

News media in Nepal 2024/25: Trends, challenges and policy

♦ Jhabindra Bhusal¹

Abstract

This study uses a descriptive approach to analyze the status of mass communication and journalism in Nepal during FY 2024/25. Despite a growing demand for skilled professionals, journalism student enrollment continues to decline. Traditional media—print, radio, and TV—are stagnating or shutting down, while online outlets are expanding, with 5,126 registered by mid-2025. However, this growth has led to more violations of journalistic ethics and a rise in related court cases. Press freedom remains fragile, with frequent threats and assaults reported by the Press Council Nepal (PCN) and the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ). The FNJ's membership dropped from over 13,000 to around 9,340 after purification campaign. Graduates are increasingly reluctant to enter journalism due to limited job opportunities. Policy developments included the enactment of the Public Service Broadcasting Act and the Security Printing Act, though key reforms like the Media Council Bill and a national advertising policy remain stalled. Provincial legislation exists but lacks consistent implementation. While PCN continues to update the journalists' code of conduct and offer training and financial support, the overall press freedom situation is concerning. Nonetheless, increased academic research and publications reflect ongoing engagement in the field.

1 Chief Officer, PCN

Keywords: *Newmedia, Press Council, code of conduct, press freedom, publications*

Introduction

Despite rapid technological growth, journalism has not remained as hopeful or enthusiastic this year. In the past year, universities saw a decline in student enrollment overall. Journalism students face greater struggles—uncertain job prospects, reputed media houses laying off staff instead of creating opportunities, and many journalists wait for months or even years for their salaries, sometimes staging protests through unions to be heard for salaries. Because of this, fewer students are choosing journalism as a field of study. For example, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, once a leading college for journalism students, has witnessed a sharp drop in enrollment. (S. Bidari, Personal Communication, September 1, 2025). Similarly, Madan Bhandari Memorial College, another popular journalism college in Kathmandu, saw a steep decline in the number of students. (S. Poudel, Personal Communication, September 2, 2025). Likewise many other public and private campuses that provide journalism education have face the same problem (Khanal & Neupane, 2024). A study could reveal how many journalism students actually pursue careers in the profession and how many shift elsewhere. At the Central Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, only about 7 percent of fourth-semester Master’s students in latest year are directly involved in journalism. (B. Acharya, Personal Communication, July 18, 2025) Media houses complain they cannot find the right talent, while students say they cannot find jobs—an ironic mismatch.

Traditional media stagnant, online rising

Audience engagement with media has changed worldwide due to the advancement in communication and information technologies. We are becoming more active as mass and interpersonal communications converge (Pavlik & McIntosh, 2017). Print, radio, and television outlets continue to struggle. Some have shut down, others have suspended broadcasting, and very few new

registrations have taken place. In contrast, the number of online media registrations and listings continues to climb (Dahal, 2025). By the end of FY 2024/25, the Press Council listed more online outlets than the previous year. At the end of the fiscal year 2024/25, total listed online news media are 5,126 whereas new online in that year are 504. The listed number of online news media in previous year were 4622 (Press Council Nepal, 2024). Even as debates continue about whether online platforms mean the end of print journalism, a new daily newspaper called News 24 daily broadsheet began publication. By Asar 2082 (mid-July 2025), Nepal had 8,040 registered print publications, 1,204 radio stations, and 249 television channels—a figure not much different from the previous year. The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), the umbrella organization of journalists, ran a membership verification campaign, reducing its membership from 13,077 to around 9,340.

Policy and legal developments

Some media-related policies have moved forward, though many are under discussion. A draft National Advertising Policy is in process but has not yet been approved. The government recently endorsed an AI policy to ensure ethical and safe use of artificial intelligence, encourage digital transformation across sectors, and support economic growth. This policy is expected to guide the proper use of AI in Nepal. The Media Council Bill, which would restructure the current Press Council into a Media Council to strengthen monitoring of journalistic code of conduct and promote responsible journalism, is still under discussion in the parliamentary committee. Debates continue over its autonomy and appointment process, with no clarity on when it might become law. Similarly, a draft umbrella act on mass communication, intended to regulate media registration and monitoring, has not advanced.

A major development this year was the enactment of the Public Service Broadcasting Bill, 2081, which merged Radio Nepal and Nepal Television into a single public service broadcaster. Its success in maintaining neutrality, fairness, and public service values will

become clearer in the coming days. Nonetheless, its passage is seen as a significant achievement (International Federation of Journalists, 2024). The Security Printing Act, 2081, was also passed, paving the way for secure domestic printing of passports, stickers, and other sensitive materials.

Provincial initiatives

Provinces have also prioritized media-related legislation. Bagmati Province introduced the Province Media Management Act in 2075 and amended it in 2080. It now has a Registrar's Office for media registration and press pass distribution. Madhesh Province enacted its own Communication Act in 2077 and set up bodies like a Media Council, Film Board, and Communication Authority. Gandaki Province has passed the *Mass Communication Act* (2080) and its regulations (2082). Lumbini Province has a *Broadcasting Act* (2075) but no other major media laws. Koshi Province is debating a Mass Communication Bill, but journalists are protesting provisions they believe threaten press freedom. Karnali Province is discussing a Mass Communication and IT Bill. Sudurpaschim Province passed a *Radio, FM, and Television Act* (2076) but lacks laws for print, online, and press passes. Though some provinces have established legal frameworks, many have yet to do so. Some have even not initiated to do anything to develop any legal provision of their own within the provincial media landscape. Some, like Bagmati and Madhesh, also provide welfare advertisements, renewal services, and recognition programs such as journalist awards, but other provinces have not kept pace (Kharel, 2022).

Media and the code of conduct

The Press Council Nepal (PCN) was established to create and monitor a code of conduct for healthy, independent, dignified, and responsible journalism. It operates under the *Press Council Act*, 1992 (2048 BS). At that time, only a limited number of newspapers existed, and in broadcasting, there were only Radio Nepal and Nepal Television. Since then, media has diversified, technology

has rapidly developed, and digital media has grown, making monitoring a more challenging task for the PCN. The PCN has updated the journalists' code of conduct over time to match these changes, ensuring it remains relevant while respecting the limits set by the law. Complaints related to news, especially from online media, have been increasing (Poudel, 2023). In the fiscal year 2024/25, the PCN received 341 complaints for violations of the code, 9 public grievances, and conducted self-monitoring of 363 media items. About 60 percent of the complaints were resolved, while the rest are still under process. When the PCN orders a media outlet to correct violations, non-compliance can lead to blacklisting. Out of 12 media outlets previously black listed, eight later complied and were removed from the blacklist, while four remain on it. Common issues reported include: false or misleading content, lack of evidence, failure to seek response from relevant parties, unbalanced reporting, harming a person's reputation or character, blackmail, misuse of photos or videos, and unprofessional conduct by journalists (Paudel, 2024).

Press freedom in Nepal

Nepal's constitution guarantees full press freedom, and most media-related laws appear to support it. However, various incidents have shown that press freedom is under threat. According to the Press Council Nepal records for FY 2024/25, 94 cases of press freedom violations were documented, mostly in Bagmati Province, followed by Madhesh Province. These incidents included threats, assaults on journalists, and in some cases, deaths. The FNJ, which monitors press freedom, recorded 73 violations between May 4, 2024, and April 30, 2025, again noting that Bagmati and Madhesh had the highest number of incidents (Federation of Nepali Journalists, 2025). Similarly, Freedom Forum's annual report for the same period listed 68 cases of press freedom violations, mainly threats and attacks, again concentrated in Bagmati and Madhesh. Recent reports also highlight that physical and professional attacks on journalists are increasing, posing a serious threat to press freedom (IFJ, 2025). Most attacks come from those in power. Even during

some protest coverage, journalists have faced threats when their reporting is perceived as critical, incorrect, or unfavorable. Part of the problem is also journalists overstepping ethical boundaries—publishing unverified, one-sided, or biased content—which reduces public trust and exposes journalists and media outlets to attacks. Therefore, adherence to the journalists’ code of conduct is essential for protecting and promoting press freedom (Patricia, 2024 & Kharel, 2012).

Publications and research in journalism

Research, study, and publications related to media, journalists, and the journalism sector help keep the field vibrant. This year, universities and journalism bodies published important materials, including textbooks and research studies. New research and publications have been released that help enrich the field of journalism and provide valuable insights for future practice (Dahal, 2024). The Press Council Nepal published a historical study of Nepali media covering print to digital formats, documenting the rise and fall of media in the country. The PCN also published books on *Karnali journalism*, the *Media Year Book*, and four issues of the quarterly journal *Sanhita*. Notable books include “*Democracy Rupture, Channel Capture Beneath and Beyond the Borders*” by Professor P. Kharel and “*Nepalma Aamsanchaar: Samachar ra Gairsamachar Mediako Naalibeli*” by Associate Professor Shriram Paudel, both from Mandap Publication House.

Additionally, the Gorkhapatra Corporation published a history of Gorkhapatra during its anniversary, and photo books were released by Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS) and *Gorkhapatra*. The Communication Registrar Office in Bagmati Province published handbooks on AI in journalism and constructive journalism. Various campuses also published journals, and Research Nepal continued investigative publications. Bhundipuran Publication released a book introducing mass communication, while journalist and Associate Professor Rishikesh Dahal wrote a book on the digital media landscape.

Policy, programs, and budget

In the budget presented on May 29, 2025, the government emphasized ensuring citizens' easy access to public information, promoting press freedom, increasing transparency and accountability, and protecting individuals' personal freedom and privacy. The budget also included plans to establish an AI center, expand the international reach of public service broadcasting through NTV World and the PSV digital platform, regulate advertisements in a structured and ethical way, and manage the use of social media and digital platforms. Most of these initiatives are related to information technology. The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology was allocated Rs 7.72 billion (GoN, Ministry of Finance, 2025).

Earlier, the budget on June 7, 2024 focused on guaranteeing full press freedom, making the media sector fair, inclusive, professional, and competitive, establishing the Krishna Sen Media Village in Lumbini, providing training opportunities to enhance journalists' skills, regulating social media and digital platforms, regulating advertising via digital platforms, and organizing the advertising sector through a single-window system. Rs 7.35 billion was allocated to the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology under that budget (GoN, Ministry of Finance, 2024). Based on these policies and budgets, various organizations and associations prepare their own budgets, programs, and work plans. To build journalists' capacities, the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology and the Department of Information and Broadcasting have conducted training in some areas. The Press Council Nepal, after registering online media, provides orientation on the code of conduct and issues certification. This program, which started in March 2022, ran 18 sessions in this year, benefiting 1,084 journalists, editors, and media owners.

The Council also supports journalists and media through the Media Development Fund. Grants were provided for laptop purchases to 16 journalists, camera purchases to four journalists, and thesis writing to seven journalists. Additionally, Press Council Nepal

and the Federation of Nepali Journalists provide financial support for journalists' medical treatment and accidents. Last year, 36 journalists received assistance from the Journalist Welfare Fund at the Press Council Nepal. On the occasion of Press Council Day, four media outlets and 48 journalists were recognized and honored for the contributions to the field (Press Council Nepal, 2025).

Code of conduct cases reaching the courts

Under Section 5 (b) 7(b) of the Press Council Act, 1992 (2048 BS), the Press Council is authorized to set and enforce a code of conduct for journalists and media outlets. Accordingly, the journalists' code of conduct has been issued and implemented, currently under the 2073 version (first amendment 2076). The law and the code allow the PCN to monitor whether journalists and media comply with the code and to take action against violations. If the media or journalists are dissatisfied with the PCN's decisions, they have the right to take the matter to court. Recently, cases of code violations have increasingly reached the courts. News published by media outlets, even when factually verified, has sometimes sparked doubts and debates within the journalism sector. Some media outlets and journalists have faced action for contempt of court. Notable recent cases include online media such as Nepalkhabar.com, Bizmandu.com, DrishtiNews.com, and Diyopost.com, which have sent certain content to court. Additionally, journalist Dilbhushan Pathak faced legal notice regarding YouTube channel he operated without registration, and this case also reached the court. Monitoring the code of conduct for online media has become challenging due to the lack of reliable and systematic methods for verifying the authenticity of audio and other digital content. Practices such as ignoring rules on whether to delete posts—or how to do so properly with explanations—have also increased, making online media monitoring more complex.

Findings

Enrollment of journalism students is steadily declining, even as the sector continues to need skillful and dedicated professionals.

The demand for trained manpower remains high, but fewer young people are entering the field. Meanwhile, online news media are rising rapidly, bringing both opportunities and challenges. Violations of the code of conduct are particularly high in the online news media, and the trend of filing court cases related to such violations is increasing. Despite some regular programs for professional development, there have been no truly game-changing initiatives, and many journalists gain only minimal benefit from existing programs.

Institutionally, the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) has seen a decline in membership after a recent effort to verify and “purify” its members. Although a few policy and legal reforms have been introduced, other important reforms that the sector has long expected have yet to materialize. Provincial governments are gradually working to structure the media sector both legally and functionally, but progress is slow. Press freedom in Nepal remains unsatisfactory. Still, there are some positive signs: new research and publications have been released that help enrich the field of journalism and provide valuable insights for future practice.

Conclusion

The fiscal year 2024/25 highlighted both opportunities and persistent challenges for Nepal’s mass media sector. Declining student enrollment and stagnant traditional media underscore an urgent need for strategies to attract and retain talent, while the rapid growth of online news media demands stronger regulatory mechanisms to uphold ethical standards. Press freedom, though constitutionally guaranteed, remains vulnerable to political pressure, physical threats, and professional misconduct. Policy advancements such as the Public Service Broadcasting Act are encouraging, yet delays in key reforms weaken institutional resilience. Provincial efforts to strengthen legal frameworks are promising but require consistent implementation and coordination with federal policies. To safeguard a free and responsible press, Nepal must prioritize comprehensive legal reforms, invest in journalist training, and

ensure strict enforcement of the code of conduct, particularly in digital media. Strengthening professional capacity, encouraging ethical journalism, and protecting journalists' rights will be essential for a vibrant and trustworthy media environment.

References

- Dahal, R. (2024). Digital paridrishya: Sanchar ra patrakaritako aayamik parivartan (*Digital landscape: Dimensional change of communication and journalism*). Center for Media Research Nepal.
- International Federation of Journalists (2025). IFJ Nepal country report: Tightening control (23rd annual South Asia press freedom report 2024-2025 Front-line democracy: Media amid political churn). IFJ. https://samsn.ifj.org/SAPFR24-25/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/IFJ_SAPFR-Nepal-Tightening-Control_compressed.pdf
- Khanal, S.R. & Neupane, M.S. (2024). *Development of media education in Nepal*. SSRN. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5036277
- Kharel, P. (2012). Media for participatory democracy. Kamala Kharel.
- Kharel, P. (2025). *Democracy rupture, channel capture: Beneath and beyond the borders*. Mandap Publication House.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance. (2025). *Budget Speech for the Fiscal Year 2025/26*, Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance.
- Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance. (2024). *Budget Speech for the Fiscal Year 2024/25*, Government of Nepal, Ministry of Finance
- Patricia, E.C. (2024). *Ethical Challenges in Journalism Practice: Balancing Media Ownership Interests and Public Responsibility*. IAA Journal of Social Sciences 10(1):46-51. <https://doi.org/10.59298/IAAJSS/2024/101.46.50000>
- Paudel, S. (2024). Responsible media and media literacy for promoting democracy in Nepal. *Samhita*, 61(1), 217-230. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16730825>
- Pavlik, J.V. & McIntosh, S. (2017). *Converging media: A new introduction to mass communication*. Oxford University Press.
- Press Council Nepal. (2024). *49th Annual Report 2023/24*. Press Council Nepal.
- Press Council Nepal. (2024). *Media Year Book 2023/24*. Press Council Nepal.
- Press Council Nepal. (2025). *Progress Report of FY 2024/25*. Press Council Nepal