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## **Media Ownership and Monopoly: Legal Oversight and Public Interest Concerns in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

The pluralism of the media provides an indispensable element of democratic society, making sure that a variety of views, voices and stories is reflected in the arena of the public opinion. Nevertheless, there is a high rate of media ownership concentration in the hands of highly influential and wealthy media conglomerates in Pakistan and this has triggered serious doubts on accountability concerning democracies, freedom of expression and protection of the interest of people. The present paper is an attempt to examine the legal checks and balances, or rather the absence of the same, regarding the ownership of media in Pakistan with particular emphasis on the ramifications of the monopoly in information publishing. The paper proposes that the media concentration in ownership will compromise the democratic values that are embedded in the Constitution of Pakistan, especially the liberty of speech and access of various source of information defined under Article 19.

Despite having the supposed existence of bodies like Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) which are meant to curb the competition in media and limit the exercise of monopoly, their ability to enforce their findings is doubtful. The regulatory system governing media ownership in Pakistan is diversified, out-mode and in most aspects, unsuitable to deal with the challenges of cross-media convergence and media companies' consolidation. The biggest media houses including Jang/Geo, ARY, and Express have taken over the electronic media and have also been involved in the print and digital media to a great extent, constructing vertically and horizontally integrated media empires that control the opinion and political discourse of masses to a great extent.

The paper also provides a wider picture to the situation of Pakistan through a comparative perspective with the regulatory practices of other jurisdiction like India, the United Kingdom, and European Union. Such comparative perspectives indicate how in other democracies balancing freedom of press against anti-monopolizing protection has been tried out so as to maintain a vibrant, competitive media. Conversely, regulatory framework in Pakistan is not only institutionally weak but also politically influenced, especially in cases of PEMRA that has had a continuous allegation of regulatory capture and lack of independence.

To address the implication of the concentrated media ownership on the public interest, this paper will argue that the current system allows handpicking of



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reports, suppression of critics and backtracking of investigative journalism. The fact that transparency in media funding and ownership arrangement is done away with only adds to the malaise which leaves citizens at the mercy of biased and manipulated data flows. Conclusively, the paper requests that an ambitious agenda of legal change be put in place by introducing clear anti-concentration thresholds, strengthen institutional independence of media regulators, and the disclosure of ownership information. With such reforms only, can Pakistan harbor the prospects of preserving the democratic necessity of media pluralism and upholding the interest of the populace in the era of the monopolistic domination of information.

### Introduction

Free varied and unbiased media plays an essential role in the operation of every democratic community. It not only acts as a stage of societal then it also acts as a means of accountability which balances the power of state and corporate agents. Nonetheless, such a democratic responsibility is undermined greatly once ownership of the media is concentrated to the power of select few. In Pakistan, media ownership has recently become highly concentrated, which has led to a monopolistic system of media which in turn poses a threat to media pluralism, freedom of the editorial information and the right of people to have access to variety of information sources.

Pakistan has experienced a very fast development in media in the last twenty years. With the electronic media sector liberalized, especially after the formation of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) under the 2002 Ordinance the growth of the number of independent news channels and the media platforms were mushroomed. From this expansion, initially there was greater media freedom and competition, which on the contrary, created an environment in which media monopolies easily formed.<sup>1</sup> Culture and Media Conglomerates all over the world have figured out ways of dominating content production and distribution in fields both television, print, radio, and digital productions (conglomerates have been both vertically and horizontally integrated) Leading conglomerates like the Jang/ Geo Group, ARY Digital Network, and the Express Media Group have been some of the leaders of this ordeal.<sup>2</sup>

Although Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan provides that every person has the right to be able to express themselves freely, both verbally and through publication and includes the right and freedom of speech, press and expression, such protections are being further compromised by the effects of concentrated media ownership.<sup>3</sup> As a small group of companies operates most of the media sources, the sphere of views representing to the people are reduced, the opinion dissenting with the mainstream is side-lined, and the purpose of the journalists is frequently set on the commercial or political profit rather than directed

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<sup>1</sup> "(PDF) Broadcast Media, Regulation and Freedom of Expression in Pakistan," *ResearchGate*, ahead of print, April 24, 2025, [https://doi.org/10.31703/glsr.2021\(VI-I\).08](https://doi.org/10.31703/glsr.2021(VI-I).08).

<sup>2</sup> "ResearchPaper," n.d.

<sup>3</sup> Abida Hassan et al., "A Critical Analysis of Salient Amendments in the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan.1973," *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2024): 2, [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2024\(5-II-S\)11](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2024(5-II-S)11).



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towards the general welfare of people. In a case like this, freedom of speech will be just a myth—it is just protected on paper but practically empty.

This menace worsened by the poor regulatory measures taken by authorities like the PEMRA and Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP). These, which are usually compromised by politics and bureaucratic obstruction in the form of an absence of institutional independence, have not managed to implement efficient methods to stop cross-ownership and to fulfill anti-monopoly protection.<sup>4</sup> The result is a media system in which a small number of players have out of proportion influence on the public discourse, policy debates and even elections.

This paper will analyse the legal environment under which the media ownership in Pakistan is left and how the gaps in structures and institutions contribute to the monopolistic nature in media ownership and deeper consequences of the media occupied nature on the interests of the people and the democratic scrutiny. It also aims at making use of international comparative models to present legal and regulatory changes that can guarantee a more pluralistic transparent, and accountable media environment in Pakistan.

### **Legal Framework Governing Media Ownership in Pakistan**

The legal design that governs the media ownership in Pakistan is not only fractured but incompletely developed to offer enough protection to thwart the concentration of monopolies and cross-media ownership. Although the Constitution grants the freedom of speech and expression as a right under Article 19, a legal regime to reinforce the same provision in the wake of a media pluralism scenario is quite wanting.<sup>5</sup>

The main regulatory law is the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) Ordinance, 2002, which put in place a commission called PEMRA as the main body to license and regulate the operation of the private broadcasting media. The ordinance also gives PEMRA some powers to control media ownership but it lacks certain clauses barring or restricting cross-media ownership. Practically, this has found a way to enable the conglomerates to have interests in television, in the print industry and in the electronic industries, which has tightened the diversity of ownership in the media.<sup>6</sup>

Another twist in the regulatory framework is that of the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP), which has been created under the Competition Act, 2010. Although CCP is entrusted with the responsibility of deterring the misuse of market power, it has only had a minimal role to play in management of the media monopolies. No anti concentration or ownership limits are based on the industry which has enabled large media groups to grow uninhibited and in many instances merging or buying the competition all with no regulatory opposition. Besides, CCP intervention in the media has been partial and has not really been effective as there have been legal and political twists in the ownership

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<sup>4</sup> "Role of Media in Political Polarization: Impacts on Democracy in Pakistan | Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.ojs.plhr.org.pk/journal/article/view/579>.

<sup>5</sup> Hassan et al., "A Critical Analysis of Salient Amendments in the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan.1973."

<sup>6</sup> "The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Ordinance, 2002 (Ordinance No. XIII of 2002), Pakistan, WIPO Lex," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/15871>.



of media.<sup>7</sup>

The other significant exclusion in the existing structure is lacking transparency laws on ownership. In contrast to jurisdictions, in which the media organizations have to publicly declare the names of beneficial owners and their sources of funding, Pakistani legislation does not provide any such responsibility. This has brought about the veil of transparency on the financial and political orientation of media houses, making them to be environments prone to influence, manipulation and agenda setting.<sup>8</sup>

On a rare occasion, the judiciary has tried to step in when there are lapses in the regulation or excessive concentration, but its intervention has not resulted in long term structural changes. Without transparent legislative guidance and lack of an independent oversight body, the performance of the PEMRA has been characterized by accusations of being politically-bent, selective in their application and has been claimed to be under regulatory capture. The PEMRA also lacks the capacity to act as an independent regulator in appointments as they are usually botched without much consultation or due process.<sup>9</sup>

In short though Pakistan has institutions theoretically endowed with the power to provide guidance over competition in the media the legal tools at their disposal are either too restrained, too uneven or politically tainted to be of much service in this respect. The existing framework not only lacks normative transparency but it also lacks enforcement power which in turn allows uncontrolled growth of media empires distorting the verbal space as well as democracies.

### **Media Concentration in Pakistan: A Critical Overview**

Media Concentration in Pakistan Media Concentration in a Developing Country like Pakistan A Critical Overview The extent of media concentration in Pakistan has become so high such that a few media conglomerates produce, share, and shape most of the content, as well as the national discourse. This monopoly has not been coincidental but has come out as a direct implication of lax legal provisions and loose regulatory provision that have enabled the major actors to have both vertical and horizontal platform expansion. Such ownership forms have important implications on media diversity, media independence, and quality of the democratic participation.

The largest case is the Jang Group that owns Geo News, The News International and the Urdu-language daily Jang. This vertically incorporated business has massive power in the print, television and digital media. In the same breath, the ARY Digital Network possesses a wide selection of televisions channel and newspaper as well as radio stations in that it tends to achieve a corporate-

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<sup>7</sup> "Competition Commission of Pakistan," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.cc.gov.pk/>.

<sup>8</sup> Alexandra Figueira and Elsa Costa e Silva, "Transparency as a Quality Dimension: Media Ownership and the Challenges of (In)Visibility," trans. Anabela Delgado, *Comunicação e Sociedade*, no. 44 (December 2023): 44.

<sup>9</sup> "Consolidation in the Name of Regulation: The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and the Concentration of Media Ownership in Pakistan | Request PDF," *ResearchGate*, n.d., accessed July 21, 2025, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289239506\\_Consolidation\\_in\\_the\\_name\\_of\\_regulation\\_The\\_Pakistan\\_electronic\\_media\\_regulatory\\_authority\\_PEMRA\\_and\\_the\\_concentration\\_of\\_media\\_ownership\\_in\\_Pakistan](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289239506_Consolidation_in_the_name_of_regulation_The_Pakistan_electronic_media_regulatory_authority_PEMRA_and_the_concentration_of_media_ownership_in_Pakistan).



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political orientation which has influenced the edit policies and priority of news in its reporting. The other important agent, Express Media Group now owns Express News, Daily Express and other Urdu and English media, another step in cross-platform consolidation.<sup>10</sup>

Through such structural dominance, media owners enjoy vast power over what is narrated, the way it is narrated and also that which is not narrated at all. Although there might not be anti-monopoly laws in the media field, such conglomerates have gained excessive authority over the ability to define how people are to perceive information and how politics will develop discourse. The editorial freedom is a back seat corporate interest and this gives place to self-censorship, biased coverage and suppression of any other view or the dissenting voice.<sup>11</sup>

Another aspect of its worsening is the financial set-up of these media houses. Most of them are dependent on government advertising accounts, which forms some kind of conflict of interest and promotion of state narratives. False news usually targets the news media that is skeptical of the state institutions and according to independent media monitors, this could see the withdrawal of advertisement revenue or even legal or unofficial prohibition which results in a chilling effect which in itself amounts or supports monopoly powers.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the online switch did not interrupt such monopolies, whereas they expanded their influence. The rapid responses of these conglomerates by introducing web-based portals, YouTube channels and even mobile apps with a standard appropriation of old news in new media with new avenues rarely permitting the expression of the independent voice. What comes out of all this is a media environment in which plurality is a fake and where a single editorial line still prevails across several platforms.<sup>13</sup>

This trend is repeated in empirical research as well as media audit in Pakistan. Studies done by media rights agencies have recorded concentration of ownership and associated it with minimal viewpoint diversity, editor manipulation, and accountability. What these studies note is that unless some powerful anti-concentration legislation is brought in by the state, nothing much will change and the scenario will further worsen; this will again lead to reduced democratic accountability and participation of the citizen.<sup>14</sup>

### **Comparative Analysis: Media Ownership Laws in the UK, India, and the European Union**

When analyzing the problems affecting Pakistan today, in terms of media concentration, it is important to look at the approaches used by other democratic

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<sup>10</sup> "State Control, Corporate Interests, and Media Independence in Pakistan - Raza Rumi," <https://Pide.Org.Pk/>, n.d., accessed July 21, 2025, <https://pide.org.pk/research/state-control-corporate-interests-and-media-independence-in-pakistan-raza-rumi/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Surviving the Storm: How Pakistan's Media Outlets Are Adapting to Stay Afloat," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.journalismpakistan.com/surviving-the-storm-how-pakistans-media-outlets-are-adapting-to-stay-afloat>.

<sup>12</sup> "Special Reports - FNPk," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.fnpr.org/category/special-reports/>.

<sup>13</sup> "Special Reports - FNPk."

<sup>14</sup> "Pak Institute For Peace Studies Pvt Ltd. (PIPS) – An Independent Think-Tank," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.pakpips.com/>.





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nations in relation to the question of the role that media freedom plays in relation to restricting ownership. Nations like United Kingdom, India and states within European Union (EU) have all formulated laws and institutions which aim at maintaining pluralistic media and avoiding monopoly and maintaining the interest of the populace. Comparative study provides an interesting source of clarification on how regulation clarity, ownership thresholds and institutional independency can effectively limit media grouping- proffering sources relevant to change in Pakistan.

### **United Kingdom**

The UK has come up with a strong and dynamic legal system to curb media concentration and this is mostly through the Communications Act 2003 and the authority that Ofcom, an independent communications regulator of the country, has over it. In mergers and acquisitions of the media, the law has ensured that their mergers and acquisitions must be assessed on the basis of whether they will affect media plurality and editorial independence. Ofcom undertakes tests of the public interest where they find that mergers can eliminate wide range of perspectives in the market significantly.<sup>15</sup> Also, mergers that are likely to affect the interest of the people can be blocked or put on conditions by the UK competition authority. In this way it makes not only economic but also editorial variety.

### **India**

It is also characterized with rising media consolidation in India similar to that observed in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the legal structure is disintegrated in it. Regulation The fees are controlled by an act Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 and Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 and this works under different parts of the media, although there is no cross-ownership law encompassing law all the media at federal level. Nevertheless, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has made a few recommendations to the government that favors restriction on cross-media control, and proposing market share limits on both broadcasters and distributors.<sup>16</sup> These recommendations are not binding but it represents a policy sensitivity of risks of media concentration unchecked.

### **European Union**

Article 11 (2) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights that assures media pluralism is the regulatory framework embraced by EU. Whilst the individual member states are mainly obliged to regulate media, the European Commission keeps an eye on the owner's concentration in their broader competition policy. One of the examples is the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) supported by the EU and allowing evaluating the threats to the freedom and diversity of the media in EU member states annually.<sup>17</sup> National laws that incur the limits on cross-ownerships, transparency requirements, as well as independent regulatory

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<sup>15</sup> "Media Ownership Rules Review," [Www.Ofcom.Org.Uk](http://www.ofcom.org.uk), July 31, 2009, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-plurality/morr>.

<sup>16</sup> Chavak Debraj Deb, "A Look into the Ownership and Evolution of Indian Media," *Bayan College International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 1, no. 02 (2021): 02, <http://bayancollegeijmr.com/index.php/ijmr/article/view/52>.

<sup>17</sup> "Media Pluralism Monitor 2023 – Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://cmpf.eui.eu/media-pluralism-monitor-2023/>.



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organs to deal with pluralism risks have been incorporated within the boundaries of several nations within the EU.<sup>18</sup>

### **Relevance for Pakistan**

Such comparative frameworks illustrate that a coherent regulatory framework beyond licensing is needed. Regulation with obligatory disclosure of ownership and examination of merger, as well as outdoors evaluation by free of charge individuals are imperative gadgets that are neither having a place in generally Pakistan media doctrines. Pakistan does not have a statutory framework of assessing the influence of the ownership pattern on content pluralism as seen in the UK or the EU. The example of India can illustrate the dangers of regulatory fragmentation, which Pakistan has been struggling with as well. Put together, such international experiences justify the critical need of Pakistan to amalgamate structural protection in its media regulations with the intention of providing pluralism, responsibility and editorial freedom.<sup>19</sup>

### **Legal Oversight vs. Political Control: Regulatory Capture of PEMRA?**

Although the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) was created to serve as an independent agency that guarantees balanced development and diversity of media, so far it has a history of operational patterns characterized by a rather common phenomenon like regulatory capture and political manipulation. Instead of playing a role as an impartial good political measure of media standards and ownership control, PEMRA has been frequently charged with partial application of laws, muffling critics as well as acting in the benefits of the ruling regime. This conflict between the forces of law and of politics is an essential impediment towards realization of media pluralism in Pakistan.

PEMRA was constituted under the 2002 Ordinance with a mandate to regulate the licensing and functioning of electronic media, and to prevent monopolistic practices in broadcast ownership. The law theoretically provides PEMRA with autonomy; however, its structural design leaves it vulnerable to political influence. The appointment of the Chairman and members is done directly by the federal government, with no independent parliamentary oversight, making the institution susceptible to executive control.<sup>20</sup> In multiple instances, media scholars and practitioners have pointed out that PEMRA has exercised its authority not to promote media diversity, but to suppress critical voices and protect political allies.<sup>21</sup>

One of the major criticisms is that PEMRA has been adopting an uneven

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<sup>18</sup> European Parliament, "Media Freedom and Pluralism | Legislative Train Schedule," European Parliament, accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-area-of-justice-and-fundamental-rights/file-media-freedom-and-pluralism>.

<sup>19</sup> "(PDF) Role of Media in Strengthening Democracy in Pakistan: Journalists' Perception," *ResearchGate*, n.d., accessed July 21, 2025, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316417388\\_Role\\_of\\_Media\\_in\\_Strengthening\\_Democracy\\_in\\_Pakistan\\_Journalists'\\_Perception](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316417388_Role_of_Media_in_Strengthening_Democracy_in_Pakistan_Journalists'_Perception).

<sup>20</sup> PAKISTAN ELECTRONIC MEDIA REGULATORY AUTHORITY ORDINANCE 2002 AS AMENDED BY THE PAKISTAN ELECTRONIC MEDIA REGULATORY AUTHORITY (AMENDMENT) ACT 2007 (ACT NO, n.d.

<sup>21</sup> "The Impact of Digital Media on Consumer Behavior: A Social Media Perspective | Insights: Journal of Humanities and Media Studies Review," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://insights-journal.com/index.php/insights/article/view/2>.



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approach to licencing and suspension authority. Channels which are seen to be hostile to the state institutions, especially those telecasting on civil-military affairs, human rights or corruption have been abruptly closed down, forced to withdraw the license or pay huge fines, many times without health hearings. On the other hand, media that is pro-government are often provided with laxity in handling of regulations.<sup>22</sup>

Such selective application has given rise to the claim that PEMRA is more of a censorship interest group than a regulator. The problem is further enhanced by non-existence of institutional checks over PEMRA decision making processes. Despite the Guide defines the establishment of a Council of Complaints, these councils lack power and are usually full of individuals with political powers. This way, the ability of PEMRA to perform objective adjudication is seriously impaired and it cannot have the independence required to face off formidable interests, political or corporate.<sup>23</sup>

Several times the structural flaws of PEMRA have been poised by international watchdogs and local media rights bodies. Instances when the regulatory discretion held by PEMRA is used to violate the freedom of speech by being viewed as a form of crackdown against those voices that are opposed are well documented by organizations like Reporters Without Borders, Freedom Network Pakistan etc. Lack of a legal firewall between the regulator and the executive makes PEMRA in an unsuitable position to put in place an effective media ownership regulation or promote fair competition in the broadcasting sector.<sup>24</sup>

Substantially, the essence of the regulatory capture is a weak point of the letter and the spirit of media law in Pakistan. Until and unless PEMRA functions with institutional independence in reality, any legal initiatives undertaken to restrict the monopolies of the media will only end up being nullified by the political influence. To eradicate this structural defect, it is vital to win back the confidence of the people on the regulatory regime and attain a media culture, which is characterized by pluralism and fairness.

### **Public Interest and the Right to Information: Is Media Monopoly Harming Democracy?**

A free and pluralistic media can be a positive service to the public interest in any existing democracy, which provides the citizens with a variety of sources of information, encourages critical discussion and checks power. But in Pakistan, such democratic functions are endangered by the concentration of media ownership that is increasing. With an increasing conglomeration of content and distribution control, fewer opinions are available, and this complicates the choice

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<sup>22</sup> "(PDF) Censorship vs. Freedom of Speech: Analyzing the Role of PEMRA in Regulating Pakistani Media [ 842 ] Censorship vs. Freedom of Speech: Analyzing the Role of PEMRA in Regulating Pakistani Media Censorship vs. Freedom of Speech: Analyzing the Role of PEMRA in Regulating Pakistani Media [ 843 ]," accessed July 21, 2025, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385753901\\_Censorship\\_vs\\_Freedom\\_of\\_Speech\\_Analyzing\\_the\\_Role\\_of\\_PEMRA\\_in\\_Regulating\\_Pakistani\\_Media\\_842\\_Censorship\\_vs\\_Freedom\\_of\\_Speech\\_Analyzing\\_the\\_Role\\_of\\_PEMRA\\_in\\_Regulating\\_Pakistani\\_Media\\_Censorship\\_vs\\_Fr](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385753901_Censorship_vs_Freedom_of_Speech_Analyzing_the_Role_of_PEMRA_in_Regulating_Pakistani_Media_842_Censorship_vs_Freedom_of_Speech_Analyzing_the_Role_of_PEMRA_in_Regulating_Pakistani_Media_Censorship_vs_Fr).

<sup>23</sup> Marco Mezzera and Safdar Sial, *Media and Governance in Pakistan: A Controversial yet Essential Relationship*, n.d.

<sup>24</sup> "Those We Must Not Leave behind - Martin Bright, 2023," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/03064220231165387>.





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that people can make or participate in the civic aspect.

The right to information though Article 19-A is a part of the constitution, gets eroded most of time since it gains ground when the media houses are run by the commercial or political interests of a few dominant forces. Although according to the law the citizens are entitled to information in all matters of public interest, the concentrated ownership of the media, which results in homogenization of media product, reduces the information quality and its diversity. The news reporting, a matter of business rather than a public service, defends the corporate interests of owners and editors and their editorial leanings based on advertisers, political benefactors or other corporate affiliations.<sup>25</sup>

Such a situation is problematic especially in regard to investigative journalism. It is in the interest of the media monopolies to avoid contents likely to jeopardize their business and political ties. Other issues or sensitive issues like corruption, security policy, and minority rights are usually under-reported or twisted in a manner. When they seem to challenge top stories that are spread by leading media houses, independent journalists are resisted institutionally, intimidated legally and economically sidelined.<sup>26</sup> This leads to distorted debates in the public because major concerns are either killed or redefined to fit in the agenda of the elite.

The effect is even stronger on the regional, linguistic and minority voices, who find it difficult to get their representation in the mainstream media. English and Urdu media, which are mostly in possession of large corporations based in cities, usually do not give importance to the contents of Baluchistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, interior-Sindh or tribal interest areas. his marginalization continues structural discrimination and deprives large parts of the population of their rights to have their say in the national dialog.<sup>27</sup> In its turn, it creates distrust, estrangement, and non-involvement in democratic processes.

These issues are upheld by empirical research. The researches by CSOs show that the ownership concentration can cause an agenda-setting bias in that media stories are delivered not as per their importance and objectivity but in the interest of specific owner interests. Such influenced prejudices tend to have an enormous impact on the voting conduct, policy deliberations, and the establishment of the public opinion, which culminates in what scholars refer to as the marketization of information.<sup>28</sup>

Media monopolies in this sense do indeed pose a threat to competition, but in the bigger picture they represent a structural threat to democracy as such. Where the democratic process is starved in the name of the corporate plan and where the flow of information is filtered through the myopic eyes of self-meaning, then the process of democracy is stagnated. Protecting the right to information, however, cannot consist only in openly following the content but the structural

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<sup>25</sup> "Category: ABM-Articles - PILDAT," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://pildat.org/category/abm-articles>.

<sup>26</sup> "Pakistan Archives - Committee to Protect Journalists," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://cpj.org/asia/pakistan/>.

<sup>27</sup> "Digitalrightsfoundation.Pk," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/>.

<sup>28</sup> "The Political Economy of Television News in Pakistan | 4 | Global Jour," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003327639-4/political-economy-television-news-pakistan-awais-saleem>.



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transformation of patterns of ownership, independence of editors and the equity of access.

### **Recommendations and Way Forward**

The high level of media mergence which is currently dominant in Pakistan is not only business problem, it is also structural barrier to democracy duty, civic responsibility and right of information to people of Pakistan. This crisis needs a variety of legal, institutional, and policy-based reform agenda. Unless structural reform is made, the attempts to maintain the independence and diversity of media will be either ineffectual or decorative in character.

#### **1. Enact a Cross-Media Ownership Law**

The paramount area of legislation requirement will be the introduction of a full-scale cross-media ownership regulatory system with clear restrictions as to the amount and quality of media platforms that a single organization may possess. This law must also not allow the same corporate entity to own controlling interests in the same market in television, radio, print and digital media. A competitive regulatory framework with ownership cap should be put in place which should be quite open and implemented by an independent authority.<sup>29</sup>

#### **2. Strengthen PEMRA's Institutional Independence**

The structural weakness of PEMRA, inability to be autonomous, is of great concern. The PEMRA Ordinance 2002 should be amended to change the mechanism of appointing the Chairman and the members of the Authority with reference to the parliamentary oversight and the incorporation of civil society. Moreover, there should be the transparent decision-making process, and it should be reviewed by courts and the society to prevent suspicions of bias and regulatory capture.<sup>30</sup>

#### **3. Empower the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP)**

The Competition Commission of Pakistan should be strengthened and directed to examine mergers and acquisitions and dominating tendencies particularly in the media field. CCP ought to come up with media specific competition policy that is measurable in market share and levels of ownership concentration. It should also be institutionally isolated against any political and corporate influence in order to guarantee its impartiality.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4. Mandate Ownership Transparency**

There should be legal reforms that make the ownership structures by the media, sources of their funding and beneficial interests publicly revealed. Media funding is not a transparent process, thus providing a platform of concealed political and business interests to determine content inside editorial departments. Making the disclosure a precondition to licensing would increase the accountability to the general population and minimize the use of hidden power in newsroom.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "Media Pluralism and Diversity | UNESCO," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en/media-pluralism-diversity>.

<sup>30</sup> Muhammad Zahid Rafique Yasir Aleem, "Regulation of Broadcast Media in Pakistan, UK, and Malaysia; A Comparative Analysis," *Competitive Education Research Journal* 2, no. 4 (2024): 4.

<sup>31</sup> "Competition Commission of Pakistan," accessed July 21, 2025, <https://www.cc.gov.pk/>.

<sup>32</sup> "The Precarious Path of Pakistan's Media Landscape: Navigating Freedom, Regulation, and Sustainability," <https://Pide.Org.Pk/>, n.d., accessed July 21, 2025, <https://pide.org.pk/research/the-precarious-path-of-pakistans-media-landscape-navigating-freedom-regulation-and-sustainability/>.



## **5. Support Community and Independent Media**

To secure pluralism in media state policy must actively promote non-profit, community and regional media projects by means of subsidies, legal support, and easy access to state advertising. These efforts may neutralize the influence of corporate press and give partial voices a boost, particularly those of the marginalized areas and language groups. 6. Create Public Interest Media literacy.<sup>33</sup>

## **6. Develop Public Interest Media Literacy**

Finally, the civil society should be subject to the reform. At the public level, media literacy increases the abilities of citizens to recognize biased, monopolized or manipulated material. Schools, Non-Governmental Organizations and Media Watchdogs ought to join hands to train citizens to be critical consumers of information and with this approach the society pressurizes the media owners to self-regulate.

Collectively such reforms strive to establish a democratic environment which is transparent and fair with the media. However, a change in the law will not be adequate enough without persevering political determination, independence of institutions and involvement of citizens. It is only then that Pakistan could curb the trend of media monopolization and regain the appropriate role that the media plays in democracies, namely being a democracy watchdog.

## **Conclusion**

The atmosphere of Pakistan media that was once hailed as a fast liberalization process and vitality is now gaining underlying changes active in the form of monopolization and power possession of the elite. Concentration of ownership in the hands of a few dominant conglomerates has diluted the pluralism necessary to keep a healthy state of democracy. Leading parts of Pakistan mainstream media have instead turned into outfits of private- or participant interest, filtering and generating stories, writing, and editorial approach that exclude the populace and encourage self-repression beneath a blanket of authorities news and curtailment of observations.

In this study, it has been developed that legal supervision systems especially the ones operated by PEMRA and Competition Commission are not in place to sufficiently present a challenge to this increasing emphasis of power within the media. There is no transparency of ownership, regulatory capture, and a weak enforcing structure, and mergers and cross-ownership have been permitted without control, and content is politicized in an unregulated fashion. Besides, the right to information which is one of the main pillars of constitutional democracy is nothing short of a rosy promise in case the very information system can be viewed through partisan and/or commercial perspective.

The results of such media monopoly are severe: lack of investigative reporting, undermined editorial independence, absence of the voice of regional and minority people and deception of the misinformed or controlled masses. Such consequences create an existential crisis to the democratic institutions in Pakistan whereby the agency of the citizenry relies on informed practices and accessibility to differing narratives.

Legal and policy reforms have to be comprehensive to deal with this crisis. Laws

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<sup>33</sup> Durwesh Nusrat Naseem, "Analysis of Cross Media Practices in Pakistani Press," *Pakistan JL Analysis & Wisdom* 1 (2022): 23.



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on cross-media ownership, restructuring of institutional frameworks especially of PEMRA and CCP as well as fostering of independent and community media are one of the most important initial steps. However, it is evident that reform will not be limited to law reform. It will also have to include cultural and civic awakening -made possible through media literacy and academic/peer criticism and other pressure by the civil society -that re-expropriates the media as a public trust.

To sum up, the imperatives of the law and democracy require that a combined effort involving effort is taken immediately to end monopolistic control of the media in Pakistan. Pakistan will only be able to create an informed populace and a strong democratic equilibrium by reinstating pluralism, autonomy, and openness in the media industry. The road ahead will be full of challenges and steep, however, the price of not acting is much higher; the type of society in which the influential have their voices and people have nothing.

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