This past year has been laden with heinous violations against human rights linked to the digital sphere; individuals have been detained and subjected to persecution and death sentences on the basis of online speech in the form of blogs and social media posts. A teenager was sentenced death penalty in June 2017 for allegedly liking a blasphemous post on Facebook; five bloggers accused of criticizing authorities and religious militancy went missing in January; and personalities such as Qandeel Baloch and Mashal Khan have faced violent deaths on the basis of allegations of vulgarity and blasphemy online.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) introduced in August 2016 has paved the way for stronger censorship and surveillance powers for the state. Bolo Bhi has been closely monitoring the implementation of PECA, which is regrettably being used to silence dissent rather than to protect civilian rights. Our research has highlighted the weaknesses of the judicial system, the lack of awareness among adjudicators and the lack of forensic capacity and measures of government ministries and bodies appointed the task of online regulation.

Advocacy:

Over the past year, Bolo Bhi has monitored cyber space in Pakistan closely, leading a social media campaign to raise awareness about violations against digital rights, surveillance and censorship. We have also engaged with the media to comment on issues relating to internet rights, freedom of expression, right to privacy, access to internet, harassment, and cybercrime laws in Pakistan. Digital security workshops are also a critical aspect of our advocacy campaign to raise awareness about strategies to protect oneself.

Policy

Bolo Bhi worked closely with policymakers, legislators and civil society to push for the protection of digital rights such as the right to free speech, information and privacy. Our efforts included participation in multi-stakeholder conferences, the development of policy briefs and critical engagement with the law. Bolo Bhi submitted written arguments in its ongoing case in the IHC, challenging the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority’s (PTA) powers to issue directives that block content on the Internet. We also made significant contributions to a UPR joint submission to the UN Human Rights Committee, specifically focusing on rights of religious minorities in Pakistan.

Research:

Bolo Bhi published a research paper in July exploring the Internet Policymaking landscape in Pakistan, which analyzes patterns and attributes of internet policy making in Pakistan by tracing the history of the IT and Telecom Industry, and mapping the processes of IT related legislation as well as the actors involved in these processes. Other research efforts were also geared towards the post legislative scrutiny of PECA 2016.
**ACCESS TO INTERNET IN FATA**

Bolo Bhi conducted extensive research on the state of access to internet in FATA in September, 2017. Our findings revealed that despite the pivotal role that mobile internet services can play in creating connectivity and access to information to citizens without access to computers and broadband devices, these services are almost entirely unavailable to users in FATA.

Moreover, our research found that even broadband connectivity was almost entirely unavailable in North and South Waziristan Agencies, while broadband connections were limited to larger towns in the Khyber, Bajaur, and Khurram Agencies. Bolo Bhi continues to campaign for the lifting of the internet ban in FATA, which must be framed within the larger discourse of human rights in the region.

**A Paranoid State**

An article on the problematic issue of state monitored social media; criticism is not an attack; it is an instrument of democracy.

**Forced Disappearances will not silence us**

Exploring the threats to journalists from the powerful military and its' associated intelligence agencies.

**Blue Whale Challenge**

A press release warning teenagers, parents and teachers against the harmful implications of falling prey to a dangerous online game.

**Data Protection and Privacy**

Exploring the increasing importance of data as digital currency as well as the need for data protection laws.

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**The Internet Policymaking Landscape in Pakistan**

Bolo Bhi hosted one of the first multi-stakeholder Internet Policy making dialogue. The event featured the launch of our research on *The Internet Policy-making landscape in Pakistan*, published in collaboration with the Internet Policy Observatory and the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

The event was attended by relevant stakeholders including the Ministry of IT, legislators, IT experts, members of the academia, civil society and media. They led a lucrative discussion on the future of IT policymaking and improving the transparency and inclusivity of legislative processes pertaining to the IT sector to decrease the misuse of the cyber crime law

**Digital Security Workshops**

Bolo Bhi has held several workshops for university students, journalists, media personnel, human rights' activists, lawyers and development sector practitioners - geared towards raising awareness about online threats and developing the skills and strategies to protect ones' online communications as well as to improve the security of ones' devices, including cell phones and laptops.

The sessions have proved to be critical towards creating a more informed citizenry that is equipped with the tools, skills and information necessary not only to protect their individual rights, but to engage with the state more effectively in matters pertaining to cyber security and rights such as the right to free speech, information and privacy.
Advocacy

Bolo Bhi has extensively engaged with universities this past year, conducting digital security trainings as well as information sessions regarding digital rights in Pakistan as well as on Bolo Bhi’s work. The Universities engaged include Habib University, Iqra University and NUST. Bolo Bhi also held a symposium on “Pakistani Society and the World of Cyberspace Insecurities: Challenges and the Way Forward” at NUST Business School.

Along with a social media campaign about significant occurrences in terms of digital rights and digital security tips, Bolo Bhi has also hosted and participated in several multi-stakeholder conferences related to internet policymaking. Bolo Bhi research associate, Saleha Zahid, spoke as a panelist at DRF’s Hamara Internet: Contextualising Digital Rights in Pakistan Conference as well as the Conference. Who Bhi founder, Farihea Aziz and Director, Usama Khilji also led a Consultative session on Cyber Crime and harassment hosted by the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Bolo Bhi’s work utilizing the Right to Information

This year has seen the introduction of notable RTI legislation in Pakistan. At the federal level, the Right of Access to Information Act 2017 has been passed and there have been significant advancements in RTI legislation at the provincial level at well, though the Government has yet to take measures to implement the law and establish information commissions.

Bolo Bhi submitted one of the first RTI’s under the new federal act to determine the number and nature of user data requests the state makes from telecom companies as well as companies such as Facebook in a year. It also filed an RTI to determine the nature of censorship and laws that granted different state bodies with this authority.

Media Engagement

Why we need civic education | TEDxLahore

Bolo Bhi Director, Usama Khilji spoke about the dearth of civic awareness in Pakistan and the dire need for civic education to empower citizens to effectively engage with the government to hold it accountable and ensure that their rights are protected.

17th ITCN Asia

Bolo Bhi Co-founder, Farihea Aziz, was a panelist at the 17th ITCN Asia conference at the Karachi expo center in September. She gave a presentation at the session “Challenges of Digital Security for Media” organized by the Center for Excellence in Journalism (CEJ) and the center for Information and Communication Technology at IBM. She also discussed the benefits and challenges for journalists of the Prevention Against Electronic Crimes Act (PECA 2016)

News channels, print media & radio shows

Bolo Bhi has campaigned extensively for digital rights, engaging with local and international media, in English, Urdu and Pushto. We comment on relevant issues pertaining to human rights as they relate to the internet; for instance the freedom of expression, the right to privacy, access to the internet and the right to information. We closely follow issues such as cyber harassment and how they translate into the physical world. We also keep a close eye on how these issues affect particular social groups and geographical regions differently.

The channels engaged with include: BBC, Al Jazeera, CNN, Geo, Dunya, Dawn, Capital TV, Waqt, Roze, Sach, etc.
Looking Forward

Going into the new year, Bolo Bhi seeks to continue post-legislative scrutiny of PECA, in order to inform and influence its’ implementation in a manner that is better able to protect the rights of citizens. We also seek to engage parliamentarians and civil society in discussions related to self regulation and co-regulation as more effective and desirable alternatives to state censorship and surveillance.

We also aim to play a more active role in monitoring network shutdowns and internet disruptions more closely, to create a report on the state of access to internet in Pakistan.

Our vision for the year is to work more holistically on increasing awareness and capacity amongst the youth, civil society and media to protect their rights and security and engage with the government more effectively. For instance we hope to raise awareness about new RTI legislation and its’ stipulated procedures so that citizen’s can utilize it effectively.

Follow our work:

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