

The Chinese regime's fierce repression of journalists hidden behind a day of celebration

As China recently marked its “National Journalists Day”, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is calling attention to the Chinese regime's extreme crackdown on press freedom, which threatens the existence of independent journalism. From the torture of detained reporters to arbitrary detentions and systematic censorship and harassment, here are five alarming tactics used against journalists in China.

On Friday, 8 November 2024, the Chinese regime [celebrated](#) “National Journalists’ Day” — an annual event dedicated to glorifying its propaganda machine. The state-affiliated All-China Journalists Association (ACJA) awarded its Annual “Journalism” Prizes, with one of the top prizes going to an article from the state-run agency Xinhua that [praised the growing authority](#) of Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

“The Chinese regime’s celebration of a ‘Journalists’ Day’ is fooling no one. Given this display of propaganda, it is essential to highlight that Beijing’s ruthless crackdown on press freedom is endangering journalism’s very existence in the country. We call on the international community to increase pressure on the Chinese regime to stop violating the principles of press freedom enshrined in its constitution.

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Five key repressive tactics highlight the critical dangers to press freedom in China:

- **Journalists are killed, mistreated and tortured:** Violence committed by the regime against journalists is widespread. In November 2023, independent journalist **Sun Lin** was [beaten to death](#) by state security agents in his home, days after releasing footage of protests against Chinese leader Xi Jinping. 2017, [Nobel Peace Prize](#) and RSF Press Freedom Prize laureate **Liu Xiaobo** and [political commentator](#) **Yang Tongyan** both died in 2017 from cancers that were left untreated while they were held in detention.
- **The world’s largest jail for journalists:** Due to the systematic imprisonment of reporters, at least 122 journalists and press freedom advocates are currently detained in China, including Chinese journalist **Zhang Zhan**, who spent four years in prison for her coverage of the Covid 19 outbreak, and was [recently criminally detained](#) yet again for “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.”
- **Harassment and surveillance:** Journalists covering sensitive topics are constantly followed and monitored. According to the 2024 annual report by the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China (FCCC), the vast majority (81%) of surveyed journalists [believe](#) that authorities have “possibly or definitely” compromised their messaging app WeChat, while four out of five journalists said they had experienced interference, harassment, or violence.
- **The crackdown on foreign journalism:** The Chinese regime is increasingly using a [visa weaponisation policy](#) to limit access for foreign journalists. In the FCCC’s 2024 survey, nearly one-third of journalists [reported](#) their newsrooms suffered staffing shortages due to an inability to recruit the necessary reporters.
- **Transnational repression:** The regime extends its crackdown on press freedom far beyond its borders. Swedish publisher **Gui Minhai** was [abducted](#) in Thailand in 2015,

and later sentenced to 10 years in prison in China. Uyghur journalists living abroad are also the main target of the authorities, such as **Kasim Abdurehim Kashgar** whose friends [were detained](#) as retaliation for his journalistic work.

Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, he has reinstated a media culture [reminiscent of the Maoist era](#), where seeking information or sharing it freely is a crime. RSF's report, [The Great Leap Backwards of Journalism in China](#), reveals the regime's extensive efforts to control media outlets and information, both domestically and internationally.

China falls close to the bottom of [RSF's 2024 World Press Freedom Index](#), ranking 172nd out of the 180 countries and territories evaluated.