

# 2021 ROUND-UP

**journalists detained, killed,  
held hostage and missing**

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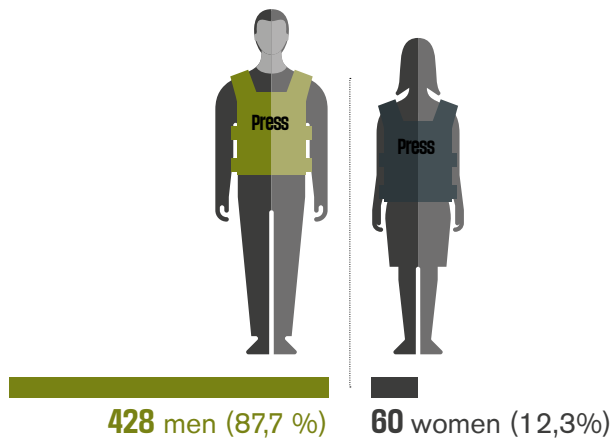
Founded in 1985, **Reporters Without Borders (RSF)** works for journalistic freedom, independence and pluralism all over the world. Headquartered in Paris, with 13 bureaux and sections around the globe and correspondents in 130 countries, it has consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO. It provides specific support to journalists in the field by means of campaigns, legal and material assistance, physical safety equipment and aids (bullet-proof vests, helmets, manuals and insurance) and digital protection (digital security workshops). Nowadays a key interlocutor for governments and international institutions, RSF publishes an annual World Press Freedom Index that is widely consulted and quoted.

# OVERVIEW



# DETAINED JOURNALISTS

## THE FIGURES



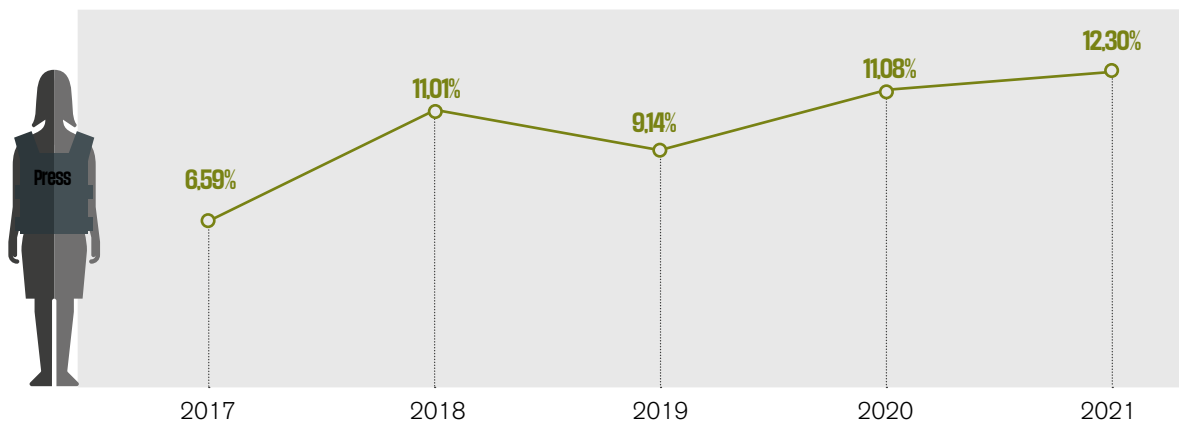
## DETAINED JOURNALISTS

### Record number of detained journalists

**Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has never logged such a high number of detained journalists.** As of 1 December 2021, **a total of 488 journalists were in prison** because of their work – a **20% increase in one year**. This exceptional surge in arbitrary detention is mostly attributable to three countries whose governments are indifferent to their citizens' yearning for democracy. The magnitude of these figures is also indicative of an increasingly relentless crackdown on independent media.

In **Myanmar**, where the military retook power in a coup on 1 February 2021, 53 journalists are in prison, versus only two a year ago. In **Belarus**, where President Alexander Lukashenko's reelection was disputed in August 2020, 32 journalists are now imprisoned, versus seven a year ago. These unprecedented numbers are also due to Xi Jinping's increasing control over **Hong Kong**. In this special administrative region, which used to be a regional model of respect for press freedom, and which had no imprisoned journalists, the national security law imposed by Beijing in 2020 has been used as a pretext for arresting and detaining at least 10 journalists as of 1 December.

### Another unprecedented figure: 60 female journalists in prison



**Gradual increase in the proportion of female journalists imprisoned**  
as of 1 December each year.

## DETAINED JOURNALISTS

**RSF had never previously registered such a high number of detained female journalists: 60 are currently in prison** because of their work – **a third more** than in 2020. By comparison, the number of their male colleagues in prison has risen by only 19%. **Women now represent 12.3% of detained journalists, nearly double what it was four years ago** (6.6%). Not only does this increase illustrate the fact that more and more women work as journalists and are not immune to the repression faced by the entire profession, but it is also indicative of certain regional characteristics.

It is no surprise that **China**, the world's biggest jailer of journalists, is also **the biggest jailer of female journalists, with 19 currently detained**. Three of them, including [Claudia Mo](#), a defender of press freedom, are imprisoned in Hong Kong, and the remaining 16 are detained in mainland China. They include [Sofia Huang Xueqin](#), who is well known for her involvement in China's #MeToo movement and has been placed in solitary confinement on suspicion of “inciting subversion of state power,” and [Gulmira Imin](#), the administrator of the Uyghur news site *Salkin*, who has been sentenced to life imprisonment for “separatism” and “leaking state secrets.”



Claudia Mo  
© Peter PARKS / AFP



Sofia Huang Xueqin  
© Women's Media Centre



Gulmira Imin  
© US Commission on International Religious Freedom

## The regime that imprisons more women than men



Daria Tchoultsova  
© AFP



Katsiarina Andreyeva  
© AFP

In 2021, **Belarus stood out for detaining more women (17) than men (15)**. Nearly half of the imprisoned professional journalists are women (9 out of 20), as are 8 of the 9 imprisoned media workers. (The latter work in administrative positions in the media as managers, directors, accountants or even legal experts.) These figures are **indicative of the end of the patriarchal tolerance traditionally displayed by Belarusian authorities**, who were caught by surprise by the leading role of women at the onset of post-election protests. In fact, the first two journalists to be convicted on criminal charges were women – [Daria Chultsova](#) and [Katsiaryna Andreyeva](#) (whose actual surname is Bakhvalova). These two reporters for *Belsat*, an independent Belarusian TV channel based in Poland, were sentenced to two years in prison camp on charges over the “organisation and preparation of acts grossly violating public order” simply because they provided live coverage of an unauthorised demonstration.

## DETAINED JOURNALISTS

## Myanmar, Vietnam and Iran: other countries that imprison female journalists



Ma Thuzar  
© Twitter

The **9 female journalists currently imprisoned in Myanmar** include [Ma Thuzar](#), a freelance reporter who has been held incommunicado in Insein, a sinister prison located in a Yangon suburb, since her arrest on 1 September 2021. She played a leading role in covering the protests that followed the coup d'état on 1 February.



Pham Doan Trang  
© Člověk v tísni

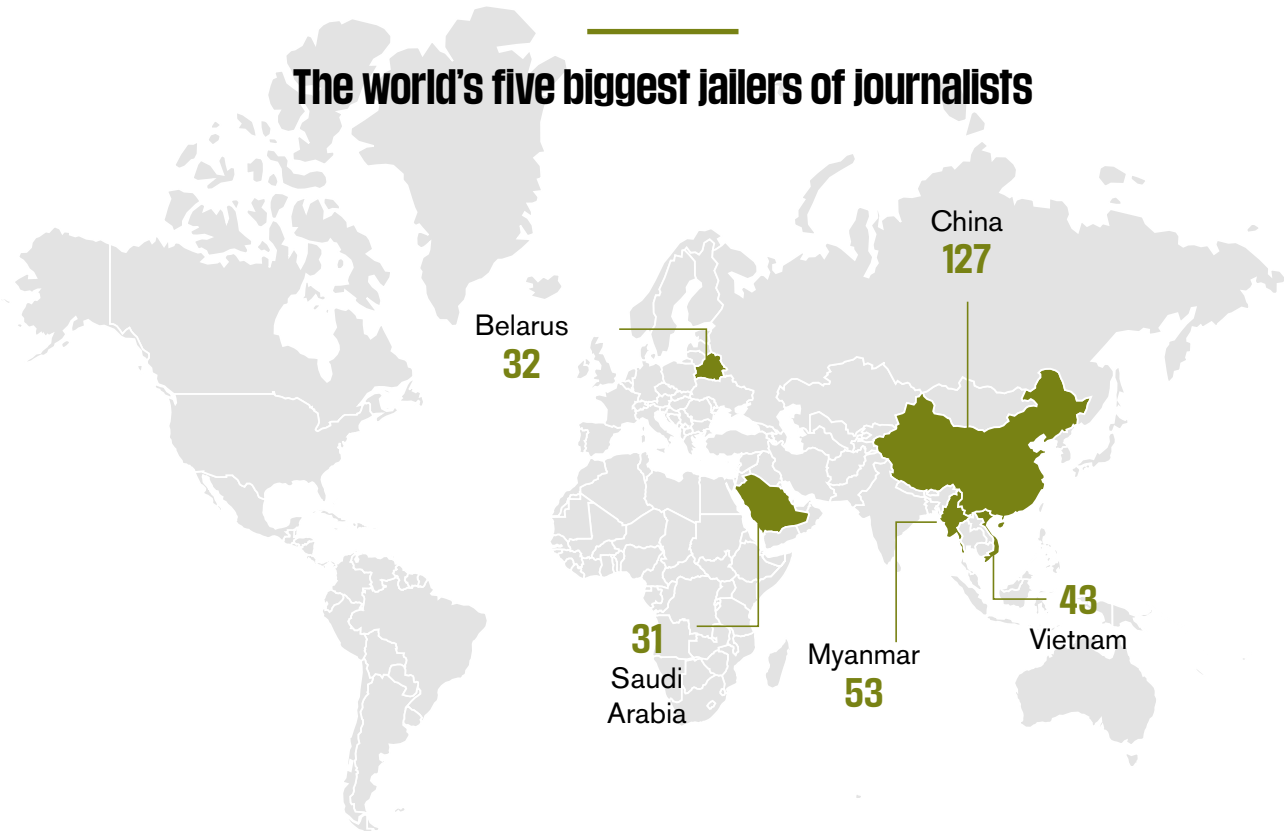
**Four female journalists are detained in Vietnam**, including the recipient of the **2019 RSF Press Freedom Prize for Impact**, [Pham Doan Trang](#), who was sentenced on 14 December to nine years in prison for anti-state propaganda. She has been held incommunicado for more than a year, ever since her arrest at her home in Ho Chi Minh City on 6 October 2020. When she appeared before judges, she was clearly in very poor shape and had a limp that was the result of being badly beaten by police in the summer of 2018, since when she has had pains in the back and legs that make it hard for her to walk. A recent scan showed a tumour in her abdomen.



Narges Mohammadi  
© DR

**In Iran, [Narges Mohammadi](#)**, a journalist and human rights defender who had already spent eight years in jail, was **returned to prison at the start of November** after a year of freedom. **Her reimprisonment brought the number of detained Iranian female journalists to three.**

## DETAINED JOURNALISTS



### Myanmar and Belarus now among the top five jailers

With China, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam already on the list of the world's top five jailers of journalists last year, the list's only two new members in 2021 are Myanmar and Belarus. They replaced Egypt – which released 21 journalists before arresting others.

According to data collected by RSF, China keeps its title of the world's biggest jailer of journalists for the fifth year running. The world's most populous country (with 1.4 billion inhabitants in 2020, according to the OECD) is also by far the one with the most detained journalists: 127 as of 1 December. While the number of journalists detained in mainland China fell slightly in 2021, arrests in Hong Kong contributed to an overall 2% increase. RSF's latest report, [The Great Leap Backwards of Journalism in China](#), which was published in early December, looks at the Chinese regime's unprecedented crackdown on journalists and the offensive against the right to news and information that it has pursued both at home and abroad in recent years.



## DETAINED JOURNALISTS

### The most noteworthy cases of 2021



Jimmy Lai  
© Anthony Wallace / AFP

#### Celebrating a 74<sup>th</sup> birthday in prison

He is one of the world's oldest imprisoned journalists. Born on 8 December 1947, [Jimmy Lai](#) celebrated his 74<sup>th</sup> birthday in the Hong Kong prison where he is serving a 20-month prison sentence for taking part in “unauthorised” pro-democracy protests in 2019. The founder of theNext Digital media group and the leading Hong Kong newspaper *Apple Daily*, he received an additional 13-month jail sentence on 13 December and is facing the possibility of life imprisonment on the five additional charges still pending against him.



Kayvan Samimi  
Behbahani  
© DR

One of Iran's best-known journalists, [Kayvan Samimi Behbahani](#), will soon also celebrate his 73<sup>rd</sup> birthday in prison. Born on 25 February 1949, the editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Iran Farda* and president of the Association for the Defence of Press Freedom was sentenced to three years in prison on a charge of “anti-government propaganda” in December 2020. He is one of the 12 journalists currently detained in Iran.



Dawit Isaak  
© DR

#### More than 20 years in a dictatorship's jails

Beating all imprisonment records, [Dawit Isaak](#), a Swedish-Eritrean journalist, and two fellow Eritrean journalists, [Seyoum Tsehaye](#) and [Temesgen Gebreyesus](#), have been detained for more than two decades. They were arrested in September 2001, when President Isaias Afewerki took advantage of a stunned world's focus on the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States to transform his country into a dictatorship and ban all independent media. [Subjected to the most appalling prison conditions](#), Dawit Isaak has never been allowed to see his family or a lawyer. Placed in isolation, often handcuffed, exposed to terrible heat, he has been hospitalised several times, sometimes in psychiatric hospitals. A group of UN experts reported in August 2021 that, according to a “credible source,” he was still alive in September 2020. This was the strongest evidence of his survival since the early 2010s.



Ali Aboluhoom  
© Facebook

#### 15-year convictions

Fifteen years in prison. It was the longest sentence handed down to journalists in 2021, and two of them received such a sentence. In Saudi Arabia, [Ali Aboluhoom](#), a journalist of Yemeni origin, was sentenced to 15 years in prison in October for tweets that, according to Saudi authorities, were used to spread “ideas of apostasy, atheism and blasphemy.” In Vietnam, [Pham Chi Dung](#) was handed down a 15-year sentence in January on the catch-all charge of “anti-government propaganda.” The sentence was emblematic of the tougher stance taken by the current Communist Party leadership in Hanoi. Dung founded the Independent Journalists Association of Vietnam, an anomaly in a country where all media are supposed to toe the line set by the Propaganda Department.



Pham Chi Dung  
© vov.vn

## DETAINED JOURNALISTS



Amadou Vamouké  
© RSF

### Interminable trials

Some trials are unusually long or longer than average. In Cameroon, [Amadou Vamouké](#) knows the 4 kilometres between his prison cell and the special criminal court in Yaoundé by heart. To this day, since his arrest in 2016, the former head of Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV) has made the trip more than 80 times for as many hearings. In a [Kafkaesque trial](#) that is dragging on for lack of evidence, he is accused of inappropriately channelling state funds into CRTV, the state radio and TV broadcaster he ran for a decade. He has so far been [illegally](#) detained preventively for more than five and half years.



Ali Anouzla  
© Antony Drugeon

Interminable trials are also common in Morocco. Although not detained while on trial, *Lakome* news website editor and reporter [Ali Anouzla](#) has been waiting to learn his fate for eight years. Named an RSF [“information hero”](#) in 2014, he has been facing a possible 30-year jail sentence since 2013 on charges of “material support for terrorism,” “justifying terrorism” and “incitement to commit acts of terrorism.” The journalist and historian [Maati Monjib](#) was sentenced to a year in prison by a court in Rabat in January 2021 on trumped-up charges of “fraud” and “undermining the internal integrity of the state” in a case that began more than five years ago and is now being subjected to a drawn-out appeals process. Hearings were postponed more than 20 times in 2021.



Raman Pratashevich  
© AFP

### Arrested mid-flight

The year’s most spectacular arrest was undoubtedly that of Belarusian opposition journalist [Raman Pratashevich](#) on 23 May 2021. Ryanair flight 4978, which was taking him and 171 other passengers from Athens to Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, was intercepted by a Belarusian fighter jet and forced to land in Minsk. The Belarusian authorities cited the alleged presence of a bomb and a conflict among passengers as grounds for intervening. But the real aim of this act of piracy was clearly to arrest Pratashevich, the former editor-in-chief of the Telegram news channel Nexta, labelled as “extremist” by Belarusian authorities, exiled in Lithuania. Arrested and imprisoned as soon as the Ryanair jet landed in Minsk, he has been under house arrest in a secret location since the end of June. His only public appearances since his arrest have been to make clearly forced confessions.



Julian Assange  
© WSW

### Heaviest possible sentence

A total of 175 years in prison. It’s the heaviest sentence faced by anyone targeted in connection with journalism in 2021, and it’s what Wikileaks publisher [Julian Assange](#) could get if extradited to the United States. Held in London’s Belmarsh maximum-security prison since April 2019, the US government continues to pursue Assange’s extradition on the basis of 18 charges connected with Wikileaks’ publication in 2010 of hundreds of thousands of leaked classified documents revealing war crimes and human rights violations that have never been prosecuted. Assange is the first publisher to be charged under the US Espionage Act, which lacks a public interest defence. His fiancée has stated his legal team will pursue an appeal “at the earliest possible moment” following the 10 December UK High Court ruling allowing for Assange’s extradition.

## DETAINED JOURNALISTS



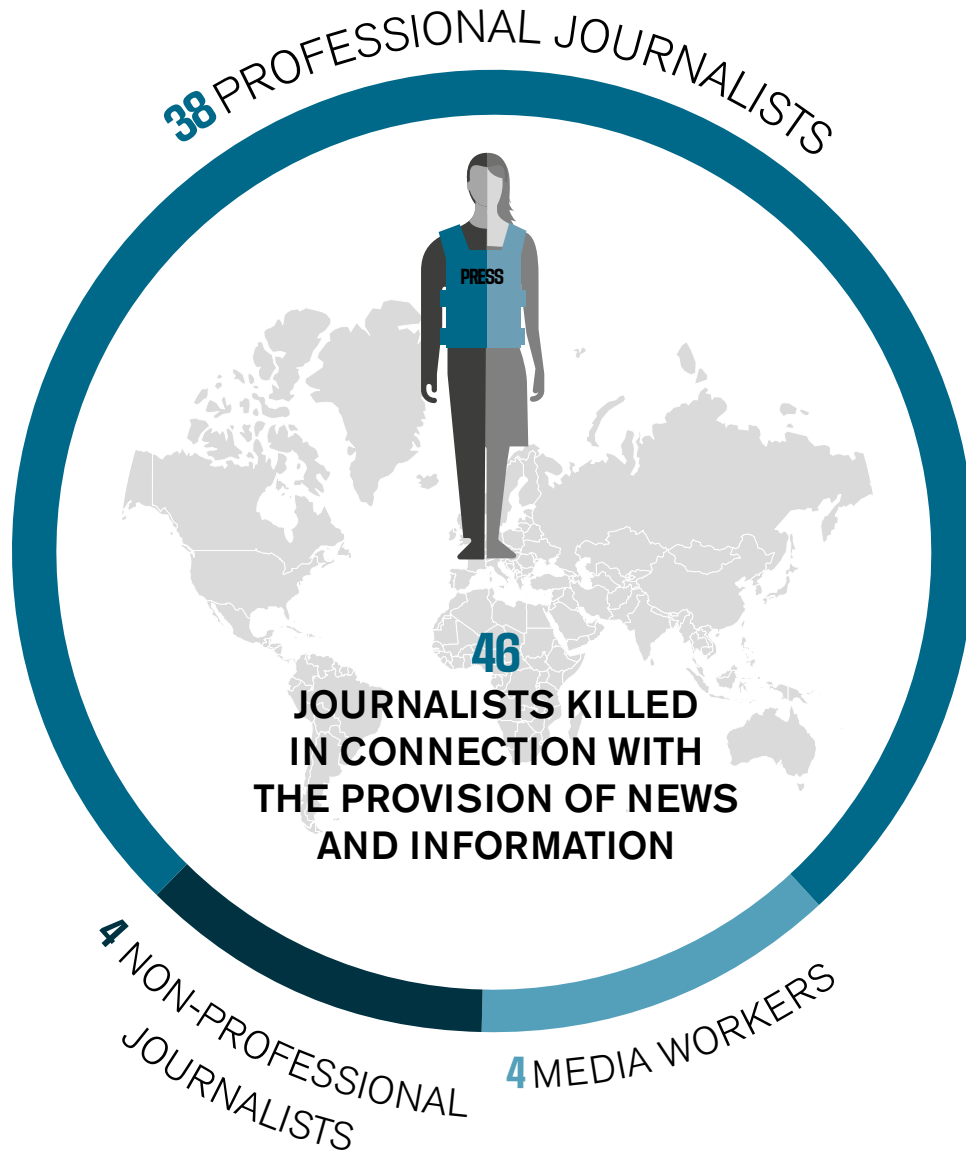
Zhang Zhan  
© YouTube screenshot

### **Imminent danger of death**

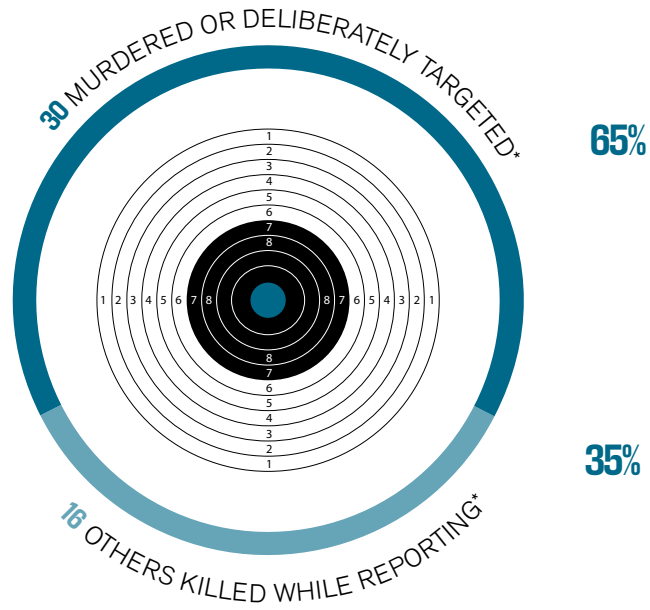
China's [Zhang Zhan](#) is currently the journalist who is in greatest danger of dying in prison, according to information obtained by RSF. In late October, she weighed only 40 kg although 1.77m tall, and she could no longer walk or even lift her head without help. Imprisoned since 14 May 2020 and awarded the [RSF Press Freedom Prize](#) for Courage in 2021, she is in critical condition after going on a hunger strike to protest her four-year prison sentence for allegedly “posting large quantities of false information” while covering the initial Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan. At least ten other press freedom activists are in danger of dying in Chinese prisons for lack of medical care.

# JOURNALISTS **KILLED**

## THE FIGURES

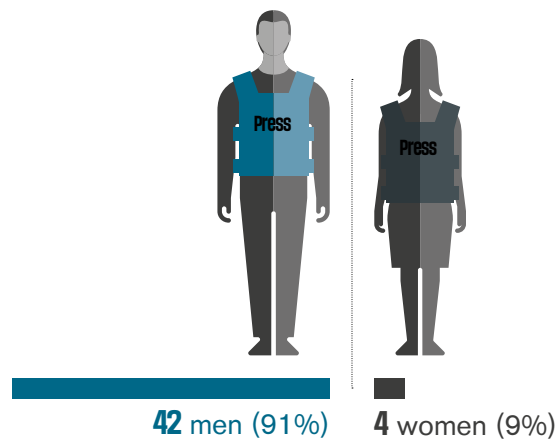


JOURNALISTS KILLED



**\* MURDERED OR DELIBERATELY TARGETED:**  
journalists deliberately killed because of their work

**\* KILLED WHILE REPORTING:**  
journalists killed while in the field without being targeted as journalists

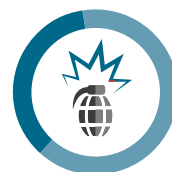


**43**  
local  
journalists  
(93%)



**3**  
foreign  
journalists  
(7%)

**18**  
in a war  
zone  
(39%)



**28**  
not in  
a war zone  
(61%)

## JOURNALISTS KILLED

## Number of journalists killed lowest in nearly 20 years

Mursal Vahidi  
© DRSaadia Sadat  
© DRShahnaz Roufi  
© DRRasha Abdallah  
Alharazy  
© Facebook

RSF logged a total of 46 journalists and media workers killed in connection with their work in 2021 (from 1 January to 1 December). This is **the lowest figure in nearly 20 years**. You have to go back to 2003 to find another year with fewer than 50 journalists killed. The accelerating downward trend since 2016 is mostly due to developments in regional conflicts (in Syria, Iraq and Yemen) and the stabilisation of war fronts, after the particularly deadly years of 2012 and 2016. Nonetheless, **an average of nearly one journalist a week is still being killed in connection with their work**.

**The number of female journalists killed rose from two last year to four in 2021, while the proportion, 9%, was at its highest since 2017.** This was due in part to the fall in the overall number of fatalities and in part to the death of three Afghan women media workers – [Shahnaz Roufi](#), [Saadia Sadat](#) and [Mursal Vahidi](#) – who were killed, in March, in two targeted attacks in the eastern city of Jalalabad that were claimed by the Islamic State. The fourth female victim was [Rasha Abdallah Alharazy](#), a Yemeni TV reporter who was killed in a targeted car bomb attack in Aden, Yemen's provisional capital, in November.

Giorgos Karaivaz  
© Nova NewsPeter R. de Vries  
© AFP**Two-thirds of those killed were murdered**

These four women were the victims of targeted killings, as were 26 other journalists. This means that nearly **two-thirds (65%) of the journalists killed in 2021 were deliberately eliminated**. While this proportion is less than in 2020, when a record 85% of the journalists killed were deliberately targeted, it is nonetheless slightly higher than the average for the past five years.

For the first time in five years, **the proportion of journalists killed in countries not at war fell slightly**. Nonetheless, **three of every five victims were killed in countries not officially at war**, and even the region regarded as the safest in the world for journalists, the European Union, was affected. The murders of [Giorgos Karaivaz](#), a *Star TV* crime reporter who had been investigating police corruption, in Athens in the spring, and [Peter R. de Vries](#), a Dutch crime reporter who also advised witnesses in criminal cases, in Amsterdam in the summer, made it the deadliest year for journalists in Europe since 2015, when a terrorist attack on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris left eight dead.

## JOURNALISTS KILLED

### Three journalists killed far from home

Even if the deadliest wars have lessened in intensity in recent years, war zones continue to be especially dangerous for the media. A total of **18 journalists** were killed in war zones in 2021, and **three of them** (versus one last year) were killed while reporting in the field far from their home country. [Danish Siddiqui](#), an Indian photographer working for the *Reuters* news agency who won a Pulitzer Prize in 2018, was killed while covering an unsuccessful Afghan special forces attack on Taliban positions on 16 July. He was shot dead after seeking refuge in a mosque with an army officer and a doctor in an attempt to escape Taliban fighters.



Danish Siddiqui  
© Wikipedia



David Beriain  
© Twitter



Roberto Fraile  
© EPA/MAXPPP

The other two were the equally experienced Spanish reporters, [David Beriain](#) and [Roberto Fraile](#). They were killed while filming a documentary with anti-poaching patrols in the northeast of Burkina Faso, near the so-called three-borders area (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), when one of the Sahel-based armed groups that are active in the region opened fire on the convoy.



## JOURNALISTS KILLED

## The five most dangerous countries



Benjamín Morales  
Hernández  
© DR

## Mexico

**Still no improvement**

Mexico is the world's most dangerous country for the media for the third consecutive year, with seven more journalists\* killed in 2021, bringing the total to 47 killed in the past five years. Journalists who cover sensitive political stories or organised crime, especially at the local level, run a high risk of being gunned down in cold blood. In Sonora, a northwestern state with a great deal of drug trafficking and organised crime activity, two journalists went missing and two were murdered in 2021, one of whom was **Benjamín Morales Hernández**, killed on 3 May, World Press Freedom Day. Fuelled by near total impunity and in the absence of bold reforms by successive governments to tackle the problem and reinforce protection for journalists, the spiral of violence seems endless.

\* **Fredy López Arévalo**, **Manuel González Reyes**, **Jacinto Romero Flores**, Ricardo López Domínguez, **Saúl Tijerina Rentería**, **Gustavo Sánchez Cabrera** and Benjamín Morales Hernández.

## Afghanistan

**In the shadow of the Taliban and Islamic State**

Although Kabul finally fell to the Taliban in mid-August without any fighting and with no media deaths, the media paid a high price in 2021 with a total of six journalists killed, most of them in attacks and bombings claimed by the Islamic State or the Taliban. The total impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators and instigators of these crimes explains the continuing violence against reporters in this country, which has seen a total



## JOURNALISTS KILLED

of 47 journalists (including six women) killed in the past five years – on a par with Mexico, the world's deadliest country for the media. In June, RSF asked the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor to investigate the past year's murders of journalists and media workers in Afghanistan as possible war crimes.

### Yemen and India

#### Equally horrific



Ahmed Hdij Baras  
© Facebook



Chenna Kesavulu  
© Telugu Kathalu



Sulabh Srivastava  
© ABP New



Avinash Jha  
© Facebook

With four fatalities each, Yemen and India share third place in the ranking of deadliest countries for the media. Both countries have the same number of journalists killed in the past five years – 18. But while the Yemeni journalists, such as [Ahmed Hdij Baras](#), are usually the collateral victims of a never-ending war, the Indian journalists are generally the victims of targeted murders after trying to cover local organised crime activities. [Sulabh Srivastava](#) was investigating trafficking in alcohol, [Chenna Kesavulu](#) gambling and tobacco smuggling, and [Avinash Jha](#) a network of illegal clinics. As in previous years, journalists located in the northern “Hindi Belt” half of India were more vulnerable. Three of the four journalists killed in India in 2021 were from this region, which has a more vibrant but often anarchic economy that encourages the development of criminal activities with the complicity of the police and local administration. Journalists who try to cover these activities prove to be easy targets.

### Pakistan

#### Sensitive stories off limit



Nazim Jokhiyo  
© Youtube

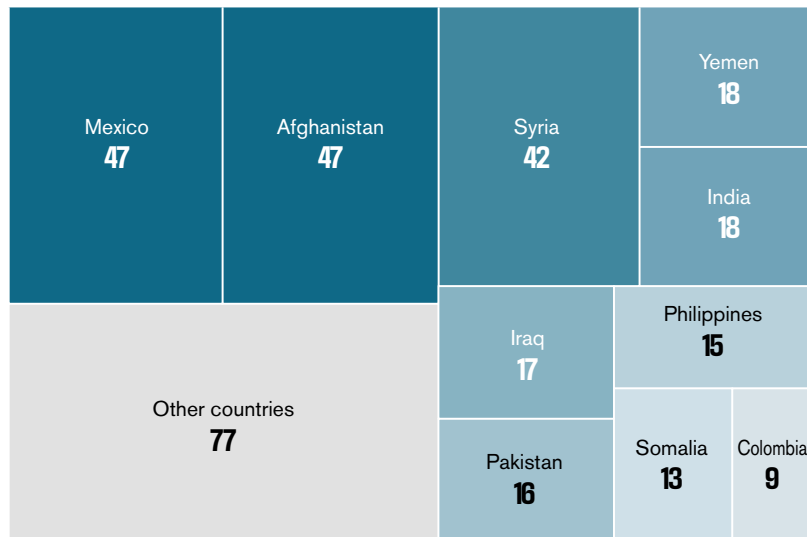


Muhammad Zada  
© Dawn

Even with one death less than last year (three instead of four), Pakistan continues to be one of the five deadliest countries for journalists. In a new development, two of the three journalists killed this year did not work for established news media and had instead created their own online media outlets. [Nazim Jokhiyo](#), who was based in southern Pakistan, had posted videos showing hunting parties for Arab dignitaries from the Gulf that are illegal because they hunt for protected species. [Muhammad Zada](#) had exposed the activities of drug traffickers in the area where he lived in north Pakistan. Both were the victims of targeted murders that confirmed the dangers of their reporting and highlighted the degree to which the traditional media have ceased to cover such stories because of the threat of reprisals. It was one more sign of the curtailment of press freedom in Pakistan, where a total of 16 journalists have been killed in the past five years.

## JOURNALISTS KILLED

**Over the past 5 years, three-quarters of fatalities originated in only 10 countries**



**Three-quarters of all journalists killed in the past five years met this fate in just ten countries.**

Mexico and Afghanistan top the list, tied, each with a total of 47 journalists killed. Asia (which includes Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, China, Myanmar, Indonesia and the Maldives, among others) was the deadliest continent, with a total of 109 journalists killed over the past five years.

**Syria: still one of three deadliest countries**

While Syria is no longer one of the world's five deadliest countries in terms of journalists killed in 2021, it remains one of the three deadliest countries during the past five years. This, even though fewer journalists have been killed in Syria in recent years, with the highest death tolls dating back to 2012–2013 (the start of the war) and to 2014–2015 (the emergence of the Islamic State). Although these figures were high, they fell short of the reality. Many journalists disappeared after been arrested by government forces or captured by Islamic State fighters. In the absence of death certificates, many families continue to believe that their loved ones are alive despite many years of captivity without any news and most likely victims of torture.

# JOURNALISTS HELD HOSTAGE

## THE FIGURES



**60**  
local  
journalists  
(92%)



**5**  
foreign  
journalists  
(8%)

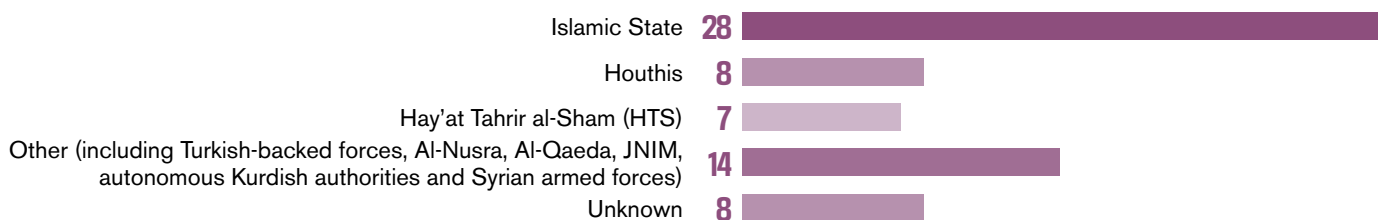
## JOURNALISTS HELD HOSTAGE



At least **65 journalists and media workers are currently held hostage**, which is two more than last year (**up 3%**). All of them were abducted in three Middle Eastern countries – Syria (44), Iraq (11) and Yemen (9) – except **Olivier Dubois**, a French journalist who was abducted in Mali in 2021 (see *Sahel Prisoner Olivier Dubois*, p, 22).

Despite the overall rise in the number of hostages, some were released in 2021. Four Yemeni journalists were freed, as was **Bilal Abdul Kareem**, the US founder of the propaganda media outlet *On the Ground News (OGN)*, who had been kidnapped by the Jihadi group Hay'at Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) in northern Syria.

## The leading hostage takers



**Journalists as hostages:** RSF considers journalists as hostages when they are being held by non-state actors who threaten to kill or injure them or continue to hold them as a means of pressure on a third party (a government, an organisation or a group of people) with the aim of forcing the third party to take a particular action. Hostages may be taken for political reasons and/or for economic reasons (for ransom).

## JOURNALISTS HELD HOSTAGE



Mohamed Alshekh  
© Facebook

The Islamic State continues to be the group responsible for the highest number of abductions of journalists. As of 1 December 2021, a total of **28 journalists** – more than **two-fifths (43%) of hostages worldwide** – who had been captured in Syria or Iraq, were still officially held by the Islamic State, although the group was officially defeated in 2017. To this day, none of the bodies have been found, and families have received no news.



Adham Dashrne  
© Facebook

In Syria, the biggest current threat is from HTS, a Syrian Jihadi group that controls the northern Idlib area and is holding seven hostages. HTS kidnapped four more journalists this year: [Khaled Hseno](#), [Adham Dashrne](#) and the brothers [Bashar and Mohamed Alshekh](#).



Razan Zaitouneh  
© AFP

Some older cases have been added to the hostage figures as a result of research by the Syrian Centre for Media (SCM), an RSF partner, which recently confirmed some reported abductions. The SCM has never stopped investigating the many abductions of journalists that occurred in 2014 and 2015, when the various Jihadi groups such as the Islamic State and Jaysh al-Islam were at their peak. Although there seems to be little hope of finding these journalists alive, they continue to be regarded as hostages as long as their deaths are not confirmed. This is the case of **Razan Zaitouneh**, a well-known journalist and human rights defender, abducted in 2013. She is widely presumed to have been killed by her kidnappers, who have never been officially identified.



Austin Tice  
© DR

### **Austin Tice, hostage in Syria for nearly 10 years**

Abducted at a checkpoint near the Syrian capital, Damascus, in August 2012, the US journalist [Austin Tice](#) spent his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday in August 2021 in captivity. His kidnappers have never been clearly identified, and the last proof of life, an appearance in a video, was nine years ago. The US authorities conducted direct negotiations with President Bashar al-Assad's government in 2020, fuelling hope that he is still alive and being held in a government prison.

Journalists have other predators in other countries. In Yemen, the Houthis are still holding eight journalists, four of whom were [sentenced to death](#) last year on the supposed grounds they spied for Saudi Arabia. Most of these hostages suffer from severe physical consequences as a result of torture. In the past, this Shia militia has openly used the journalists it abducts as bargaining chips in negotiations over prisoner exchanges.

## JOURNALISTS HELD HOSTAGE



Olivier Dubois  
© DR

**Sahel prisoner Olivier Dubois**

The only French hostage in the world at the end of 2021 was a journalist. A reporter for three French publications, *Libération*, *Point Afrique* and *Jeune Afrique*, **Olivier Dubois** was taken hostage in Gao, a city in northeastern Mali, on 8 April. He appeared a month later in a very short video in which he confirmed that he was being held by the Support Group for Islam and Muslims (JNIM), a regional coalition of armed groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda. He had received an email, which RSF has seen, inviting him to interview a JNIM representative, and he was kidnapped after flying to Gao for the proposed meeting. Based in Bamako, Mali's capital, since 2015, Dubois has always tried to provide the fairest and most exhaustive coverage of the conflicts in Mali by speaking to all the protagonists, despite major security threats. RSF has undertaken various initiatives to help obtain his release, including organising a meeting in Paris of journalists who are former hostages, and launching a support campaign in 15 French cities.

# MISSING JOURNALISTS

## Two journalists reported missing in 2021

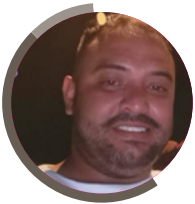
None of the five journalists who disappeared in 2020 has been found, and two more were reported missing in 2021, bringing the total number of disappearances logged by RSF since 2003 to 46.

**The two journalists who disappeared this year are both from Sonora, a state in northwestern Mexico** that borders the United States. Sonora's high levels of organised crime activity and corruption make it especially dangerous for the media.



Jorge Molotzín Centlal  
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**Jorge Molotzín Centlal**, a journalist with the weekly newspaper *Confidencial*, disappeared on 10 March. His last contact with his family in Caborca, the town where he lived, was a phone call reporting that he was in Magdalena de Kino, a town 120 km to the east, with a friend (who also disappeared). He was on a routine tour of the region's city halls to gather information and distribute copies of his newspaper. After seven days of searching and messaging, his family reported him missing on 17 March. Colleagues say he was not involved in any illegal activity, had no links with criminal groups of any kind and had not reported any particular threat related to his work.




Pablo Felipe Romero  
© DR

**Pablo Felipe Romero**, who reported for a local radio station in the port city of Guaymas and covered crime for the newspaper *El Vigía*, was reported missing on 25 March. Aged 34, he had recently resumed working as a journalist after a three-year break running a funeral home. According to a police source, investigators found his apartment and his car unlocked, but no trace of the reporter, whose phone has remained turned off since his disappearance.

In neither case have the local or federal police and judicial authorities reported any significant progress in their investigations, with the result that both disappearances remain a complete mystery.




# METHODOLOGY



The 2021 round-up figures compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) include professional journalists, non-professional journalists and media workers. The round-up distinguishes these categories in its breakdowns in order to facilitate comparisons with previous years.

Compiled by RSF every year since 1995, the annual round-up of violence and abuses against journalists are based on data gathered throughout the year. We gather detailed information that allows us to affirm with certainty or a great deal of confidence that the death, detention or abduction of a journalist was a direct result of their work.

The figures in this round-up were compiled on 1 December 2021, and don't take into account releases, arrests, deaths or disappearances that took place after that date.



## CREDITS

Editor-in-chief: Catherine Monnet

Data journalist: Nalini Chella-Lepetit

Reporting: Africa, Latin America, East Asia, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Maghreb, Middle East and EU/Balkans desks

Sub-editor: Penelope Smith

Layout: Stéphanie Barcelo