

The PECA Amendment Act 2025 & Freedom of Expression: A Legal Straitjacket?

A War on Misinformation or a War on Free Speech?

Sometimes, all it takes is one tweet, one opinion, or one post online—and under Pakistan’s PECA Amendment Act 2025, that could be enough to get you in trouble. We’re seeing more and more cases where people find their social media accounts suddenly suspended, their posts deleted, and legal notices at their doorstep—all without a proper chance to explain themselves. The government decides what counts as “false information,” and there’s barely any room left for fair hearings or open conversation. While the amendment is being promoted as a way to control misinformation and improve online safety, many journalists, activists, and legal experts are worried. They believe it’s not really about protecting people—it’s about silencing criticism. In a time when social media is one of the main ways people share ideas and raise their voices, this law could shut many of them down.

Originally, PECA was passed in 2016 to deal with serious online crimes like hacking, fraud, and harassment. But the 2025 amendment changes the direction completely. Now, it focuses more on punishing people for posting content the government sees as harmful—especially anything critical of state institutions or public officials. Even worse, the law gives authorities the power to remove posts without asking a court first. This takes away the basic right to express oneself freely.

What makes this law even more concerning is how unclear it is. Words like “false information” or “defaming the state” are not clearly defined, which means they can be used however someone in power wants. That creates fear. People start holding back what they say. A journalist might avoid reporting corruption. A citizen may stay quiet about their views. Even a simple post could be flagged as criminal. And in most cases, there’s no fair process before action is taken.

This isn’t just about social media—it’s about rights. The Constitution of Pakistan, under Article 19, gives people the right to speak freely, with some limits for things like national security and public order. But this amendment pushes those limits too far. Who gets to decide what’s harmful or false? Should every critical opinion be treated as a threat? Without clear rules and independent review, this law could be used more to silence people than to protect society.

Islam also encourages freedom of expression when it’s used responsibly. The Quran talks about justice, truth, and standing up against wrongdoing. In Surah Al-Ma’idah, we’re told to always be fair and just, even when we speak against those we dislike. Islam supports

speaking the truth—not staying silent. So, when laws begin punishing people for doing just that, they go against those values.

We've already seen examples of this happening. With the 2025 amendment, this kind of pressure will only increase. The more unclear the law is, the more power it gives to those in control—and the more ordinary people will be afraid to speak.

Yes, it's important to have rules for the internet, especially to stop hate speech, online abuse, or dangerous lies. But it has to be done fairly. The solution isn't to shut people up—it's to create better systems for checking facts and holding people accountable. Countries like Germany and the UK have created balanced laws that do both: protect people and protect their right to speak. Pakistan can learn from those examples instead of creating fear through control.

Digital Voices, Silenced by Fear

Imagine a blogger exposing corruption in a public office. A citizen tweeting concerns about government policies. A journalist questioning the transparency of a decision. Under PECA 2025, any of these could be flagged as “false” or “defamatory,” leading to arrests or bans. The result? A digital landscape where silence becomes survival.

The Way Forward: Regulation with Accountability

Regulating digital spaces is necessary, but it must be done with safeguards. Legal suggestions:

- A clear definition of misinformation to avoid arbitrary prosecutions.
- Judicial oversight before content takedowns.
- Protecting journalistic freedom, ensuring criticism isn't criminalized.
- Harmonization with international digital rights laws, balancing security with speech.

Countries like Germany and the UK have adopted regulated frameworks that combat hate speech and misinformation while protecting civil liberties. Pakistan's cyber laws must follow a similarly balanced approach rather than adopting a punitive model that stifles free expression.

In the End: What Side of History Are We On?

PECA 2025 walks a tightrope between public safety and censorship. The intent may be noble, but the execution feels heavy-handed. We're told it's for our protection. But who's protecting our voices?

True democracy doesn't fear dissent—it welcomes it. And in both law and faith, truth has always been worth standing up for. This isn't just a law. It's a test. Of leadership, of fairness, of whether we're building a country that listens—or just one that punishes.