application scope (definition of defamation, journalist and newspaper); (ii) penalties and remedies; (iii) proof and procedure; (iv) constitutional and international standards. The reason is that the use of the past tense is based on the research being completed.

Scope of Application (Who is a Defendant?)

Comparing the broad definition of 'journalist' and 'broadcasting' in the PDA 2024 to previous laws and international standards (e.g., inclusion of bloggers, vloggers, and ordinary social media users).

Penalties and Remedies

Comparing the minimum compensatory damages (PKR 3,000,000 in PDA 2024) and the power to suspend/block social media accounts with existing fines and remedies.

Proof and Procedure

Comparing the PDA 2024's allowance of filing suit "without proof of actual damage" and the non-applicability of the Law of Evidence with standard legal procedures.

Ethical Considerations

The research must ensure impartiality by acknowledging the stated purpose of the PDA 2024 (protection against false information) while critically analyzing the documented concerns regarding freedom of expression and press freedom. The analysis should be grounded in legal text and documented expert critique.

Results and Discussion

Punjab Defamation Act 2024 is a controversial law

In other words, we can say that all Act is favor to Government of Punjab. The Act described, a common man cannot speak against Punjab Government. Its means, every person who pass any type of comments against Government of Punjab, he will face case & fine. Especially those people they work on social media. The law says social media content creators and online platforms within the definition of "journalist" and "newspaper,". Critics argue this is unfair with digital creators mostly lack of resources for rigorous fact-checking and are not proper trained in professional journalistic standards (Dawn, 2023). This Act replaces the jurisdiction of District Courts with special

tribunals to hear defamation cases. Lawyers have raised concerns about the impartiality and independence of these tribunals, as their members will be appointed by the government in consultation with the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court. There are fears by government interest, may be create a conflict between Government & public, especially in cases where the government policy not in the interest of public. One of the criticized provisions is the ability of the tribunal to pass a "preliminary decree" against a defendant who fails to obtain "leave to defend," which essentially means a defendant can be ordered to pay damages without a full trial or having the right to properly defend themselves. According to the lawyers, this law is against the fundamental rights in the Constitution of Pakistan. It limits the freedom of speech (Article 19) and fair trial (Article 10A). There is a provision in the law according to which individuals, journalists, and lawyers are not allowed to say anything about those cases which are still pending before the tribunal. This is what is referred to as a gag order as it prevents the discussion of vital issues among people. The bill was passed in the Punjab Assembly with much opposition by several opposition MLA and journalists. They claim that the government did not consult all people as it should have made the law. The law has been rejected by journalist groups, the civil society, and the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) who have attempted to prevent the law in court but have failed. Concisely, the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 is reported to combat fake news and save individuals against the harm to their reputation. Legal experts argue it is in reality a means to suppress dissent and direct what information reaches people, particularly those journalists, activists, and other individuals who use online platforms to speak out (Rahman & Anggriawan, 2025).

Reaction of Lawyers in Pakistan on The Punjab Defamation Act 2024

The lawyer community has been very adamant and criticized the Act in Pakistan. The lawyers, journalists, civil society organizations and human rights organizations came together to denounce the Punjab law (Digital Rights Monitor, 2023).

The major issues are the fact that the law poses a grave danger to basic rights, and that it has legal issues, as well as the possibility of abuse. Overview of the responses and issues that the legal community expressed:

Constitutional Violation and Legal Flaws of this Act

Infringement of Fundamental Rights

Lawyers says that this Act violates several articles of the Constitution of Pakistan, including:

Article 19 (Freedom of Speech)

The Act is seen as a tool to suppress free speech, press freedom, and legitimate criticism, especially against public officials.

Article 10-A (Right to Fair Trial)

Critics point out that the Act allows for defamation claims to be initiated "without any proof of actual damage or loss." Furthermore, some provisions allow to tribunal that they can start trial without any evidence. This is a direct violation of the Article 10-A.

Article 25 (Equality before the Law)

This Act only promote & support to the policies of Punjab Government. Due to this reason a common man may be face inequality if he speaks against government or any other officials (Jurist, 2024).

Violation of Fundamental Rights

According to Lawyers community this Act violates several articles of the Constitution of Pakistan, including:

Hurdle in Judicial Independence

This Act pass a direction that establishment of special tribunals to handle defamation cases.

Lawyers have raised concerns that these tribunals, with members appointed by the government officials, could undermine the independence of the judiciary and open the door for undue political interference & pressurize to public through policies prepared by the government.

No need of this Act

Legal experts say that this Act is redundant, as there are already two other defamation laws in Punjab: The Defamation Ordinance of 2002 and the Punjab Defamation Act of 2012. Critics argue that instead of creating a new law, the government should have amended existing legislation to address any perceived shortcomings.

Protests and Legal way by the Lawyers

Lawyers, often in collaboration with journalists, civil society groups & ENGOS have been at the forefront of challenging the Act.

Petitions have been filed in the Lahore High Court (LHC) to have the law declared unconstitutional.

But even that, this law forcefully implemented by the government officials.

The petitioners, including lawyers and journalists, have called the law "unconstitutional, unlawful, and against the principles of the law in Pakistan." After this effort, the Lahore High Court took action, suspending several key sections of the Act and assuring that no legal proceedings will take place under the new law until the court has reviewed its constitutionality. In the nutshell, the legal community of Pakistan views the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 as a "draconian" and "authoritarian" piece of legislation designed to silence dissent rather than genuinely address the issue of defamation.

The unified response from lawyers, including the filing of legal petitions, highlights the deep-seated concern that the Act poses a significant threat to civil liberties and the rule of law in Pakistan (Dawn, 2023).

Reaction of Journalists in Pakistan on The Punjab Defamation Act 2024

The reaction of journalists, media organizations & ENGOS in Pakistan to the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 has been overwhelmingly negative & stop to freedom of speech, characterized by strong condemnations, protests, and legal challenges (IFJ, 2023).

The media community understand to defamation Act, as a tool to silence and suppress freedom of the media.

Immediate and Widespread Protests by Media

Walkout & Protests

When this bill was being passed by the Punjab Assembly, journalists covering the proceedings staged a walkout from the press gallery in protest.

Established Joint Action Committee

Major journalist and media bodies, including the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), the All-Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE), and the Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA), formed a Joint Action Committee to collectively oppose the legislation of this act.

Condemnations of act

These organizations have passed multiple joint statements and press releases, calling the law "draconian," a "black law," and a "gross infringement on the fundamental rights of freedom of expression" (Pakistan Law Bot, 2023).

Concerns Raised by Journalists

Threat to Media Freedom:

The main concern is that the Act will be used to intimidate journalists and force them into self-censorship, particularly when reporting on corruption, public officials, or sensitive political issues.

Vague and Broad Definitions

Journalists have criticized the law's vague definitions of "defamation" and "journalist," which extend the scope to include social media users and digital creators of Punjab.

This is seen as a deliberate attempt to bring all type of online expression under the state's control policy.

Incomplete justice

The Act's provision for special tribunals with a six-month deadline to resolve cases is not enough for justice. Journalists argue that this expedited process, coupled with the tribunal's power to pass preliminary decrees against the defendant, can lead to unfair judgments.

Harsh Penalties to Journalists

Journalists says that the penalties (up to PKR 3 million) and the authority to block or suspend social media accounts is indicating that Journalists or media cannot freely speak. This act designed to financially and professionally cripple journalists and media outlets.

Without Consultation of Journalists

A major point of contention is the government's lack of meaningful consultation with media stakeholders before passing the bill. Journalists allege that their concerns and proposed amendments were completely ignored by the Government.

Trial Starts without Proof

Journalists totally against the provision that allows defamation claims to be initiated "without proof of actual damage or loss." This provision shifts the burden without any proof onto the accused, forcing them to prove their innocence rather than requiring the accuser to prove defamation, which is a fundamental departure from legal principles.

Legal Challenges

Journalists, collaborate with lawyers and human rights organizations, have filed petitions in the Lahore High Court & challenge the constitutionality of the Act. In their opinion, that the law violates fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan, including freedom of speech (Article 19) and the right to a fair trial (Article 10-A). In which result, The Lahore High Court has responded by suspending several sections of the Act and ensuring that no proceedings will be initiated under the new law until the legal challenge is resolved. Simply we can say that journalists of Pakistan, observe the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 as a severe threat to their profession and to the democratic values of the country.

They have taken a firm and unified stance against it, using both public protests and legal to fight for its repeal or significant amendment.

Reaction of General public in Pakistan on The Punjab Defamation Act 2024

The general public's reaction on the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 has been concerning and criticism, aligning closely with the views of journalists, lawyers, and human rights organizations. While a specific, nationwide poll on public opinion isn't available, the sentiment expressed on social media and through civil society channels indicates strong opposition for this law (Aslam et al., 2025).

Here are the main points highlighted by the general public's reaction:

Fear of Censorship & news used by the Government

Threat to Social Media Users

A major concern for the general public is that the law's broad definitions extend to social media users. In this time, many people feel fear that expressing their opinions, sharing critical news stories, or even posting satirical content could now put them it may be possible they face defamation law suit. Social media creator feels fear and psychologically self-censorship, they hesitant use of own voice, Picture & dissent or critique public figures online (Suddle et al., 2025).

Silencing Dissent

The opinion of social media user completely against this law. They understand this law help to powerful people; in sense their illegal activities not show on media. This

Law is a powerful weapon for high profile people it is definitely stop to public opinion & criticism through defamation act.

Legal and Constitutional Conflict

Violation of Rights

Several citizens, having seen the detailed legal analyses by lawyers and human rights bodies, are concerned that this Act violates their fundamental constitutional rights, especially freedom of speech (Article 19).

No Transparency in Act

The public has criticized to government, hurried manner in which the bill was passed. The Government should proper consultation with stakeholders, including civil society, the general public & lawyer's community.

Misuse and Intimidation of Government

There is a widespread reality that this Act will be use as weapon against political opponents, activists, and ordinary citizens. People fear that powerful individuals defiantly use the law's harsh penalties and expedited tribunal process to harass and intimidate critics, regardless of the truthfulness of their statements (Tahir et al., 2025).

Distrust in Institutions

The creation of special tribunals with government-appointed members will be led to public distrust. This is true that, these tribunals will not be impartial and will serve the interests of the powerful, rather than upholding justice.

Solidarity with Journalists, Activists & Lawyers

Support for Protests

The general public, particularly the youth and online communities, shown strong solidarity with the protests organized by journalists and lawyers. In this scenario, Hashtags, online campaigns were used as protest, and demanded the repeal of the "black law" (IFJ, 2023).

Effect on Public

The public understands that law meant to suppress journalism will also affect them. They recognize that a free press is a power to accountability and that if journalism may silent then, the public's access to information will be severely restricted. The Punjab Defamation Act 2024 is perceived with a lot of suspicion and concern by the general population in Pakistan. They consider it to be a danger to their freedom of expression, intimidation and a loss to democracy and accountability. Their response is an amalgamation between the fear of the legal consequences and the firm stance of backing the legal and media fraternity combating this statute.

International media on The Punjab Defamation Act 2024 Pakistan

The world and human rights watchdogs have responded to the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 with pure criticism. They have extensively reported and announced

the issues that have been championed by local journalists, lawyers, and civil societies in Pakistan.

Draconian/Black Law

The international news agencies and human rights organizations have always been described with negative terminologies in this case which depict the law as draconian and a mechanism to silence the press. They pointed out on the provisions of the law, particularly the establishment of special tribunals and severe punishments, as meant to damage the free speech.

This Act against Critics used

International informers reported that this Act will use by powerful people, against political opponents, journalists, and activists. They emphasize that the law is not a balanced effort to address defamation but a means to curb dissent.

Uncompleted Justice

Reports from international organizations have pointed out that legal anomalies within the Act. Defamation can be claimed without any proof of actual damage and the denial of the right to a fair trial. They observe that the establishment of special tribunals as a way to bypass the regular, independent judicial system.

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

This bill highly condemned by the IFJ. The bill's passing and highlighted its potential to be "weaponized against critics of the governments." The IFJ has urged the provincial and national authorities in Pakistan to withdraw the legislation and uphold press freedom.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Human rights organizations like HRW and Amnesty International consistently monitor such legislation and they know previous record of condemning laws. Their reports often reflect the concerns of local activists and organizations, which have already labeled the law a "gross infringement of basic rights" (Library of Congress, 2024).

Other Media Organizations

Global media outlets and freedom of the press organizations have closely followed the developments, reporting on the protests by Pakistani journalists and the legal challenges filed in the Lahore High Court. Their coverage often provides context by referencing Pakistan's existing legal framework and its constitutional guarantees of free speech, which is totally conflict with this Law.

Role of international media

The international media and human rights community understand the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 as a severe setback for civil liberties in Pakistan. Their reaction is not just about the law itself, their concern about government that who use this law stop to public opinion/criticism against government.

Maximum Penalty in The Punjab Defamation Act 2024

The Law makers of this Act want that accused person, pay fine or imprisonment or both. The punishments of this Act are as under. The penalties are primarily highlighted in Section 21 (Consequences of proof of defamation) and Section 15 (Preliminary Decree) (Devgan, 2024).

Table 4
Penalties under PDA 2024

Penalty Type	Section(s) of the Act	Details
Monetary Damages (General)	Section 2(k) (Definition of 'General Damages') & Section 15 (Preliminary Decree)	A minimum of PKR 3,000,000 (Rupees Three Million) can be awarded as 'General Damages.' This minimum can be imposed as a Preliminary Decree if the defendant fails to obtain 'leave to defend' the case as per Section 13.
Monetary Damages (Punitive)	Section 21 (Consequences of proof of defamation)	The Tribunal can award Punitive Damages which may extend up to ten (10) times the quantum of General Damages awarded. This means punitive damages could reach up to PKR 30 million (Rupees Thirty Million) based on the minimum General Damages.
Unconditional Apology	Section 21 (Consequences of proof of defamation)	The Tribunal may require the defendant to issue an unconditional apology, which must be accepted by the claimant and published with equal prominence as the original defamatory statement.
Blocking/Suspension of Platform	Section 21 (Consequences of proof of defamation)	The Tribunal may direct the suspension or blocking of the defendant's social media account, website, or any other media platform used to disseminate the defamatory content.
Penalties for False/Frivolous Claims	Section 20 (Penalties for false and frivolous claims)	The Tribunal can dismiss a claim if it is found to be false, frivolous, or vexatious and may impose a penalty on the claimant, which can extend up to PKR 1,000,000 (Rupees One Million).
Penalty for Commenting on Pending Proceedings	Section 12 (No comment on pending proceedings)	For violating the ban on commenting on pending proceedings, a person may be subject to an initial fine of PKR 50,000 and an additional fine of PKR 10,000 per day for the continuance of the violation.

Procedural Sections Related to Penalties

Section 13 (Leave to defend)

Relates to the preliminary stage where a defendant must seek permission to contest the claim. Failure to obtain leave to defend can lead to a Preliminary Decree (Section 15) being passed against them.

Section 15 (Preliminary Decree)

Allows the Tribunal to pass an initial decree, including the minimum General Damages (PKR 3 million), without the defendant fully engaging in the legal proceedings if they fail the Leave to Defend process.

Section 16 (Execution of Decree)

States that a Preliminary Decree is automatically converted into an Execution Proceeding without the need for fresh notices to the defendant.

Comparative Legal Analysis with International Law

Global Comparison

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)- Article 19: determine whether Pakistan is adhering to international principles of freedom of expression (Suddle et al., 2025).

Common Law Countries (UK, USA)

Consider the ways of proving defamation, the ways of the defendant to defend against it with the use of truth and public interest, and whether this move to make criminal acts non-criminal is in line with international practice (Tahir et al., 2025).

Freedom of the press and the autonomy of the media are fundamental tenets of democracy, but the way it is understood and practiced is highly differentiated in various jurisdictions. This paper will compare media regulations in Pakistan with the international standards of free-speech, citing the regulations established by the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States (Rahman and Anggriawan, 2025). Although Article 19 of the Pakistani Constitution ensures citizens the freedom of speech, restrictive laws, including the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance, the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, and defamation and sedition legislation, put numerous limitations. These limitations result in a climate of extensive censorship, surveillance, and the suppression of dissent which is commonly defended by the authorities based on reasons either related to religion, national security or the maintenance of order (Hassan et al., 2025).

By contrast, the international standards, in particular those found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) focus on proportionality and necessity in restricting the freedom of speech. European standards, demonstrated in European Convention on human rights (ECHR) and case laws of the European Court of human Rights (ECTHR) establish strong provisions on restrictions that can be tolerated, with the aim of balancing the interests of the society and the rights of an individual. A different way is provided by the United States: First Amendment to the Constitution in the United States has made a free speech near-absolute, and any content-based restriction or a prior-restraint restriction is considered the most stringent (Aslam et al., 2025).

Discussion

Implementation of PDA 2024

The special tribunals are permitted to hear the defamation cases by the Act. They are able to initiate a case without demonstrating damages and set a fine of PKR 3 million minimum. Opponents argue that allowing tribunals to make preliminary orders, i.e. order payment prior to the entire trial, contravene the right to trial by jury. The legislation also enables tribunals to prevent or prohibit social-media accounts, which brings up the issue of censorship.

Major Issues that Stakeholders are Concerned with.

There are no courts that are independent. Tribunals appointed by the government can be biased and undermine the independence of the judiciary. According to the lawyers, it is contrary to Article 10 -A of a fair trial to admit cases where there is no evidence of injury.

Severe punishments are abused. The power to block accounts and pay huge fines will scare journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens.

Vague terms and unfair rules. The vagueness of the terms journalist and defamation may get common social media users into trouble, restricting regular speech. The Act is biased towards constitutional office-holders, which puts the issue of inequality.

Response of attorneys and journalists. The law has been described in the law community as cruel and authoritarian, with petitions filed to the effect that the Act infringes the Articles 19, 25 and 10-A. Journalists have also protested the Act going as far as to refer to the Act as a black law that has threatened press freedom.

Communal and foreign views. The law is viewed as the means of silencing dissent by civil-society groups and the people. The Act is accused by the international media and groups, including the International Federation of Journalists and Human Rights Watch, of being a form of infringement on basic rights and calls on its removal.

Conclusion

To put it briefly the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 is an act that is supposed to address defamation but its broad and vague definitions, severe punishment and special tribunals raise significant concerns. The opponents claim that the act threatens freedom of speech, damages the fair trial right, and assists the public officials excessively. This has been protested and sued by many who argue that it violates the rights in the Constitution of Pakistan and the international human rights laws.

Recommendations

The Act establishes new legal environment of defamation. The key suggestions regarding this Act are as follows.

Clarify vague terms. Defamation, journalist and newspaper should be made understandable to the ordinary social-media user so that the law does not entrap the basic social-media usage. Only false statements that are really false and those that are harmful should be sued.

Restore fair process. Eliminate the authority to make preemptive strikes without a complete defense. Make plaintiffs show harm, or malicious intent, and use the Law of Evidence to make it just.

Minimize fines and maintain their fairness. Limit the number of fines as though they should not be excessive and prevent blocking social-media accounts unless it is well-grounded and proportional.

Protect court independence. Instead of special tribunals, use standard courts or establish special open panels that will not be selected through the government.

Involve stakeholders. Have actual conferences with journalists, lawyers, civil-society organizations and citizens prior to change. This strategy can ensure the law of defamation protects the reputation of other people in the future without silencing the opponents.

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