

Traps of Fear

Violations Against Yemeni Journalists During Movement and Travel

Human Rights Report



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**Human Rights Report
2025**



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Executive Summary

This report highlights the current state of violations against Yemeni journalists and their media and personal rights, carried out through checkpoints and security barriers across Yemen.

Issued by the Marsadak (Yemeni Media Freedom Observatory), the report reveals a troubling escalation of systematic security violations targeting Yemeni journalists during their travel between governorates, particularly at military checkpoints operated by various parties to the conflict throughout a war that has now stretched into its second decade.

The findings are based on meticulous monitoring and documentation of such violations, supplemented by the results of a field survey conducted by the Marsadak, affiliated with the Studies and Economic Media Center (SEMC), with the participation of 42 journalists (male and female) from ten Yemeni governorates, enriched with first-hand testimonies and detailed legal analysis.

Survey results show that more than three-quarters of participants (76.2%) were subjected to searches of their personal electronic devices, while 51.5% reported direct financial blackmail. Other serious abuses included forced searches, confiscation of equipment, threats of arrest, and verbal and physical assaults. These violations were often triggered by the discovery of the individual's professional identity as a journalist, with targeting beginning as soon as their profession was revealed.

According to participants, forces affiliated with the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in Aden were most frequently responsible for these violations (45.2%), followed by the Houthi group (33.3%), and then forces loyal to the IRG of Yemen in Marib and Taiz (21.4%). These figures indicate that the abuses are not confined to one faction but extend across Yemen's political geography, reflecting a systematic pattern of repression that transcends allegiances.

Qualitative data highlights severe psychological and professional consequences of these violations. Some 69% of journalists reported that their freedom of field coverage and their mental health had been negatively affected, while 12% decided to refrain entirely from traveling, fearing further exposure to such violations, posing a direct threat to the continuity of free journalistic work.

The report also revealed a lack of rights awareness and digital security among journalists. Only seven participants filed official complaints regarding the abuses they faced, amid a prevailing sense of futility and the absence of effective protection mechanisms.

In contrast, 88% of those journalists indicated that they later adopted preventive digital security measures, such as using encryption tools, periodically deleting sensitive content from their electronic devices, and documenting violations.

The annexed legal analysis herein concludes that these practices constitute grave violations of the Yemeni Constitution, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and international human rights law, particularly Articles (17) and (19) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantee freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and the right to privacy.



Introduction:

Since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Yemen in 2014, the country has witnessed a severe deterioration in the state of human rights, particularly with regard to freedom of the press, opinion, and expression. Violations against journalists and media professionals have become systematic, ranging from arbitrary detention, torture, and unfair trials to field censorship, all amid near-total impunity.

According to data from the Marsadak, a total of 2,629 violations against male and female journalists, media workers, and media outlets were documented between 2015 and 2024¹. These include 54 killings, more than 300 cases of arbitrary arrest or detention, as well as hundreds of instances of court summons, travel bans, and physical and psychological assaults, targeting journalists both while performing their work and during their personal or professional travel between governorates.

As if this were not enough, recent years have witnessed an additional form of violation directly linked to journalists' professional identity at checkpoints, turning even routine travel into a perilous venture.

In this context, security checkpoints operated by the various parties to the conflict have emerged as one of the most serious challenges facing journalists, not only while carrying out their reporting duties, but even during personal or civilian travel, such as attending events, participating in training sessions, or visiting relatives. The mere disclosure of one's professional identity as a journalist can turn a simple journey into a repressive ordeal marked by abuse, threats, confiscation, and extortion.

Against this backdrop, the Marsadak, affiliated with the SEMC, presents this human rights report to shed light on the recurring pattern of violations targeting Yemeni journalists during their movement inside their country,

1- <https://marsadak.org/en/annualreport-en-24/>

regardless of the purpose or nature of their travel. The report draws on monitoring and documentation, a field survey of 42 journalists (male and female) across ten governorates, individual testimonies, and detailed legal analysis.

The report aims to document the scope of these violations and analyze their impact on the physical, psychological, and digital safety of journalists, as well as on their right to freedom of movement and to live without threat, underscoring the fact that mere affiliation with the profession has become grounds for security targeting.

Furthermore, the report seeks to push toward enhancing protections in all their forms, including legal safeguards, activating accountability mechanisms, and ensuring that all parties in Yemen respect Article (57)² of the Yemeni Constitution and Articles (12) and (19) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)³, which guarantee the right to freedom of movement, to live with dignity, and to express opinions without discrimination or unlawful restriction.

2- <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/19992>

3- https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1976/03/19760323%2006-17%20am/ch_iv_04.pdf



Background and Context:

The Yemeni context presents a highly complex environment where fundamental freedoms have witnessed a sharp decline since the outbreak of the conflict in late 2014. With the collapse of state institutions and the rise of multiple centers of power, journalists have become among the most targeted groups by the various parties to the conflict. Documented violations against them include killings, enforced disappearances, detention without trial or through sham trials lacking basic standards of justice, in addition to torture, threats, travel bans, property confiscation, and the closure of media institutions. These practices have nearly destroyed the working environment for journalism in Yemen.

In this climate, checkpoints, positioned at city entrances and along main travel routes, have transformed from security measures intended to protect lives, rights, and dignity into a daily instrument of repression and a direct security

threat to journalists, regardless of the purpose of their travel.

The risk of violations is no longer limited to those actively engaged in reporting at the moment of interception. Simply carrying a press card, storing media content on a phone, or having the name of a media outlet appear on documents is enough to trigger a chain of violations, starting with field interrogation and sometimes ending in confiscation, arrest, or financial extortion.

The degree of risk varies depending on which party controls the checkpoint. However, the common denominator across all regions is the exploitation of the journalistic profession as a pretext for targeting, combined with the absence of accountability and the use of security procedures as a political and security weapon against press freedom and free expression.

Although some violations occur in areas under Houthi control,

territories controlled by the IRG of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council (STC) have not proven any less harsh in some cases, particularly since journalists are often forced to pass through those areas to escape threats from the Houthis, travel between governorates, or exit the country for various reasons.

The significance of this report lies in its impartial documentation and transmission of recurring realities on the ground, conveyed through the voices of those who have personally endured such harsh experiences.

These violations take place in a context marked by legal and regulatory voids. There are no clear mechanisms for receiving complaints from journalists or for investigating abuses they face at checkpoints. The fragmentation of security agencies and their divided loyalties have contributed to the persistence of these violations without deterrence. Consequently, many journalists have resorted to extreme self-censorship, professional concealment, or refraining from travel altogether,

measures that, while intended for protection, threaten their professional survival and livelihoods.

The violations documented in this report do not merely represent a breach of constitutional guarantees of freedom of movement and privacy. They also expose a systematic environment of intimidation, restriction, and unofficial surveillance over journalists' work, rights, and private lives, an environment starkly at odds with Yemen's international commitments, most notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), whose articles (12), (17), and (19) safeguard freedom of movement, privacy, and freedom of expression.

Therefore, what journalists face while traveling within Yemen are not isolated individual incidents, but a systematic pattern of recurring violations carried out by multiple actors, aimed directly at shrinking civic space, repressing press freedoms, and blocking the flow of information to silence voices that deliver the truth.

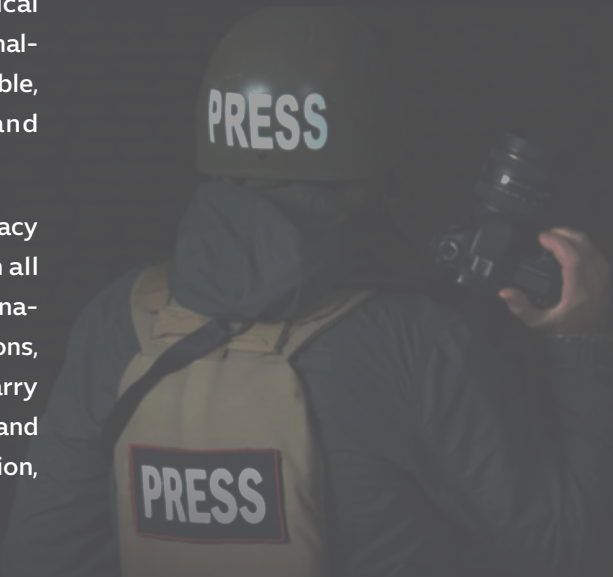
Objective of the Report:

This report aims to shed light on one of the most neglected and overlooked forms of violations in the Yemeni context: the systematic targeting of journalists during their movement inside the country, regardless of whether such travel is for professional duties, personal reasons, or participation in domestic or international events.

The report seeks to: Document the scope and pattern of these violations, analyze their psychological and professional impact on journalists, identify the actors responsible, and provide legal framing and assessment of the violations.

It further seeks to support advocacy efforts and exert pressure on all parties in Yemen to uphold their national and international obligations, ensuring that journalists can carry out their duties and move freely and safely, without threats, humiliation, stigmatization, or extortion.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations for the relevant stakeholders aimed at improving the legal and security environment for journalists, strengthening protection and accountability mechanisms, and enhancing rights and digital awareness, contributing to the safeguarding of press freedom and independence.



Methodology:

This report adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology to document and understand the nature of violations against Yemeni journalists during their travel between governorates, and to analyze the patterns of these violations and their impact on fundamental rights, including freedom of movement, physical safety, and digital privacy.

For data collection, a specially designed electronic survey was employed and distributed to a purposive (non-random) sample of journalists who were compelled to travel inside Yemen for professional, personal, or humanitarian purposes. The sample was selected based on secure accessibility and participants' willingness to contribute, with consideration for geographic and gender diversity to ensure broad representation of real experiences.

The survey was conducted between March 2022 and June 2025, with participation from 42 journalists (37 men and 5 women) from 10 Yemeni governorates. Their professional backgrounds varied, including independent journalists, field TV correspondents, and editors working for local and international media outlets. The sample also included journalists who had





For the safety of the journalists who participated in this report, their identities have been concealed, and no names or details that could lead to identifying them have been mentioned. Testimonies and data were collected with prior consent from the participants. Marsadak retains documented copies of interview details and forms used, stored in confidential and secure files to ensure integrity and protect sources.



traveled through areas controlled by different warring parties, allowing for the documentation of diverse patterns of violations.

In addition to survey data, qualitative testimonies were collected directly from journalists who faced documented violations during their travel, in order to gain deeper insights into these experiences. The report also builds on previous field documentation conducted by the Marsadak in past years, adding a complementary dimension and expanding both the geographical and analytical coverage.

Finally, the findings were reinforced with legal analysis based on the Yemeni Constitution, the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Penal Code, the Press and Publications Law, and international human rights standards, particularly the ICCPR. This analysis assessed the legality of security practices related to journalists' detention and searches and compared them against the legal guarantees afforded under domestic and international law.

Survey Results:

This section of the report is based on an analysis of field survey data in which 42 journalists (male and female) from 10 Yemeni governorates participated. The goal was to measure the prevalence of violations journalists are subjected to during travel, identify their patterns, the entities involved, as well as to assess the psychological and professional impact and the level of legal and digital awareness among journalists.



Exposure To Searches And Violations:

% 76.2

Their personal
electronic
devices were
searched while
traveling.

32

% 23.8

They had not
been searched

10

42



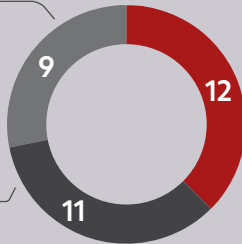
Exposure To Searches And Violations:

They were
searched more
than three
times.

% 21.4

They were
searched two
to three times.

% 26.2



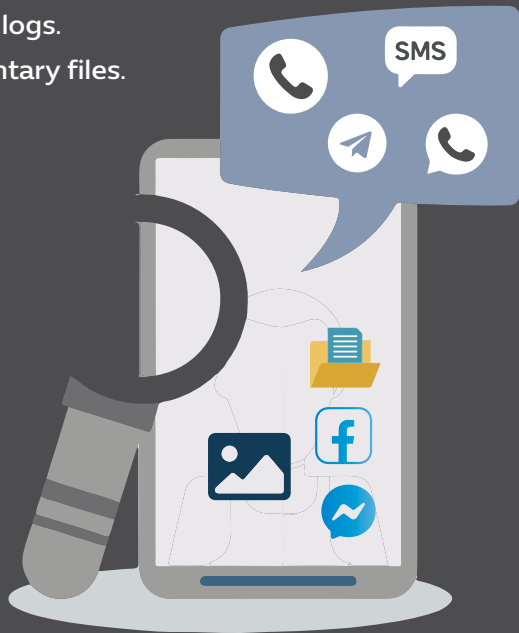
% 28.6

They were
searched
once.

- 76.2% of participants (32 out of 42) stated that their personal electronic devices were searched while traveling.
- 23.8% (10 participants) reported that they had not been searched but expressed fear that it might happen in the future, given the increasing number of security checkpoints and the absence of guarantees regarding safe movement and freedom of expression.

The search of journalists' electronic devices was not superficial or random but rather targeted specific professional and personal information and files, which indicates intent to exploit, incriminate, or blackmail. Journalists reported that checkpoint personnel focused mainly on the content of mobile phones, especially:

- Instant messaging applications (WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram).
- Photos and videos.
- SMS messages and call logs.
- Journalistic or documentary files.



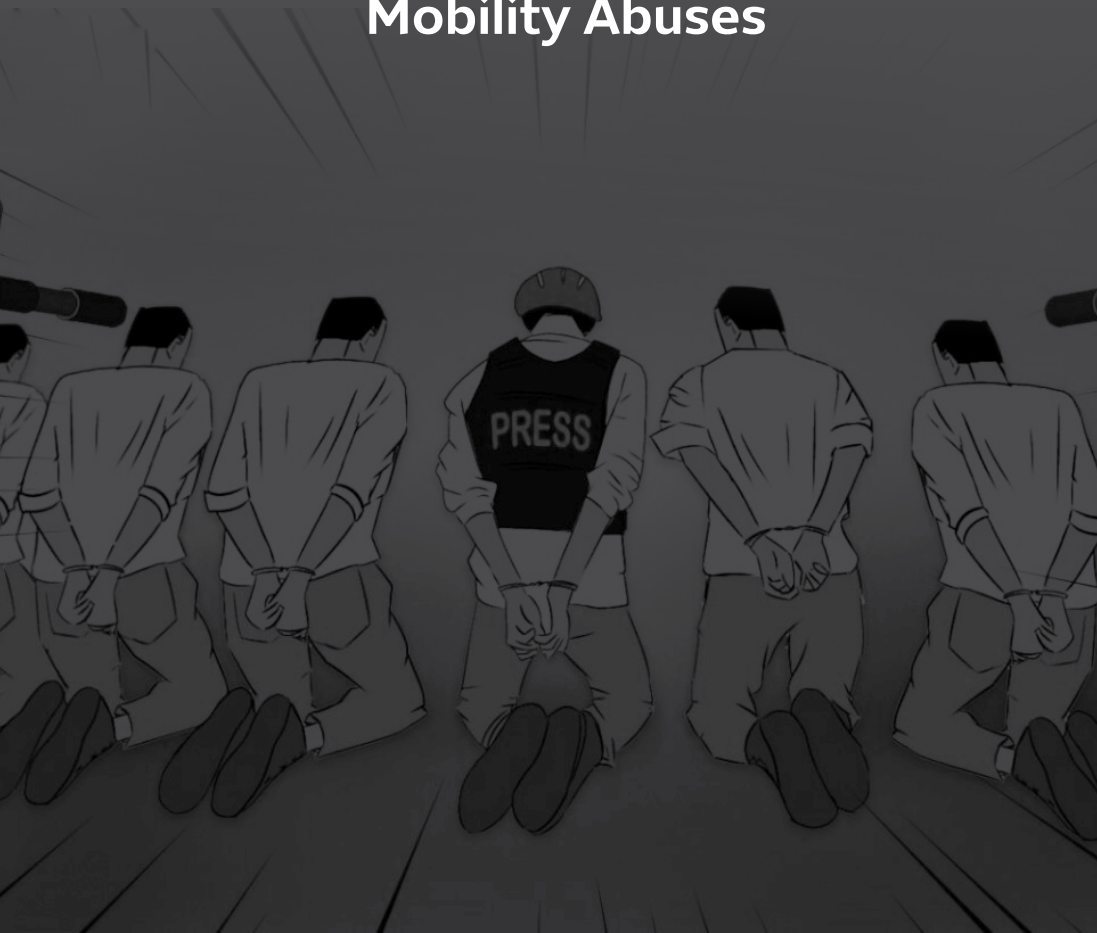


The data in the above chart indicates that 71% of respondents whose privacy was violated and whose phones were searched confirmed that their photos and videos were among the main items inspected. Meanwhile, 53% reported that their SMS messages were examined, and 43% said their call logs were reviewed. As for instant messaging applications (such as WhatsApp and Telegram), they were the most targeted, with

78% of participants confirming that these were searched during their detention.

This pattern demonstrates that the violations went beyond security checks and became a direct intrusion into personal life and legally protected professional privacy. This constitutes a violation of Article (17) of the ICCPR, which prohibits arbitrary interference with correspondence and private life.

Voices From The Road: Journalists Testify To Travel and Mobility Abuses



I Violation of Privacy:

Journalist (M.H.), who works at a local radio station, says his frequent overland trips to Marib governorate, either to attend media trainings or to participate in professional exchanges, have become increasingly risky. Each time, before entering the Al-Mujaama' area inside Marib city, the vehicle he is traveling in is stopped at the first of four checkpoints controlled by Yemeni government forces. There, passengers' IDs are taken, and they are forced to wait for a long time until the documents are returned, an ordeal applied to all.

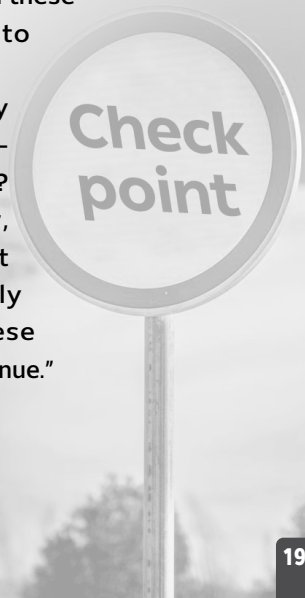
He adds that on one occasion, during questioning, he was asked to step out of the vehicle. The interrogation began as soon as one soldier learned that his profession was "journalist."

(M.H.) recounts the details: "First, they asked me and my colleague about the purpose of our travel. I told them I was going to attend media training, and that my friend was the driver. The moment they learned I was a journalist; they demanded both our phones and asked us to unlock them."

Expecting only a superficial check, the journalist and his friend were stunned when the soldier walked away with the phones and began an in-depth inspection.

According to (M.H.): "The checkpoint guard returned and demanded the unlock codes for WhatsApp. He then went through our chats one by one and even used the search feature to type in certain keywords, looking for them in the conversations."

(M.H.) concludes angrily: "Fine, I'm a journalist, and maybe they want to harass me because of my profession. But what about the driver? Why was his privacy also violated? Is the purpose of these checkpoints to intimidate drivers so they stop transporting journalists? I don't know, but that's what will eventually happen if these practices continue."



Security Traps:

Journalist (F.A.) was stopped at a military checkpoint run by Houthi forces in Al-Hawban, northeast of Taiz, while traveling to the city to obtain a passport. He told the Marsadak:

“When they stopped me, the soldier collected my ID along with the IDs of the other passengers. Then he came back shouting: ‘The journalist must get off the bus.’ I was shocked, how did he know? Later it turned out the checkpoint guard had entered my data into an iPad they had on hand and retrieved all my information.”

The interrogation began immediately, and his detention lasted for five hours until tribal figures intervened to secure his release, under the condition that he would return later.

The journalist explains: “The intelligence service had summoned me previously, back in 2021, over my reporting. This shows that the Houthis have developed advanced methods to identify travelers, through an information network linked to different security agencies in their areas of control. This means a journalist’s movements are tracked, and his life is constantly at risk.”

Al-Rabat Checkpoint: A Nightmare Gateway to Aden:

Journalist (M.A.) was heading to Aden International Airport to travel to Jordan for a human rights event on transitional justice. He was stopped at the Al-Rabat checkpoint, one of the most prominent points controlled by the Southern Transitional Council (STC) forces.

He told Marsadak: "As soon as we handed over our passports, the checkpoint personnel began calling out our names. When they saw my profession listed as 'journalist,' their attitude shifted instantly. They ordered me off the bus immediately, and a torrent of insults and accusations followed."

The journalist was taken aside and accused of working for hostile entities, while subjected to repeated verbal and physical intimidation: "They accused me of spying and even tried to assault me," the journalist added.

He was ordered to unlock his phone and his bag was searched. Upon finding \$100 he had set aside for travel expenses, the checkpoint personnel confiscated it by force, without issuing any receipt. "Under threats of detention on espionage charges, I agreed to let them keep the money in exchange for my release and safe passage."

He described the experience as humiliating and terrifying, emphasizing that simply revealing one's profession as a journalist is enough to turn them into a suspect, exposed to blackmail and abuse.

Searching for a Charge:

One journalist described his ordeal: "I was overwhelmed with anger watching a checkpoint personnel search through my phone, entering WhatsApp, typing in specific keywords, then scrolling through my personal photos. I can't even describe what I felt at that moment."

This was the experience of journalist (M.N.), who was returning from a trip to Taiz and heading to Cairo via Aden. At the Al-Ra-

bat checkpoint in Aden, checkpoint personnel stopped him.

Despite holding a visa and all necessary travel documents, the mere word “journalist” on his passport changed everything: “The insults and threats began. The interrogation lasted two hours. The officer’s hostile questioning made it clear he was looking for any slip to use against me. He then hurled curses I can’t repeat and refused to let me leave until I paid him money.

Most journalists are forced to conceal their profession while traveling between governorates. When their identity is revealed, through the profession listed in passports or other documents, they face dangerous moments.

Journalists are treated as suspects by security forces and armed groups loyal to different factions across Yemen who control checkpoints. The burden falls on the journalist to prove otherwise. As a result, many conceal their professional identity, trying to appear as ordinary travelers. Yet even this doesn’t shield them from harm, as Yemen’s roads have become daily instruments of oppression against all citizens, especially journalists.

Security Circulars:

In another incident in Abyan governorate, journalist (R.M.) was returning from filming a report for a TV channel when he was stopped by soldiers at a checkpoint. His camera and phone were confiscated, and he was subjected to verbal abuse and obscene insults.

It didn’t stop there, he was physically assaulted and detained in a small room at the checkpoint.

He recalls: “The checkpoint commander ordered his soldiers to strip me. They actually began unbuckling my belt in an attempt to humiliate me. Only when another officer intervened did they

stop. The whole incident was psychological torture. I felt they wanted to completely break me.”

Being well-known as a journalist in Abyan made him a constant target of surveillance and threats. He said: “My name was circulated across checkpoints in the governorate. I had to travel in disguise and use informal routes between 2013 and 2014 to avoid arrest, until tribal mediators intervened. My name was finally removed from the blacklist, but only after I signed a pledge to stop writing or criticizing the authorities at that time.

Agreed Measures:

Though entrance checkpoints vary between areas controlled by different factions, the accusations remain the same.

Journalist (J.A.) was stopped twice during the same trip at two different entrances to Taiz after soldiers learned of his profession.

- The first time, Houthi forces detained him until late at night, forcing the driver and other passengers to leave without him. He was interrogated and his phone was confiscated on the grounds that he was “a journalist loyal to the Yemeni government.”

- The second time, entering from the opposite side, government forces stopped him, searched his phone, and accused him of working for “Houthi media” before finally allowing him through.

Female Journalists Under Detention:

Normally, women in Yemen pass through checkpoints more easily, as social norms traditionally consider the searching or detention of women shameful and inappropriate. However, since the war escalated in early 2015, these cultural values have eroded, especially when it comes to female journalists, according to several testimonies.

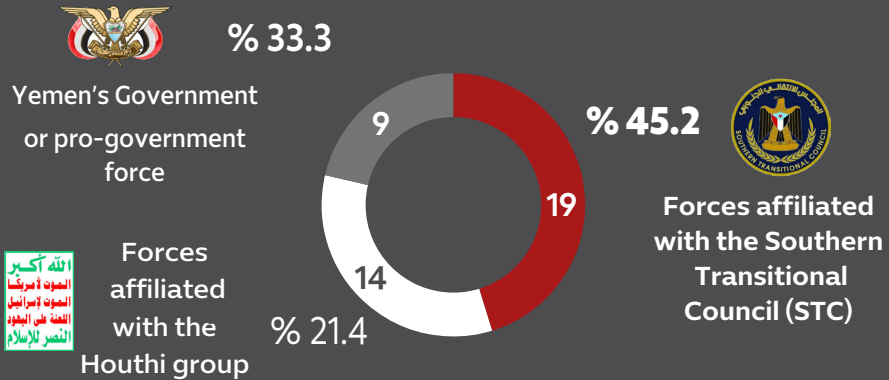
Female Journalist (E.A.) recounted that during a field assignment in 2023, she and her husband were stopped by Houthi forces in Khawlan Al-Tiyal district, Sana'a governorate. They were detained from 11 a.m. until 2 a.m. the next day.

Their detention came after photographing geographic locations deemed "sensitive" by the security forces. They were taken to the Khawlan police station and subjected to lengthy interrogation from morning until midnight.

She told the Marsadak: "We were both interrogated. They inspected my personal camera, went through its contents, then searched for our phones. We were forced to delete photos and videos they considered 'inappropriate,' even though there was no clear criminal charge."

The ordeal continued as they were forced to sign a written pledge not to film again. Their camera was confiscated until the following day, and they were only released once investigators confirmed the "safety" of the material, according to (E.A.).

Perpetrators Of Violations:



The findings indicate that violations are not confined to a single group or geographic area but are systematically practiced across different zones of control. While the STC forces accounted for the largest percentage of violations reported in this survey, long-term monitoring by

the Marsadak since late 2014 shows that many journalists in Houthi-controlled areas refrain entirely from traveling, fearing strict surveillance, security summons, or outright travel bans, forms of repression that the Marsadak previously documented, especially in its 2022 report ⁴.



4- <https://marsadak.org/en/annualreport22-2/>

Financial Extortion and Other Abuses:

16 participants (38%) confirmed that they were subjected to direct financial extortion at checkpoints in exchange for being allowed to continue their travel and avoid detention or being denied passage.

In November 2022, journalist (A.S.) was traveling to Jordan to participate in a conference on journalism. While passing through a security checkpoint in Aden with two colleagues, they were stopped by STC forces. Their phones were confiscated and thoroughly searched, including photos, videos, text messages, messaging app chats, emails, call logs, and even hidden files and apps, according to testimonies.

(A.S.) explained: "From one colleague's phone, the armed men discovered that our group worked in media. They immediately accused us of collaborating with the Houthis. We were detained for three hours, and the ordeal ended only after negotiating a payment of 500 Saudi Riyals in exchange for our release."

This was not his only incident. He had previously been stopped and searched at checkpoints in Hodeidah and Marib, where he was either asked for money, or pressured to provide guarantees from influential figures. He was also forced to hand over his device passwords, though no content was deleted.

Privacy Violations and Theft:

In 2024, while leaving Aden Airport toward Taiz with three colleagues, journalist (A.F.) was stopped at a checkpoint manned by STC forces.

Once the officers discovered they were journalists, they subjected them to an invasive inspection of their phones, videos, text messages, social media conversations, contacts, and call logs.

(A.F.) recounts: “We were insulted, humiliated with obscene language, and threatened with imprisonment. They accused us of working for the Houthis.”

The violations went further. The security officers took screenshots of the phones without informing the journalists of their content or intended use, despite warnings that some photos were of a personal and private nature.

“We told them we had private photos, but they ignored us and took whatever they wanted,” said (A.F.).

The group was detained for about an hour, subjected to insults and threats, until one officer offered to “help” them in exchange for money.

“We only had about 40,000 Yemeni Rials. After negotiation, he agreed to take that amount in exchange for letting us go,” said the journalist.



Impacts and Consequences of Violations on Journalists:

Survey findings and accompanying testimonies revealed that these violations do not merely cause temporary harm, they leave deep psychological and professional scars that accumulate over time and threaten the sustainability of journalism in Yemen.

69% of participants reported that such abuses directly affected their field reporting, mental health, and professional productivity. Many described a constant sense of threat and surveillance, forcing them to avoid travel, use false professional identities, or abandon sensitive coverage altogether.

12% of participants decided to stop traveling entirely, despite the economic and professional costs.

Others said they imposed strict self-censorship, avoiding coverage of political or conflict-related issues, or publishing under pseudonyms, to reduce risks at checkpoints.

These impacts, though appearing individual, represent a structural threat: shrinking independent journalism, spreading fear, fueling self-censorship, and hollowing out journalism's watchdog role, amounting to a silent but growing threat to media freedom in Yemen.

Rising Self-Censorship:

One of the most concerning trends highlighted in this report is the escalation of self-censorship among Yemeni journalists as a direct response to repeated checkpoint violations.

Respondents explained that: Forced phone searches, aggressive questioning about journalistic content, and device confiscation and threats, all pushed them into heavy self-censorship, sometimes to the extent of avoiding coverage altogether, using

alternative publishing platforms, altering story topics, or publishing anonymously.

Some even wipe their devices of journalistic material before travel, use separate memory cards, or rely on devices not linked to their names. Others admitted they avoid documentation in certain areas, even when human-interest stories exist, fearing that their activities could be interpreted as a “security threat.”



«I Am, Yet I Am Not»

Journalist (M.Y.) said: «I've had to hide behind pseudonyms in my journalism out of fear of being tracked by warring parties, especially since I move between areas controlled by different security forces.»

He added: «Yes, it gives me some safety, but it also deprives me of credit for my work, weakens my professional record, and reduces my chances of applying for programs or opportunities that require direct links to my published journalism.»

An Informant in My Pocket

Female Journalist (A.W.) recounted: "I spent an entire night going through my phone before traveling from Sana'a to Taiz for a training opportunity. I deleted everything that could get me stopped or arrested, videos, photos, then WhatsApp chats related to my journalism.

I know checkpoints guards search for certain keywords like 'Houthi,' 'STC,' and others, so I even checked Messenger, SMS, and my contacts list."

Fear of checkpoint searches, especially phone inspections, has become a routine anxiety for Yemeni journalists. It affects not only the journey but also their entire work approach, forcing them to adopt survival measures that weaken their visibility and professional presence.

This self-censorship, though seemingly a personal choice, is among the most dangerous outcomes of systematic violations. It turns unofficial repression into internalized silencing mechanisms, stripping journalism of its watchdog role and emptying the profession of its core meaning as an independent public voice.

Psychological Analysis of the Impact of Violations

To obtain an accurate psychological description of the possible effects resulting from the violations faced by journalists at security checkpoints, the direct testimonies of participants were reformulated into the following four questions:




- When someone is threatened and resorts to harsh preventive behaviors that reduce their usual performance, how can the condition be described and what are the possible psychological effects?
- When someone is repeatedly insulted and responds by withdrawing and avoiding returning to that place, how can the condition be described and what are the possible psychological effects?

- When someone experiences a violation of privacy and blackmail, then decides to completely stop working, how can the condition be described and what are the possible psychological effects?
- What kind of psychological protection measures do these individuals need?

The questions were presented to Dr. Waleed Al-Rabbasi, a well-known psychologist and member of the psychosocial support team of the Marsadak (Yemeni Media Freedoms Observatory). He provided psychological descriptions of these cases, as well as the recommended therapeutic interventions, summarized as follows:

When exposed to dangers such as threats or insults, a person begins

to use psychological defense mechanisms to avoid feeling helpless. These include:

-  **Denial:** ignoring the presence of danger or minimizing its impact on one's awareness.
-  **Repression:** attempting to suppress painful emotions or thoughts.
-  **Turning anger inward:** directing frustration against oneself as an internal reaction to the inability to face the external situation.

This mix of defense mechanisms results in overly cautious self-monitoring and restricted spontaneous behavior, which weakens normal performance and increases stress and fear. If such responses are repeated without healthy emotional release, they may develop into psychological disorders such as anxiety or depression, leaving long-term impacts on self-confidence and the sense of safety.

Psychologically, this is considered a natural defensive response that occurs as a result of feeling unsafe. It is classified under avoidant responses, behaviors the mind resorts to in order to protect itself from repeated pain or threats.

Although avoidance offers temporary relief, its persistence reinforces fear, amplifies it within the individual, increases anxiety, and undermines confidence in oneself and others. Over time, this can limit social adaptability and, if left untreated, evolve into disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), especially if the violation involves humiliation or threats to dignity or personal safety.

The second type of response is described as an acute psychological reaction resulting from the loss of a sense of safety and trust, known as defensive withdrawal. In this case, the individual feels their environment is no

longer safe and that continuing their work exposes them to further harm, so they choose isolation as a means of self-protection, even at the cost of losing their job or professional identity.

If not addressed by a specialist, this response may develop into more serious complications such as major depression, generalized anxiety, or PTSD. In many cases, it evolves into persecutory delusions: direct threats and privacy violations, especially when accompanied by helplessness or humiliation, can trigger obsessive fears that gradually harden into fixed beliefs of being targeted or monitored. This risk increases if the individual already suffers from social isolation, has a prior history of mental health issues, or lacks timely therapeutic intervention.

Stopping work after being threatened is not merely a temporary withdrawal; it may be a sign of a deeper psychological crisis that requires professional interven-

tion to prevent the entrenchment of paranoia or the development of long-term disorders.

The necessary psychological interventions should aim to restore a sense of safety and reduce the trauma's impact on performance and behavior within the person's environment. These include:

1. **Providing a safe environment:** strengthening laws that prohibit threats and privacy violations, ensuring confidentiality in complaint handling, and preserving individuals' dignity.
2. **Referral to specialists:** directing affected cases showing signs of instability to mental health professionals for initial psychological assessment and support in managing emotions such as fear, anxiety, withdrawal, or loss of control.
3. **Therapeutic sessions:** offering individual or group sessions focused on devel-

oping coping strategies, boosting self-confidence, rebuilding a sense of safety, and reshaping negative thoughts caused by the experience.

4. Awareness and education programs for professionals through regular sessions that cover:



Understanding psychological responses to stress and threats.



Strengthening self-care and psychological resilience.



Raising awareness of individual rights and available protection mechanisms.



Training staff to recognize early signs of psychological distress.

5. Strengthening preventive mechanisms in professional environments by





encouraging safe reporting of threats and ensuring both psychological and administrative protection for whistleblowers.

6. Monitoring ongoing cases that show persistent or escalating symptoms such as complete withdrawal, poor performance, or persecutory delusions, with referrals to specialized treatment centers.

Weak Reporting and Lack of Legal Awareness

Analysis of survey data revealed that the majority of journalists subjected to violations during travel took no legal or rights-based action to report or document what they experienced. Out of 33 respondents, 27 journalists said they had suffered direct violations but did not submit a complaint to any official, legal, or media body, representing a shocking 81.8% of affected participants.

The reasons cited for not reporting are:

-  Fear of retaliation or further harassment.
-  Lack of trust in the authorities' ability to take meaningful action.
-  Absence of clear and safe complaint mechanisms.
-  A widespread belief that reporting does not change anything or lead to accountability.

This high percentage is not only an indicator of weak legal awareness but also a sign of the deep lack of trust journalists feel toward the legal and institutional frameworks that are supposed to protect them. It also reflects their sense of vulnerability and abandonment in the face of repeated violations, even when these are well-documented and supported by evidence.

What makes this finding even more alarming is that such a high number of unreported cases suggests that the documented 2,630 violations since 2015 (according to the Marsadak) may represent only a small fraction of the true scale of violations.

These figures reveal a frightening reality for press freedom in Yemen: violations have become so normalized that they often go unreported, adapted to, and even quietly endured.

Legal Analysis of Forms of Violence Against Male and Female Journalists

By: Dr. Hiba Ali Aidaroos

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The violations committed against male and female journalists in Yemen are a clear indicator of the grave challenges facing freedom of expression and human rights in the context of a complex armed conflict and near-total absence of accountability. Despite the clarity of national constitutional and legislative provisions, as well as Yemen's international obligations, practices on the ground reveal a troubling pattern of abuses, often committed by security authorities or conflict parties. In many cases, state tools themselves are employed to perpetrate these violations.

The search of personal electronic devices without judicial authori-

zation is one of the most serious infringements on the right to privacy. This directly contravenes Article (53)⁵ of the Yemen's Constitution, which prohibits the search of persons or their property without judicial permission. The same principle is reinforced by Criminal Procedure Law⁶, which requires a warrant from the Public Prosecution for searches (Arts.131,132). Furthermore, Article (169) of the Penal Code⁷ criminalizes unlawful searches.

At the international level, Article (17) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁸ explicitly prohibits arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy or correspondence.

5- <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/19992>

6- <https://www.refworld.org/legal/decrees/natlegbod/1994/en/35189>

7- <https://www.refworld.org/legal/decrees/natlegbod/1994/en/34402>

8- https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Thus, any search conducted outside this legal framework constitutes a dual violation of both constitutional and international standards and represents a serious breach of the rule of law.

The confiscation of devices or deletion of journalistic content without judicial authorization likewise undermines press freedom and violates the sanctity of private life. Legally, these practices are unlawful unless carried out under a judicial order. The Yemen's Constitution's Article (20) stipulates that: "General confiscation of property is prohibited, and confiscation is not permitted except by judicial ruling." Absent this, such acts could amount to crimes of "unlawful appropriation or destruction of private property" or "violation of privacy," depending on the circumstances. This aligns with Article (19) of the ICCPR, which guarantees the right to access and disseminate information. What makes these practices particularly concerning is

their frequent execution outside any formal legal framework, such as the confiscation of a journalist's phone in Zinjibar area, Abyan governorate, without record or opportunity for appeal.

Threats of violence or punishment constitute another violation that conflicts with both national law and international standards. Article (254) of the Penal Code criminalizes threats by any means intended to instill fear in the victim. This complements Article (7) of the ICCPR, which prohibits torture and all forms of cruel or degrading treatment. Such threats, especially when aimed at silencing female journalists or undermining their dignity, are grave human rights violations, as in the case of a journalist threatened with being forcibly taken to the "morality police," directly threatening her bodily and professional integrity.

Financial extortion has also become a tool to silence or punish journalists. Under Article (313)

of the Penal Code, extortion is a punishable crime when money is unlawfully taken through threats or coercion. This provision aligns with the UN Convention Against Corruption, which criminalizes extortion, particularly when committed by public officials. The case of a journalist subjected to financial extortion in Ataq district in Shabwah governorate demonstrates how the security environment is exploited to impose unlawful sanctions that violate personal freedom.

Testimonies and field data confirm that these acts are not isolated incidents, but part of a broader pattern of systematic repression perpetrated by both conflict parties and official authorities. Female journalists are disproportionately affected, as gender-based violence intersects

with restrictions on journalistic work. This reality highlights the vulnerability of women in the media sector and the absence of legal and institutional protection frameworks.

Thus, these violations must be documented as legal and human rights evidence that could form the foundation for a reform process, one that aligns Yemeni legislation with international commitments, strengthens protection mechanisms, and enforces accountability to ensure a safe and independent working environment for journalists.

Report Findings

The report reveals that:

- The safety of the journalistic work environment continues to deteriorate.
- Hostility toward journalists is not new, but it has intensified significantly in recent years.
- Political actors have grown intolerant of the truth and have enabled their security apparatuses to monitor and target journalists.
- Journalists are being targeted at checkpoints solely for being journalists.
- Security authorities, documented in this report, have violated the Yemen's Constitution, disregarded existing laws, and breached Yemen's obligations under international conventions.
- There are no clear and safe channels for filing complaints.
- The lack of trust between journalists and security authorities prevents victims from reporting violations, either due to low expectations of justice or fear of retaliation—both scenarios posing risks to journalists' lives and rights.
- Security violations against journalists are escalating because of persistent impunity.
- Journalists are routinely exposed to psychological violence, trauma, and post-traumatic stress.
- Journalists in Yemen urgently need psychological support programs and advocacy campaigns to relieve security and psychological pressures.
- Journalists who have suffered violations require effective legal support programs to encourage reporting and to ensure access to justice and redress.

Recommendations

To IRG of Yemen and conflict parties:

- ☑ Immediately end all forms of security targeting of journalists during travel and ensure freedom of movement without arbitrary restrictions, in line with the Yemeni Constitution and international conventions.
- ☑ Abolish all unlawful procedures at checkpoints, particularly the search of personal devices and confiscation of property without judicial authorization.
- ☑ Review and update security protocols for checkpoint forces to ensure respect for journalists' privacy and freedom of movement and hold violators accountable.
- ☑ Conduct serious investigations into cases of financial extortion and physical or verbal abuse

against journalists and prosecute perpetrators in accordance with the law.

- ☑ Ensure that journalistic identity is never used as a pretext for detention, interrogation, or confiscation, and issue clear directives prohibiting such practices.

To civil society organizations and media outlets:

- ☑ Implement legal awareness and digital security campaigns for journalists, explaining their rights during travel, how to handle checkpoints, and how to safely document violations.
- ☑ Provide specialized training on digital security, encryption, secure cloud storage, risk assessment, and physical safety for journalists, strengthening their ability to protect themselves and their data.

- ✓ Raise awareness on the importance of reporting violations, build trust with victims, ensure confidentiality, and provide protective measures.

To the international community and actors concerned with freedom of expression:

- ✓ Pressure conflict parties in Yemen to fulfill their international obligations and end violations against journalists, particularly during travel.
- ✓ Link international support for local entities to strict respect for press freedom and journalist rights, monitored through independent oversight mechanisms.
- ✓ Support protection, documentation, and accountability programs run by independent Yemeni organizations to mon-

itor violations and promote a safe media environment.

- ✓ Support psychological and legal protection programs for journalists.
- ✓ Advocate internationally to classify the targeting of journalists during travel as a form of coercive censorship aimed at suppressing media work and shrinking civic space.

Conclusion

Freedom of expression is one of the most fundamental pillars of democracy, enabling citizens to participate in public life, holding authorities accountable, and shape decisions affecting their communities. It is also a vital tool for individuals and civil society to access and disseminate information, raise public awareness, and contribute to development. Moreover, freedom of expression plays a critical role in combating corruption by exposing wrongdoing and ensuring accountability.

Violations against freedom of expression and attacks on journalists are deliberate attempts to suppress the truth and manipulate public consciousness. Governmental failure to prosecute perpetrators or enforce punitive measures against these dangerous practices openly encourages their repetition, deprives victims of justice, and deters other journalists from covering high-risk events. The result is a vulnerable public sphere dominated by polarization, misinformation, and disinformation, as is the case in Yemen today.



The Studies and Economic Media Center (SEMC) is a leading Yemeni civil society organization dedicated to promoting economic awareness, transparency, and good governance. It actively encourages citizen participation in decision-making processes and advocates for the development of a professional and responsible media landscape in Yemen.

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Yemen Media Freedoms Observatory (MARSADAK) is a monitoring and information platform aimed at disseminating all matters relating to freedoms of opinion and expression in various Yemeni regions in a professional and independent manner, as well as, analyzing and advocating for journalists' issues at the local and international levels.

<https://marsadak.org/>



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