NATIONAL SECURITY AS A WEAPON AGAINST JOURNALISM

RSF REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

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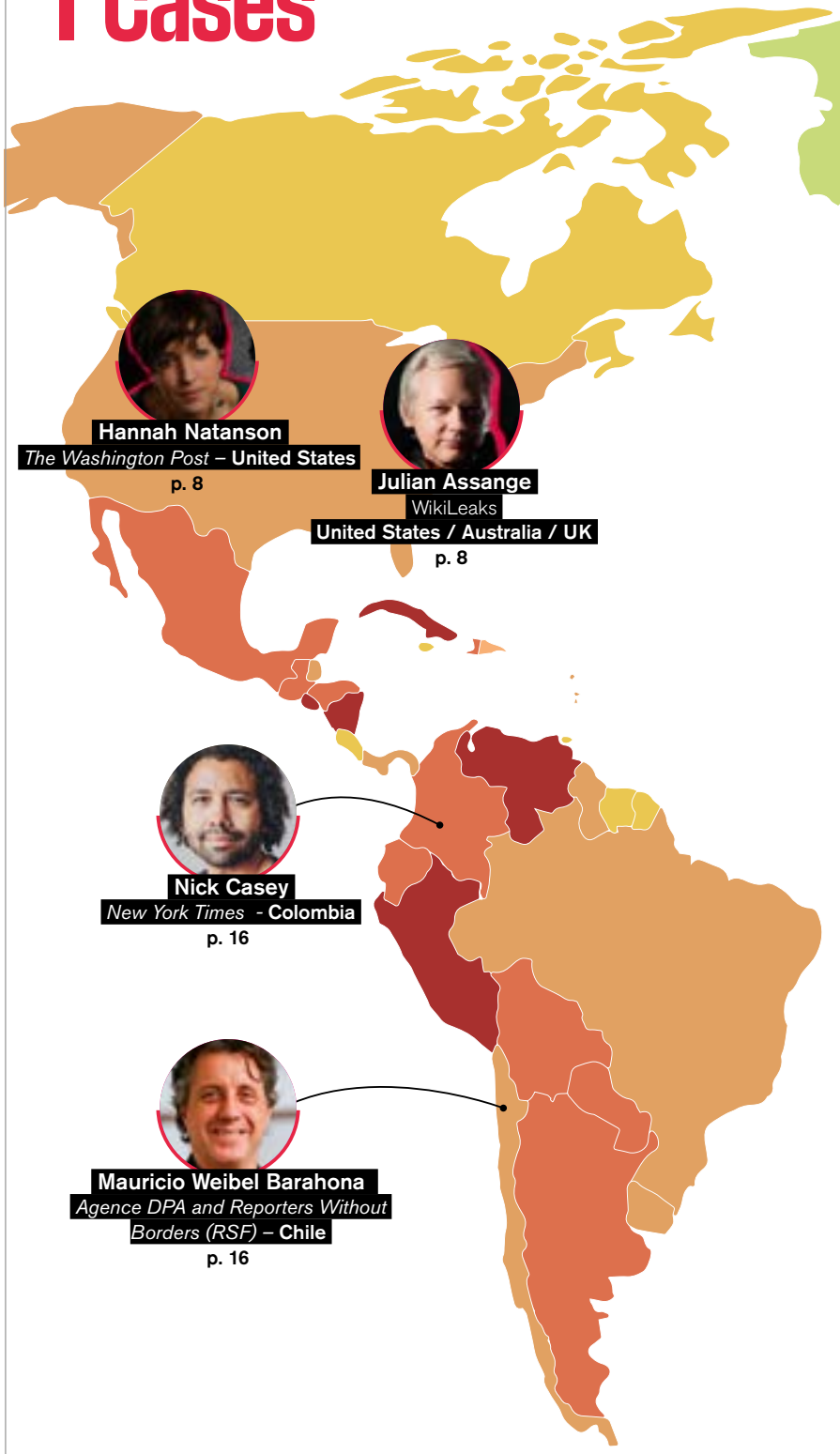
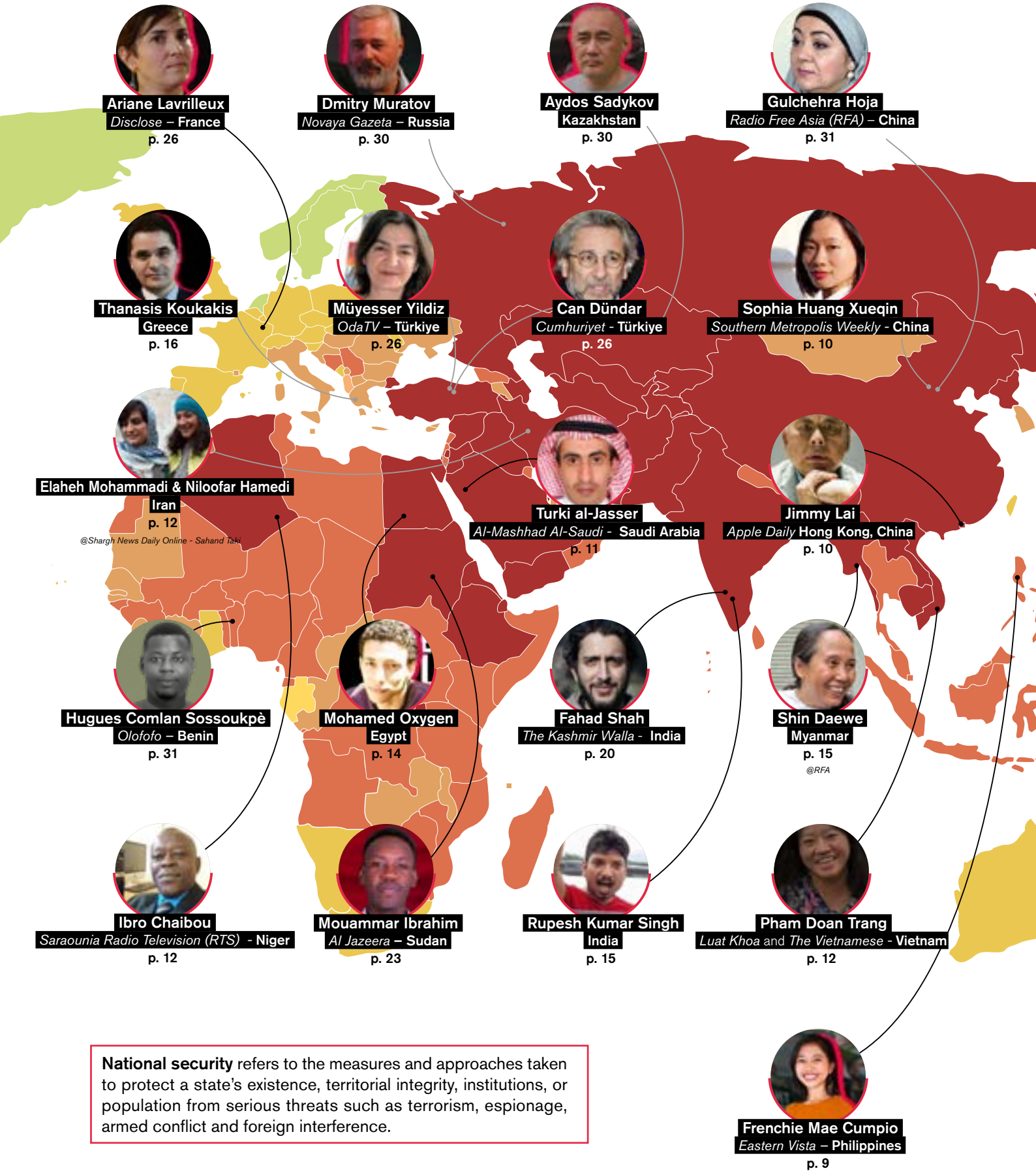
The Criminalisation of Journalism: A Map of Notable Cases





National security refers to the measures and approaches taken to protect a state's existence, territorial integrity, institutions, or population from serious threats such as terrorism, espionage, armed conflict and foreign interference.

FOREWORD

Anne Bocandé - © RSF

JOURNALISM IS NOT A CRIME AGAINST THE STATE

What do journalists **Turki al-Jasser** in Saudi Arabia, **Frenchie Mae Cumpio** in the Philippines, and **Zhang Zhan** in China have in common? They were all prosecuted in the name of "national security" between 2020 and 2026 — Turki al-Jasser was executed, the others were imprisoned — simply for doing their job as journalists. And they are far from isolated cases. Palestinian journalists in Gaza and the West Bank have also been targeted: they have been arrested, detained and, in some cases, tortured by the Israeli military, deprived of their fundamental rights under laws that are supposed to be exceptional, which are applied extensively to Palestinian journalists and thousands of civilians under the pretext of "counterterrorism" and "national security."

The excessive use of national security powers is not confined to authoritarian regimes. It is also evident in countries where democratic safeguards appear strong. Since the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States and the ensuing "Global War on Terrorism," the concept of national security has expanded considerably. Accusations of terrorism, conspiracy and acting against national interests are no longer used solely as legal grounds for prosecuting journalists; they have become political and rhetorical weapons used to discredit the press in the public sphere. Likewise, cybersecurity laws adopted to protect citizens are sometimes exploited to monitor, prosecute and imprison reporters.

The growing criminalisation of journalism is unfolding against a global backdrop of rising authoritarianism, the expansion of digital surveillance technologies and weakening democratic safeguards. This is reflected in the decline of the legal indicator in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index, a measurement of the legal environment in which journalists operate. The deterioration recorded in recent years points to a proliferation of restrictive legislation, the misuse of national security provisions and an increasing reliance on judicial systems to constrain the work of the press.

Across the world, governments are learning from one another on how to instrumentalise justice systems to portray political opposition, dissent and investigative journalism as acts of sedition. In the most extreme cases, independent journalism is treated as an enemy of the state that must be neutralised.

The rise in armed conflicts and political violence is also fuelling this trend. In times of war, journalists become direct targets as they uncover information belligerents seek to control.

At the same time, issues primarily treated as social, environmental, or public health concerns — such as migration, climate change, and pandemics — are increasingly being reframed as matters of national security. This shift exposes journalists covering these issues to even more restrictive legal and security frameworks.

While security imperatives are legitimate, they cannot be used as a pretext for suppressing information. This report demonstrates how the concept of national security is being progressively diverted from its original purpose and transformed, in many contexts, into a tool of coercion, intimidation and censorship. It documents the legal, political and narrative mechanisms used to criminalise journalism and issues concrete recommendations to states, international institutions and digital platforms so they will stop treating the press as a threat and, instead, recognise and protect it as a cornerstone of democracy.

For RSF, the stakes are clear: defending journalists who have been targeted in the name of national security means defending society's right to be informed. Every unjust prosecution, every arbitrary detention and every law weaponised against a reporter undermines not only press freedom, but also citizens' ability to understand the world around them, hold power to account and resist propaganda.

Journalism is not a crime against the state. It is one of the last safeguards against arbitrary rule and abuse of power. Protecting it is not merely a democratic choice — it is an urgent necessity.

Anne Bocandé,
Editorial Director

PREFACE

Martin Bright

NATIONAL SECURITY WHISTLEBLOWERS ARE THE LIFEBLOOD OF DEMOCRACY

Towards the end of the 2019 Hollywood movie "Official Secrets," a journalist turns to the Iraq War whistleblower Katharine Gun as she walks into court to face trial for leaking a top secret memo: "I think what you did was extraordinary. I think what you exposed was extraordinary. All our institutions failed us. The government, the intelligence services, the press — they failed us categorically." That journalist was me.

Ultimately, the attempts to silence Katharine in the interests of national security did not succeed, but there is no doubt her prosecution was intended as a warning to others. The UK government's National Security Act (2023) was, in part, an attempt to deter future intelligence service whistleblowers like Katharine Gun.

My own interest in national security and free expression is not just theoretical. In 2000, I found myself in court facing a two-year prison sentence after *The Guardian* and *Observer* newspapers refused to yield to demands to hand over source materials to the police to help in the prosecution of David Shayler, an officer in MI5, Britain's domestic intelligence service. Then, in 2007, another of my sources, Foreign Office official Derek Pasquill, was charged under the Official Secrets Act for leaking details of UK government policy towards radical Islamist groups.

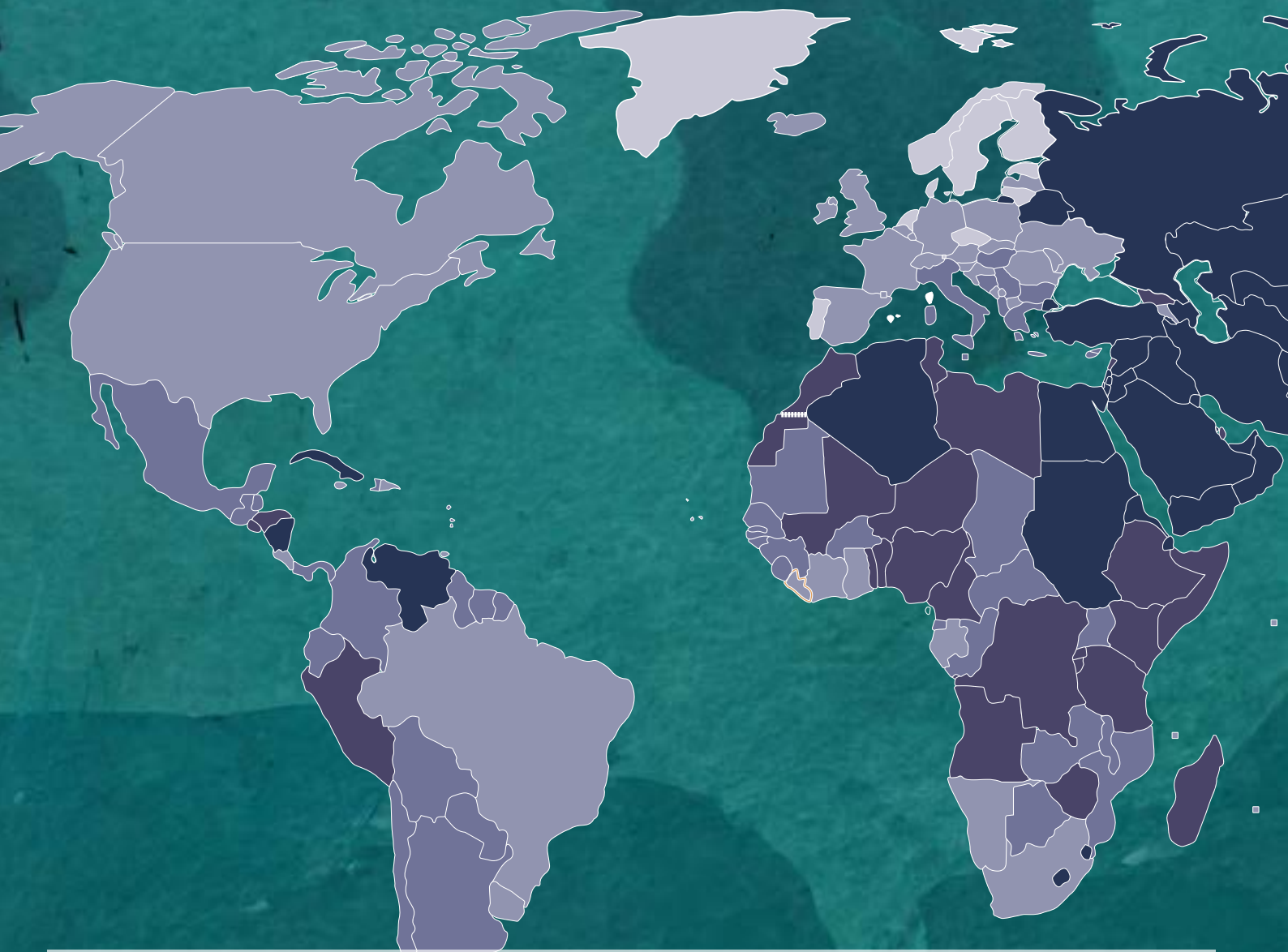
The world has changed beyond recognition since the events portrayed in "Official Secrets." The geopolitical landscape has been transformed by a global pandemic, war in Europe, the rise of populist politics and the re-election of Donald Trump. The film documents a time when the global order was defined by the rhetoric of humanitarian intervention, Russia was seen as an ally in the war against terror and Xi Jinping was a decade away from becoming the leader of China. In this new landscape, the work of investigative journalists is increasingly important, which is why they remain the target of governments across the globe. The urgency of the situation in 2026 cannot be overstated. The 21st century has witnessed the growth of new and sophisticated ways to restrict the work of journalists using the tools of the security state. In Russia, China and other authoritarian regimes, national security is often the weapon of first resort used against the media. But these techniques are not the sole preserve of dictators, as the cases of Arianne Lavrilleux in France and Thanasis Koukakis in Greece demonstrate. The new National Security Act in the UK could act as a model for democratic countries around the world by using the threat of Russia, China and the internet to restrict the activities of legitimate journalists.

This report is not intended to cover every case of abuse. There are, sadly, far too many to provide an exhaustive list. Instead, the examples given here are emblematic of the problem. There is a tendency to see the abuse of national security legislation as asymmetrical: that somehow democratic states need to "set a good example" for their authoritarian counterparts. There is something patronising and even colonial in this approach. Open and closed societies are constantly learning from each other when it comes to avoiding scrutiny and controlling dissent in what amounts to an increasingly sophisticated authoritarian feedback loop.

As the international situation becomes increasingly perilous, so does the work of journalists in conflict zones, inside authoritarian regimes or even investigating everyday abuses of power. This is why we salute those who continue reporting in the most challenging of circumstances. This is not the zero-sum game those who would silence journalists might wish it to be. It is only necessary to look at the work of three recent winners of the Nobel Peace Prize to see how central the role of journalists has become to the fight for democracy. Dmitri Muratov, Maria Ressa and Narges Mohammadi refused to buckle despite government claims that their work was a threat to national security in Russia, the Philippines and Iran, respectively.

Martin Bright,
Director of Journalism, University of Essex and Contributing Editor, Index on Censorship

The Index's legal indicator has seen the most severe decline in 2026



The criminalisation of journalism: how laws can silence the press

The Index's legal indicator has seen the most severe decline in 2026. This score deteriorated in more than 60% of the surveyed countries and territories — 110 out of 180 — between 2025 and 2026. This is notably the case in India (157th out of 180), Egypt (169th), Israel (116th) and Georgia (135th). The criminalisation of journalism, which is rooted in circumventing press law and misusing emergency legislation and ordinary law, is proving to be a global phenomenon. Twenty-five years after the US-led "war on terror," expanding the scope of defence secrets and national security measures has become a means to prohibit coverage of issues of public interest in many countries. This trend, which is particularly prevalent in authoritarian regimes, is also apparent in democracies and typically goes hand in hand with abusively using the law against journalists, notably in the name of combatting terrorism. While the full impact of a law or decree depends on how it is enforced in practice, the way these legal texts are worded often paves the way to attacks on journalism. For example, in the United Arab Emirates, vague notions such as "national unity" and "social cohesion" are used to criminalise reporting. In Burkina Faso, publishing certain information on military operations is explicitly punished. In Brazil, a 2019 decree temporarily expanded government secrecy, restricting access to public information. In the UK, the sweeping provisions in the Investigatory Powers Act raised concerns as it allowed police and intelligence services to monitor people's online activity, jeopardising the confidentiality of journalists' sources.

1

The expanding definition of a "national security threat"

The more a state expands its definition of national security, the greater the risk that these policies will be weaponised against the press. The more vaguely worded the legislation, regulation or decree, the easier it is to use against journalists.

The meaning of "national security" differs vastly from country to country. What's more, the definition of "national security" is not even static within one country alone, as governments often expand its scope.

1. COMMON NATIONAL SECURITY CHARGES USED AGAINST JOURNALISTS

The propaganda lexicon of the state is full of words such as "spies," "traitors" and "terrorists." In authoritarian contexts, these are often used interchangeably, equating journalists to dangerous opposition groups or geopolitical enemies. Democracies, for their part, tend to misuse espionage and state secrets laws to crack down on whistleblowing.

SPIES AND TRAITORS

THE USA'S ESPIONAGE ACT

Espionage and treachery have always been interwoven in the public imagination, and in the **United States** this has been fuelled by spy fiction, Hollywood and high-profile Cold War cases. Rarely depicted, however, is how the Espionage Act — enacted in 1917, ostensibly to prevent the disclosure of information sensitive to national security — has been abused from the outset. President Woodrow Wilson, who signed the bill into law, used it to prosecute thousands for protected political speech, such as anti-war activism. In the early 2000s, the archaic and overly broad law became the Obama administration's tool of choice for prosecuting whistleblowers such as Reality Winner and Edward Snowden.

A troubling new precedent was set in 2020, when the US Department of Justice charged Wikileaks publisher **Julian Assange** under the Espionage Act, marking the first time it was used against a publisher. The case stemmed from Wikileaks' publication of leaked secret documents. While publishing classified material is legally permitted in the United States, the government alleged, without ever proving it, that Assange had conspired to illegally obtain the information.

The case — which risked encouraging the government to invoke the Espionage Act against anyone that published sensitive material, including news media — was eventually resolved and Assange was liberated after spending over five years in England's Belmarsh prison awaiting extradition to the United States. However, the resolution failed to eliminate the underlying danger of this archaic law, which makes no distinction between traitors who sell sensitive information to foreign powers and conscientious whistleblowers who expose important information to the public. It does not allow for a public interest defence against charges under the Espionage Act.

Until the law is reformed, the risk of its abuse continues to hang over American news media. In January 2026, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) raided the home of *Washington Post* journalist **Hannah Natanson** in connection with its prosecution of an alleged leaker, confiscating devices that may contain sensitive information on thousands of confidential government sources — a serious breach of source confidentiality. The Trump administration ignored the legal guardrails meant to protect against this exact scenario by arguing that Natanson may have violated the Espionage Act. The case is ongoing as of this writing.

When it comes to prosecuting the publication of leaks as espionage, "International standards dictate, at a minimum, that both the public interest in the speech [e.g. journalistic content] and the potential harm to national security arising from speech are relevant to determining whether it is legally 'necessary' to penalise it using

A closer look at...

The case of Julian Assange

Fourteen years. That is how long the United States relentlessly pursued WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in an effort to put him on trial on US soil. The Australian citizen faced up to 175 years in prison on 18 charges linked to the publication of more than 250,000 leaked classified military and diplomatic documents in 2010. While publishing classified documents is legally protected in the United States, the government argued that Assange had conspired to obtain the information unlawfully — a claim it never succeeded in proving. After taking refuge for seven years in the Ecuadorian embassy in London, Assange was arrested by British authorities in April 2019. One month later, he became the subject of a US extradition request. Five years of waiting and legal twists followed, spent in London's high-security Belmarsh prison. After 1,901 days behind bars, Assange was finally released on 25 June 2024. Under an agreement reached with US authorities, he pleaded guilty to one count of "conspiracy to obtain and disclose national defense information", for which he was sentenced to 62 months in prison — time he had already served. On 26 June 2024, Assange landed in Australia, his home country, a free man. RSF campaigned on Assange's behalf, visited him at Belmarsh prison, and urged the US, UK and Australian governments to find a political solution to the case. Despite the positive outcome, it remains deeply alarming that Assange was deprived of his liberty for publishing documents that were both truthful and of considerable public interest, which had been leaked to him by a former US Army intelligence analyst. Had he been extradited to the United States, he would have been the first publisher tried under the Espionage Act, which does not provide for a public interest defence.

civil or criminal sanctions,"[1] according to *Freedom of Speech in International Law* by Amal Clooney and David Neuberger. However, the authors point out that "many national laws do not reflect this standard" and, worse, autocratic governments simply label journalists as "spies" to silence them.

RUSSIA'S "FOREIGN AGENT" AND "UNDESIRABLE ORGANISATION" LAWS

Such is the case in **Russia**, the other main character of Cold War movies. Exiled Russian investigative outlet *The Insider* reports that Russian legal defense organisation Perviy Otdel (or "Department One") found that espionage and treason convictions hit a record high in 2025. The trend accelerated further in the first quarter of 2026, with the number of new treason cases reaching the courts up 20% year on year, according to *Meduza*, citing Perviy Otdel. The Perviy Otdel report states that "charges under 'espionage' statutes are increasingly brought against people who had no actual access to state secrets. Evidence cited in such cases includes donations, correspondence, contacts with alleged provocateurs, and 'intent to commit a crime'." The spike in charges corresponded with the start of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, a phenomenon detailed in Part II of this report (see page 25). However, the Kremlin's accusations against journalists of betraying state interests predate the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and are exemplified by the creation of the legal designations "foreign agent" and "undesirable organisation."

The Foreign Agent Law was adopted in 2012 as a response to demonstrations against President Vladimir Putin and its scope has been repeatedly expanded. It allows the Kremlin to label any media or individual deemed under foreign influence as "foreign agents." Anyone placed on the foreign agent list must label every piece of content (text, audio or video) they publish with the words "foreign agent" in a font that is twice the size of the rest of the content. A third of the victims of this law are independent media, making them the primary target of this legislation.

In 2015, the Foreign Agent Law was followed by the Undesirable Organisations Law, which officially defined foreign organisations that pose a "threat to Russia" as "undesirable." Anyone collaborating with or financing an undesirable organisation can be prosecuted and fined, while repeat offenders are exposed to the risk of up to five years in prison. In August 2025, RSF was listed as an undesirable organisation.

The number of media actors labelled as foreign agents or undesirable organisations has multiplied by six since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, according to data collected by the Russian NGO OVD-Info. The vague wording of these laws allows the authorities to arbitrarily target media organisations and journalists, and to criminalise even the sharing of content from "undesirable" outlets.

Such is the level of sensitivity in Russia over questions of national security that even the reasons given for designating an organisation as "undesirable" or a journalist or a media as a "foreign agent" are often classified. Trials take place behind closed doors and lawyers acting for those accused of national security offences are covered by strict confidentiality clauses.

LATIN AMERICA: NATIONAL SECURITY INFLUENCED BY REVOLUTIONS AND ORGANISED CRIME

Meanwhile, in Latin America, national security concerns have traditionally focused not on external threats, but internal enemies — political opposition groups — due to the region's revolutionary past. In recent decades, this has shifted to include organised crime. In this context, treason charges are often invoked to pressure or discredit journalists investigating security institutions or armed actors. This is especially blatant in **Nicaragua**, where authoritarianism sharply deepened after February 2023, when the Ortega-Murillo regime released and expelled 222 political prisoners to the United States, publicly branded them "traitors to the homeland" under Law 1055, and rushed through a constitutional reform and a special law, Law No. 1145 on loss of nationality, allowing anyone designated as a "traitor to the homeland" to be stripped of their citizenship and civil rights. A 2026 report by RSF Spain and PCIN found that 15.2% of the exiled Nicaraguan journalists surveyed had been deprived of their nationality. Another tool used to oppress civil society and independent outlets is the 2020 law on foreign agents, which requires individuals and organisations receiving foreign funding to register with the government in a manner that seriously restricts their participation in public debate.

THE MIDDLE EAST AFTER THE ARAB SPRING: HEIGHTENED CRACKDOWNS ON THE ENEMY WITHIN

While the "Arab Spring" arose later than Latin America's revolutions and in a completely different context, similar fears of renewed revolts spurred repressive regimes around the Middle East to label members of the press as "internal enemies" of the people. In **Egypt**, the military dictatorship of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi following his coup d'état in 2013 began with a "hunt" for journalists perceived to be affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist group that backed Sisi's toppled predecessor, Mohamed Morsi. Targets included journalists from the Qatari channel *Al Jazeera*, as well as independent bloggers, correspondents and photojournalists covering the ongoing protests. Since the wave of regime change in the region, Gulf regimes in the **Emirates** and **Bahrain**, though not affected by the protests, have also justified their surveillance and repression of journalists under the pretext of protecting their states from hostile groups and terrorist cells affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, or other such organisations.

TERRORISTS

Terrorism charges have long been an excuse to lock up journalists, especially after the US-led "war on terror" that stemmed from the al-Qaeda attacks on 11 September 2001 (see page 20). Terrorism-related accusations against legitimate journalists are especially, but not exclusively, seen in conflict zones — notably in **Gaza** (see page 24), where journalists have been accused by the Israeli army of having terrorist links. These charges are particularly useful in silencing journalists as they often carry harsher penalties and leverage fearmongering to vilify reporters in the public mind.

Perhaps the most striking case today is that of 27-year-old **Frenchie Mae Cumpio**, the longest-detained journalist in the **Philippines**, still behind bars after six years. Known for her

1 Amal Clooney and David Neuberger (eds.), *Freedom of Speech in International Law* (Oxford University Press, 2024), p. 279.

CHINA VS. THE FREE PRESS

China, an exemplary national security state, is also the world's largest jailer of journalists, with at least 120 currently imprisoned. It has amassed a formidable collection of censorship laws that have enabled the government to control information so tightly that the country is at risk of becoming a news desert. The Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China contains 12 articles related to crimes endangering national security, many of which are deliberately vague to facilitate a wide interpretation of what could be considered an offence. Under these articles, convictions of "terrorism," "secession," "subversion," "inciting subversion," "colluding with foreign forces," and "espionage" can carry life sentences. The definition of a "state secret" is so broad that it could include anything from industrial data to the birthdays of party leaders, and "subversion" is defined as "anyone who organises, plots or acts to subvert the political power of the state and overthrow the socialist system."

The Chinese authorities impose their harshest restrictions on press freedom in East Turkestan (referred to as "Xinjiang" by Beijing) and Tibet, turning both regions into veritable black holes for news. East Turkestan is home to the vast majority of the country's imprisoned journalists, most of whom have been convicted on national security charges. In Hong Kong, which has been gradually handed over to China by the British since 1997, Beijing has been enforcing the territory's National Security Law (NSL) since 2020. This new legislation has given the Hong Kong government a pretext to prosecute at least 28 journalists, 8 of whom are still detained. Since 2020, dozens of newsrooms have been forcibly shuttered, hundreds of reporters have moved abroad and self-censorship has spread throughout the territory.

PORTRAITS OF NATIONAL SECURITY LAW VICTIMS

SUBVERSION

Maximum sentence:
Life sentence for "subversion" and "more than 5 years" in prison for "inciting subversion of state power"

Commonly used for:
Locking up journalists for extended periods of time, as opposed to other charges that have shorter sentences

© Huang Xueqin's Facebook account

Name: Sophia Huang Xueqin
Age: 37
Media: independent journalist, collaborator of *Southern Metropolis Weekly*
Jailed since: 19 September 2021
Sentence: 5 years in prison

Their story: Investigative journalist Sophia Huang Xueqin is one of the leading figures of the #MeToo movement in China. Her investigation into the sexual harassment suffered by a female student led the Ministry of Education to implement nationwide reforms. After an initial arrest and three months in detention in 2019 for her reporting on the protests in Hong Kong, she was imprisoned again in 2021 on charges of "inciting subversion of state power" and sentenced to five years in prison in 2024. There are reports that she has been tortured and held in solitary confinement.

SEPARATISM

Maximum sentence: Death penalty

Commonly used for: Targeting journalists from the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and other ethnic minorites

© Frédéric J. Brown / AFP / Getty Images

Name: Ilham Tohti
Age: 57
Media: founder of *Uighur Online (Uighurbiz)*
Jailed since: 20 February 2014
Sentence: Life in prison

Their story: Ilham Tohti, a Uyghur citizen-journalist and academic currently serving a life sentence, founded *Uyghurbiz*, a news site for Uyghur-related issues that promotes peaceful dialogue between the various communities in Xinjiang province. He was accused of "separatism" and received a life sentence in 2014. He has reportedly been kept in solitary confinement, deprived of food and his right to family visits has been limited and sometimes outright denied. Since 2017, the government has refused to provide any precise information on his health condition and medical treatment.

ESPIONAGE

Maximum sentence: Death penalty

Commonly used for: Targeting Chinese-born foreign journalists

© Angela Gui

Name: Gui Minhai
Age: 62
Media: founder of the Hong Kong-based publishing house Mighty Current
Jailed since: 17 October 2015
Sentence: 10 years in prison

Their story: Gui Minhai, a Swedish citizen and one of the founders of Mighty Current, a Hong Kong publishing house known for its investigations into Chinese politics — was kidnapped in Thailand by Chinese state agents while on vacation in October 2015. In 2020, he was sentenced 10 years in prison for "espionage", and there have been no updates on his whereabouts since. In December 2025, United Nations experts officially recognised his detention as arbitrary.

COLLUSION WITH FOREIGN FORCES (HONG KONG NATIONAL SECURITY LAW)

Maximum sentence: Life in prison

Commonly used for: Silencing independent media outlets

© Anthony Wallace / AFP / Getty Images

Name: Jimmy Lai
Age: 78
Media: founder of *Apple Daily*
Jailed since: December 2020
Sentence: 20 years in prison

Their story: The case of Jimmy Lai, British citizen and founder of the independent newspaper *Apple Daily,* has become a symbol of Hong Kong's decline in press freedom. In January 2020, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam suggested that foreign media, including Hong Kong outlets founded by foreign residents, may be mouthpieces for Western governments, which paved the way for the subsequent forced closure of *Apple Daily* and sentencing of Lai for "collusion with foreign forces". A laureate of the RSF Press Freedom Award shut away in solitary confinement since 2020, Lai was sentenced to 20 years in prison in February 2026, which amounts to a death sentence given his age and deteriorating health.

A closer look at...

The case of Christophe Gleizes

Christophe Gleizes, French sports journalist, imprisoned for "glorifying terrorism" due to his journalism

French sports journalist Christophe Gleizes, a football specialist and contributor to the French magazines *So Foot* and *Society*, was sentenced in Algeria on 29 June 2025 to seven years' imprisonment on charges of "glorifying terrorism" and "possessing publications for propaganda purposes harmful to national interests". His conviction was upheld on appeal on 3 December 2025. Gleizes, who is also the author of *Magique Système : l'esclavage moderne des footballeurs africains* ("*Magical System: The Modern Slavery of African Footballers*"), was arrested on 28 May 2024 while reporting on the football club JS Kabylie as part of his journalistic work. He subsequently spent 13 months under judicial supervision — which prohibited him from leaving Algerian territory — before being sentenced. When his sentence was upheld on appeal, the journalist chose to withdraw his next appeal before the Court of Cassation to allow for a possible presidential pardon. RSF is leading an international campaign for his release alongside his family and loved ones.

coverage of abuses committed by the military and police, Cumpio was originally charged with "illegal possession of weapons" — after a raid on her living quarters in which a firearm and hand grenade were very probably planted by the police — before the equally bogus charge of "financing terrorism" was added to her case. Adding the terrorism-related charge meant that Cumpio, the executive director of *Eastern Vista* and a radio presenter at *Aksyon Radyo Tacloban* (DYVL), faced a much harsher potential punishment of up to 40 years in jail. While the initial charge was eventually dropped, she was convicted of "financing terrorism" on 22 January 2026 despite a glaring lack of evidence and now faces a prison sentence of between 12 and 18 years. Her case is far from isolated; even though the Philippines is no longer an outright dictatorship, it is so common for authorities to label journalists as "subversive" or "terrorists" when they cover sensitive issues that the practice has a name: "red-tagging."

Frequent terrorism charges against journalists are often a clear sign of autocracy. In **Belarus**, since the 2020-2021 mass protests against the rigged election of despotic President Lukashenko, the regime has drastically expanded its use of "extremism" and "terrorism" accusations to eradicate independent media. The Interior Ministry, the Committee for State Security (KGB) and the country's courts designate newsrooms as "extremist" with no evidence or oversight, and anyone linked to these media outlets — even readers who merely repost their articles — faces fines, administrative arrests or prison terms of up to ten years.

> *Among the imprisoned journalists in Belarus whose charges are known, three quarters are detained on extremism-related or other national security grounds.*

In **Saudi Arabia**, despite social reforms implemented by Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS), the kingdom continues to arbitrarily condemn journalists to extensive prison sentences or execution, as was the case with **Turki al-Jasser**, wrongly convicted on several false charges of terrorism and high treason. While charges often remain undisclosed, those revealed to the public tend to revolve around national security threats, from "economic terrorism" – the charge against **Esam al-Zamel,** a blogger and columnist for *Mecca* and *Monitor* imprisoned in September 2017 and condemned to 15 years of prison for criticising Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's failed plan to privatise the national oil company Saudi Aramco – to "communicating with individuals hostile to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", the charge leveled against caricaturist **Mohamed Ahmed al-Hazzaa al-Ghamdi**, serving 23 years in prison since 2018 for publishing his cartoons in a Qatari newspaper during Saudi Arabia's official boycott of Qatar.

2. NEWER NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES AND GREY AREAS

While some states have long considered offences not directly related to defence — such as the "dissemination of propaganda" — to fall under the purview of national security, a growing list of issues is now viewed by governments around the world as having the potential to destabilise the state. Beyond the realm of military and intelligence matters, the scope of national security has gradually expanded, on a global scale, to encompass the online information space, climate change and public health crises. As this definition broadens, so too do the restrictions imposed on journalists tasked with holding governments accountable.

PROPAGANDA AND "FAKE NEWS" CHARGES

Autocratic regimes have long criminalised propaganda broadly, because any narrative that contradicts their own is seen as inherently destabilising. Today, the very real problem of misinformation, disinformation and malicious foreign influence flooding the information space is making it easier for ill-intentioned governments to portray legitimate journalism as "fake news" and propaganda, and to classify — and punish — it as a national security offence. Casting disinformation as a national security concern risks legitimising disproportionate measures against reliable news professionals and makes it easier to circumvent the

legal safeguards designed to protect freedom of expression and opinion. Instead, the accuracy and trustworthiness of journalistic content should be judged by press law — which is not always the case.

In **Cuba,** the entry into force of the Social Communication Law in 2024 has intensified pressure on independent journalism. Journalists have been interrogated on charges of "propaganda against the government" and "mercenarism", with authorities portraying their reporting as an attempt to destabilise the socialist state. The Cuban case illustrates how the language of cybersecurity, disinformation and foreign interference can be used to recast independent journalism as a national security threat. The law forms part of a broader legal and political framework in which the regulation of digital communications reinforces a longstanding policy towards non-state media. In a country where privately owned media have been banned since 1959, independent reporting has long been treated as hostile propaganda. Authorities justify this approach through an official discourse centred on combating "disinformation" and "cyber lies", and defending the country against foreign aggression, particularly from the United States.

Similarly, in **Vietnam**, where power is wielded with an iron fist by the country's only authorised party, the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), dozens of journalists have been prosecuted and convicted under Article 117 of the Vietnamese Penal Code, which includes the offence "disseminating anti-state documents". This deliberately vague wording allows the authorities to easily suppress journalists who publish information deemed sensitive by the regime. This includes 2019 RSF Press Freedom Prize laureate **Pham Doan Trang**, co-founder of the online magazines *Luat Khoa* and *The Vietnamese,* who is currently serving a nine-year prison sentence under Article 117. In 2018, the crackdown on anti-state speech intensified with the cybersecurity law — borrowed from China, a phenomenon detailed in Part III of this report (see page 33) — which criminalises "providing misleading information liable to cause confusion among the population."

In **Iran,** which ranks 177th out of 180 countries in the RSF's World Press Freedom Index, journalists are routinely harassed, surveilled, interrogated and imprisoned for being alleged foreign agents, "conspiracy and collusion to commit crimes against national security", or for "propaganda against the Islamic Republic". Following the nationwide Woman, Life, Freedom protest movement that erupted in September 2022, the regime arrested more than 100 journalists covering the demonstrations. Many of them — including **Elaheh Mohammadi, Niloofar Hamedi, Vida Rabbani, Saeedeh Shafiei** and Nobel Peace Prize laureate **Narges Mohammadi** — were charged with collusion against the state, propaganda against the Islamic Republic and offences against national security.

CYBERSECURITY

As countering "information warfare" has become a major priority, legislation governing speech in the digital sphere has proliferated. Growing dependence on digital platforms and artificial intelligence has made states increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks, while mounting evidence points to the use of malicious foreign online influence operations to sway the outcomes of democratic elections. Against this backdrop, laws regulating the internet have, in some cases, evolved into new tools for silencing journalists. Perhaps the most striking example is China's Great Firewall, examined in Part III of this report (see page 33).

Niger, like other countries in the Sahel region of Africa, uses cybersecurity laws as a way of circumventing media laws. Prison sentences for media offences were abolished in 2010 after the adoption of a press law, yet, since September 2025, seven journalists have been targeted by the cybercrime law, which was amended in June 2024 to reinstate prison sentences for "defamation", "insults" and "dissemination of information likely to disturb public order or undermine human dignity". The penalties are far more severe than the country's media law, allowing imprisonment for two to five years and a fine of two million to five million CFA francs. Six journalists are currently charged with "complicity in disseminating a document prone to disturbing public order" under the section 31 of the cybercrime law, and three of them are currently behind bars: **Ibro Chaibou** (*Saraounia Radio Television)*, **Youssouf Sériba** (*Les Échos du Niger)* and **Oumarou Kané** (*Le Hérisson*).

In **Pakistan**, the internet was the last frontier for independent journalism as press freedom violations multiplied under an increasingly totalitarian government. That changed with the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), which is more frequently used to curb online freedom of expression than to tackle cybercrime, and amendments made in 2025 sharply reinforced its repressive nature. The amendments created a government-controlled regulator and introduced prison sentences of up to three years for sharing "false" or "prohibited" content, terms left dangerously vague. Anyone — even if they are not directly affected by the content — can file a complaint by claiming to have "substantial reasons to believe that the offence has been committed", and suspects can be arrested without a warrant. At least nine news professionals have been abusively prosecuted under the PECA since the amendments came into force, and journalists' YouTube channels have been widely censored.

In **Nicaragua**, almost all independent newsrooms have been shut down, confiscated or forced into exile, leaving digital reporting as one of the last remaining sources of reliable information. As a result, online journalists — mostly working from exile — are surveilled and threatened with prosecution, and the platforms content, where they share their content are often blocked within Nicaraguan territory. Facilitating this crackdown, the Special Cybercrimes Law has been used to control the circulation of online information and initiate administrative or criminal proceedings against critical voices since it came into force in December 2020. Like the PECA in Pakistan, the Special Cybercrimes Law criminalises vaguely-defined acts — the dissemination of "false news", "incitement to hatred" and "threats to stability" — which allow news content to be framed as risks to state security. The law

therefore functions as a central tool for restricting independent reporting and reshaping the country's information ecosystem around state-approved narratives.
In **Tunisia**, Decree Law 54, adopted in 2022, has strayed from its original aim of tackling cybercrime and violates the provisions in the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime. The law allows for legal loopholes that expose journalists to more legal proceedings, puts their sources at risk and grants excessive interpretative powers to security and legal authorities. Journalists have been detained under Decree Law 54 for charges such as "spreading false news".

WIDENING NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUES

If all disruptions to society's general harmony are considered national security problems, then the scope can be widened far beyond matters typically reserved for defense and intelligence authorities. A range of issues traditionally unrelated to military affairs — such as environmental protection and public health — are increasingly considered national security affairs, expanding the discretion to restrict journalistic scrutiny.

PUBLIC HEALTH CRISES

The COVID-19 pandemic undeniably strained the stability of countries everywhere, and some leveraged the crisis as an opportunity to crack down on the press. Reporters everywhere faced new barriers to attending events and reporting on the ground, but these measures were abusively heightened in **Russia**, where foreign journalists were denied access to Parliament, courts limited press presence at public hearings and journalists faced new obstacles to attending events involving President Vladimir Putin. Roskomnadzor, the totalitarian broadcast regulator, forced newsrooms to delete reports related to the coronavirus, even when the information was verified. Russian authorities justified these restrictions as necessary to combat disinformation and protect public order during the pandemic, presenting them as measures to safeguard national security and social stability.

Meanwhile, in **Hungary**, the smear campaigns against the media waged by former prime minister Viktor Orban evolved into accusations that journalists were publishing disinformation about the health crisis. His ruling majority then passed a "Coronavirus law" allowing the government to rule by decree during the state of emergency for an indefinite period. The legislation also included a provision for sentences of up to five years in prison for spreading fake news and significantly prolonged the deadline for government institutions to reply under the Freedom of Information Act. The state of emergency, which was later renewed under the pretext of the war in Ukraine, risked creating a chilling effect on journalism and made it even more difficult for reporters to access information.

In **Africa's Great Lakes region**, the COVID-19 pandemic also provided a pretext for restricting press freedom. **Tanzania** stood out for its harsh crackdown on media outlets that challenged the official narrative about the management of the outbreak at a time when then-president John Magufuli maintained that people should "pray to God rather than rely on face masks." Media organisations that covered the issue were suspended, including *Mwananchi*, the country's leading Swahili-language daily newspaper. *Star Media*, *Multichoice Tanzania* and *Azam Digital Broadcast* were fined and forced to issue public apologies after broadcasting a report criticising the president for failing to impose a lockdown. In April 2020, **Talib Ussi Hamad** of the newspaper *Tanzania Daima* was suspended for six months for publishing a report on the virus. In July, a new law completed the restrictive framework: no content relating to the pandemic could be published without prior approval from a state official. The following month, new regulations prohibited the publication of "information concerning the outbreak of a deadly or contagious disease in the country or elsewhere without the approval of the authorities". The rebroadcasting of content produced by foreign media outlets was also made subject to official authorisation, affecting Tanzanian radio stations that carried programmes from broadcasters such as the *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Voice of America (VOA),* and *Radio France Internationale (RFI).*

In **Rwanda**, **Dieudonné Niyonsenga**, head of the YouTube channel *Ishema TV*, remains behind bars in "degrading conditions" according to 2024 reports by the US-funded international broadcaster *Voice of America* (*VOA*) and the human rights organisation Human Rights Watch. He was arrested for allegedly "obstructing government measures", "violating lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic" and presenting the police with "fake press cards". Yet, Just weeks before his arrest, Niyonsenga, who is known for his reporting from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, had published interviews in which Rwandan soldiers were accused of theft and looting.

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

Environmental and climate-related topics — some of the most dangerous stories to report on in the world — have likewise been absorbed into security frameworks. Many journalists reporting on topics such as illegal land exploitation, gold mining, deforestation, pollution and the management of land and natural resources are routinely obstructed, threatened, or attacked under the guise of national security. Some journalists are denied entry to certain territories or prevented from accessing information of public interest because of their reporting on these issues, while others face violence when covering protests against climate change. Arbitrary detention also remains one of the major threats facing these professionals.

The heavy toll in Latin America

In the **Brazilian Amazon**, journalists investigating deforestation, illegal mining, wildfires, and socio-environmental conflicts have faced threats, violence, and restricted access in areas treated by civilian and military authorities as sensitive to sovereignty and national defence, especially during the Bolsonaro years (2019-2022) and their immediate aftermath. In **Mexico**, since 2021, several environmentally sensitive megaprojects — such as the Tren Maya railway and the Interoceanic Corridor — have been declared national security priorities, and requests for environmental information on these projects have frequently been denied. In **Peru**, in areas affected by illegal mining, oil spills, and ecological conflicts, press access is often limited under the pretext of maintaining territorial control and protecting strategic facilities. In **Colombia**, reporters covering deforestation often encounter militarised zones and other locations with restricted access justified by public-order and territorial-protection rationales, as these areas often harbour illegal industrial activities and paramilitary forces.

EVERYTHING IS NATIONAL SECURITY
in authoritarian states

THREE EXAMPLES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

In many autocracies — be they religious, secular, communist or capitalist — the ruling party is the state and the state is the ruling party, so any opposition to the governing individual, ideology or political group is often considered a threat to the order of the nation. In this context, "national security" refers less to the protection of the population than to the preservation of the state and the interests of the ruling political order.

EGYPT

In **Egypt's** military dictatorship, run by Abdel Fattah al-Sisi since 2013, at least half of the 18 journalists currently in prison are detained on charges of "threatening national security" or "belonging to a terrorist organisation". In truth, they are locked up for their work: articles, opinion pieces and investigations that question the legitimacy of the ruling regime. Blogger Mohamed Ibrahim Radwan, for instance, was arrested in 2019 for "endangering state security" and "disseminating false news" because he had held up a microphone up to people in the streets and asked them their opinions. Known as "**Mohamed Oxygen**" and the recipient of the 2023 RSF Courage Prize, he was locked up until 20 March 2026, three years past the end of his bogus sentence.

KYRGYZSTAN

In **Kyrgyzstan**, a developing dictatorship in a secular, post-Soviet republic, criticism of President Sadyr Japarov and exposés of government corruption and nepotism are framed by the authorities as threats to state stability, thereby recasting what would normally fall under defamation law or public debate in democratic systems as national security offences intended to deter dissent. Although cases are formally opened under legislation punishing individuals for "inciting mass riots" and "interregional hatred", they effectively punish reporting on misconduct involving the president, his relatives and associates. Multiple journalists and media outlets — from broadcasters *Next TV* to digital news platforms like *Radio Azattyk* to *Temirov Live* and *Kloop* — have faced arrests under these charges, as well as probation sentences and censorship following investigations critical of Japarov's leadership.

AFGHANISTAN

While Sisi's military dictatorship claims to oppose to Islamic regimes, his totalitarian tactic of equating himself with the state also has striking similarities with the government of **Afghanistan**, an authoritarian regime where religion and the state are one. Rooted in the Hanafi school of Islam and shaped by Pashtun tribal customs, the Taliban interpret Islamic teachings in an extremely rigid way, and any violations of these principles are considered crimes against the state. The General Directorate of Intelligence (GDI), the country's secret services, enforces everything from the 2024 Law on the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice — which bans the broadcasting of any image depicting living beings and the sound of women's voices, and has led to the closure of at least a dozen media — to accusations of spying or spreading propaganda against the Taliban, charges often used against journalists working with foreign or exiled media. The GDI arrests journalists arbitrarily, holds them incommunicado, and tortures them for periods ranging from a few days to several months.

In India, the emblematic case of Rupesh Kumar Singh

It should be noted that even when environmental issues are not explicitly classified as matters of national security, journalists covering them still risk prosecution under such legislation. Environmental journalism frequently exposes corruption and illegal activities involving powerful actors willing to resort to extreme reprisals. National security charges have therefore become a particularly effective weapon to bury climate coverage. The case of Indian journalist **Rupesh Kumar Singh** illustrates this trend. Long targeted through repeated arrests and reportedly placed under surveillance via the spyware Pegasus, Singh investigated the impact of pollution and the degradation of natural resources on communities in the state of Jharkhand. On 15 July 2022, two days before his arrest, he published a report on the news website *Janchowk* examining the effects of industrial pollution, including the case of an eleven-year-old girl suffering from a severe tumour. The article and the public reaction it generated attracted widespread attention and highlighted the failings of local authorities, and Singh has remained in detention ever since. Five separate cases have been brought against him, several of them under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), **India**'s particularly stringent anti-terrorism legislation. The law effectively reverses the presumption of innocence by placing the burden of proof on the accused. It allows the state to designate an individual as a terrorist without prior judicial determination and to hold them in custody for extended periods similarly even presenting the formal charges normally required. Although authorities maintain that the prosecutions are unrelated to Rupesh Kumar Singh's journalistic work, the sudden multiplication of proceedings following the publication of his investigation into pollution, combined with numerous judicial irregularities, leave no doubt that their primary purpose was to silence his reporting.

Detention in Myanmar

In **Myanmar**, terrorism-related charges have similarly been used to silence journalists reporting on environmental issues and the consequences of the civil war. Journalist and filmmaker **Shin Daewe**, known for her investigations into environmental matters, was arrested in October 2023 while working on a documentary. In January 2024, a military court sentenced her to life imprisonment for "aiding and abetting terrorism" under the anti-terrorism law, a sentence later reduced to 15 years in prison. Recipient of the 2025 RSF Press Freedom Prize, she was ultimately released in April 2025 after more than 900 days in detention. Her case illustrates the Burmese junta's growing use of anti-terrorism legislation to criminalise independent journalism, including reporting on environmental issues.

Environmental journalism frequently exposes corruption and illegal activities involving powerful actors willing to resort to extreme reprisals. National security charges have therefore become a particularly effective weapon to bury climate coverage.

3. THE SECURITY NARRATIVE AND THE SURVEILLANCE OF THE PRESS

Surveillance has become one of the most pervasive threats to press freedom. Invoking national security, states increasingly subject journalists to physical monitoring, intercepted telecommunications and invasive spyware attacks. At the same time, political leaders use hostile rhetoric to portray independent reporting as a threat to the nation. These unofficial measures create a climate of fear and distrust that undermines investigative journalism, encourages self-censorship and weakens the public's right to information.

ILLEGAL SURVEILLANCE

Illegal spyware, wiretapping and physical stalking are common tactics in some states to keep tabs on news professionals designated as threats. In July 2025, RSF discovered that its own staff had been illegally surveilled by the Bolsonaro administration in Brazil.

Surveillance has exacerbated with technology. **China** under Xi Jinping is a good example here, as it has some of the most advanced surveillance techniques on the planet. Unlike the other cases mentioned in this report, Beijing's surveillance of journalists is generally justified by vaguely written national security laws. Authorities use facial recognition cameras, location tracking and digital monitoring to closely observe journalists' movements, communications and published content. Individuals deemed sensitive, including domestic and foreign reporters, may be subject to data privacy breaches and real-time tracking by law enforcement, increasing pressure and encouraging self-censorship.

The misuse of high-tech spying is dangerous, but it is only possible because governments know they can get away with it. Major investigations over recent years have revealed an explosion in the use of Predator and Pegasus spyware, with perhaps the most notable case being "Predatorgate" in **Greece**. In 2022, financial journalist **Thanasis Koukakis** discovered his phone had been compromised. It later emerged that several opposition and government politicians, including ministers and at least 13 media professionals, had been targeted by Predator. Some of these individuals were subjected to other types of surveillance by the Greek National Intelligence Service (EYP), which led to the suspicion that the EYP was behind the Predator attacks. Despite the resignations of high-level officials, the probe into the illegal surveillance was politically sabotaged, journalists investigating Predatorgate were targeted with abusive lawsuits and officials from the privacy watchdog institution ADAE were summoned as suspects. A major new development came in February 2026, when an Athens court convicted four people over the wiretapping scandal. However, the court only questioned two proven Predator victims and did not question other suspects, including high-ranking officials. An appeal trial was pending as of June 2026, and those who ordered the surveillance have largely escaped justice.

While Greece's "Predatorgate" scandal saw transparency mechanisms fail and institutions successfully evade scrutiny, **Colombia**'s case of "*Las Carpetas Secretas*" ("the secret folders") led to some accountability — but no fundamental change. Between February and December 2019, army units spied on the activities of more than 130 citizens. Surveillance measures used to protect the population from terrorists were applied to journalists, including *New York Times* correspondent **Nick Casey**, who had published damaging allegations about the existence of "kill orders" in the Colombian army. Journalists from *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *El Tiempo* and *Semana* and reporters in conflict-affected regions were all targeted. The military units involved described these operations as "profiling" and "special tasks" to produce military intelligence reports. Telephone numbers, home and work addresses, email addresses of friends, relatives, children, colleagues and other personal data were gathered in bulk. When the scandal broke, President Iván Duque publicly condemned it on 2 May 2020, and two days later the commanders of the national army and the military forces denied having given the order or led the operation. In 2020, the public ministry initiated disciplinary proceedings against two retired generals, five colonels, three majors, one lieutenant and two non-commissioned officers, nine of whom ultimately received disciplinary sanctions for their responsibility in the illegal monitoring of journalists. No criminal investigations followed, no senior commanders were held accountable and the military intelligence apparatus saw no structural reforms.

Chile remains a beacon of hope thanks to the significant judicial and legislative action taken to prevent future abuses and provide a model for other countries. In 2017, investigative journalist **Mauricio Weibel Barahona** became the target of an illegal surveillance operation after exposing corruption and embezzlement within the Chilean army. His investigations led to the recovery of approximately 4.5 billion USD for the public treasury and the prosecution of 850 military personnel. The army intelligence director at the time, General Schafik Nazal, asked judge Juan Antonio Poblete Mendez to authorise the illegal interception of telephone communications, using the false identity of an alleged foreign agent seeking strategic information. The operation was called "Operation W" after the journalist's surname. Poblete approved the request and, in 2019, the news site *la Tercera* revealed the existence of the operation. In response, Weibel launched his own investigation, identified those who were tapping him and handed over the information to the authorities. In 2021, he filed a complaint for malicious interception against the armed forces and the judiciary. Nazal and Poblete have been indicted, with prosecutors seeking a 20-year prison sentence for each. As of June 2026, the preparatory hearing for the oral trial was yet to be scheduled. Weibel and his legal team have also drafted the Model Law for Press Protection — inspired directly by the failures exposed in this case — which has been approved by Chile's Chamber of Deputies and is awaiting Senate ratification. UNESCO and other international organisations plan to promote the model law worldwide.

THE SECURITY NARRATIVE AGAINST PRESS FREEDOM

When politicians use abusive rhetoric to discredit journalists, they often present them to the public as national security threats. These unofficial accusations foster distrust of the press among citizens and diminish public support for journalists when they are abusively prosecuted for their reporting. Sometimes, this discourse incites violent harassment against news professionals, which leads reporters to self-censor. Here are some examples from around the world:

India: The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its supporters increasingly dismiss journalism critical of the government as "anti-national." Prime Minister Narendra Modi popularised the term "Urban Naxals" as a label used against journalists and intellectuals who hold power to account — Naxalites are Maoist insurgents who wage armed rebellion against the state in rural areas. In parallel, pro-government online trolls routinely target journalists with cyber harassment, doxxing and mass smear campaigns in which they are labelled "traitors," "foreign agents," and so on.

USA: President Donald Trump so routinely uses inflammatory language towards journalists and media outlets — accusing them of treason, sedition and lying — that his anti-press behaviour has become largely normalised. "Even presidents like Richard Nixon, who kept an 'enemies list' containing the names of disfavored journalists, would find the way Trump attacks the press unthinkable," says Clayton Weimers, Executive Director of RSF North America. In perhaps the most clear example of the impact of his rhetoric, Trump called the US newspaper *The New York Times* the "enemy of the people" at a campaign rally in 2024 and, minutes later, one of his supporters attempted to storm the event's press section. The Trump administration's anti-press hostility has increasingly extended beyond rhetoric. In spring 2026, the Department of Justice issued subpoenas seeking to compel reporters from *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal* to testify before a grand jury as part of a national security leak investigation. Although the subpoenas were later withdrawn following objections from the news organisations, the episode raised serious concerns about government efforts to pressure journalists into revealing information gathered in the course of their reporting and underscored the growing climate of hostility facing the press in the United States.

Burkina Faso: Junta leader Captain Ibrahim Traoré frequently accuses journalists who challenge his actions of "lying" and threatening national security, particularly when they report on the armed conflicts. These public accusations are then used to justify repressive measures, including forced conscription to the front lines, which is presented as a way for journalists to confront the "reality on the ground."

Hungary: Under former Prime Minister Viktor Orban, baselessly accusing journalists of serving "foreign" interests became the policy of the ruling party Fidesz, and later became state policy. These attacks were institutionalised through the establishment of the Sovereignty Protection Office in 2024, which attemped to discredit at least 15 Hungarian journalists and international media actors, including RSF and its local correspondent through pamphlets and official statements. As of June 2026, following Orban's defeat in the April parliamentary election, the new parliamentary majority of the Tisza party is moving towards dissolving the office.

Argentina: According to a 2024 study by the Argentine Journalism Forum (FOPEA), in the first four months of Javier Milei's presidency, 40% of the attacks on the press came from the government. Many of these were categorised as "stigmatising discourse" by public officials, often coming directly from the president, who frequently accuses journalists of being "criminals" and "terrorists" on social media. At the same time, Milei's administration has reinforced this hostile climate by restricting journalists' access to official venues such as Congress and Casa Rosada, and a growing pattern of police violence against reporters covering protests has emerged under his administration.

Brazil: The trademark style of the government of former president Jair Bolsonero was to insult, denigrate and humiliate journalists seen as too critical of its policies. President from 2019 to 2023, during the COVID pandemic Bolsonero accused the press of being "responsible for the panic in the country and the loss of lives during the pandemic, a national disgrace." These vehement anti-press sentiments were amplified by his administration and supporters on social media. In 2020, RSF recorded more than 180 attacks against the television network *TV Globo*, which was accused of wanting to "betray" and "destroy" the country. On 8 January 2023, after Bolsonero was defeated in the presidential election, his supporters stormed democratic institutions in Brasilia and at least eleven journalists covering the event were assaulted, threatened, harassed, or had their equipment stolen.

A note from
The RSF Digital Security Lab

The Digital Security Lab (DSL) is a forensic service by Reporters without Borders that analyses journalists' devices to see if they've been compromised.

Sophisticated digital attacks on smartphones increasingly threaten journalists worldwide. Notably, state-sponsored or state-supported spyware attacks exploit previously unknown security vulnerabilities (known as "zero-day vulnerabilities") to compromise devices and monitor communications. Journalists are particularly vulnerable to this risk, as their smartphones contain sensitive information, including confidential communications with sources, research data, and contacts. The mission of DSL is to identify spyware infections, phishing campaigns, account compromises, and other forms of digital surveillance or intrusion targeting journalists and their sources. Digital attacks are often difficult to detect, even for experienced security professionals. Unlike physical attacks, they frequently leave little visible evidence. The Digital Security Lab helps journalists by:

- Analysing devices for signs of compromise or spyware infection
- Investigating phishing attempts and malicious communications
- Examining suspected account takeovers and unauthorised access
- Documenting attacks to support accountability efforts and public reporting when appropriate

PRESS

2

Weaponising the threat of conflict

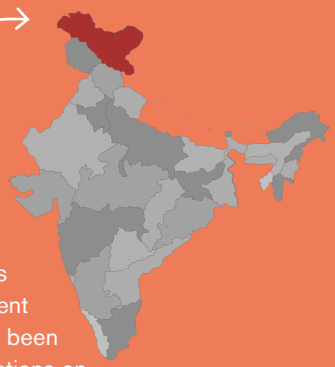
National security measures are necessarily heightened in dangerous times, but so is the potential for their abuse. War and instability create fertile ground for fearmongering and give governments a convenient justification to expand control over the press — sometimes permanently. As states of emergency call for national unity, negative coverage of national governance is often vilified as an attempt to fracture political cohesion when it is needed most. Even in times of peace, the mere threat of war is often used to silence reporting on sensitive topics.

1. THE LASTING IMPACT OF EMERGENCY MEASURES ON PRESS FREEDOM

The consequences of the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent "war on terror" were among the most significant geopolitical events since the end of the Cold War and continue to define the security landscape worldwide. After the organisation al-Qaeda killed nearly 3,000 people on US soil, the United States led domestic and international counterterrorism programmes that prompted many countries to introduce stringent anti-terror legislation and greatly expanded mass surveillance and intelligence-sharing between governments. The crackdown on suspected terrorists was a profound challenge to traditional journalistic practices as reporters around the world saw their sources in government and foreign organisations dry up. New anti-terror laws opened up journalists reporting on national security to previously unheard of levels of surveillance.

In **the US**, the passing of the Patriot Act in direct response to the attacks ushered in the increased use of surveillance by the state and directly undermined the privacy of journalists' relationship with their sources. In **the UK**, the special status of journalistic material established by case law was overridden in national security cases following the September 11th attacks.

WHEN THE EXCEPTION BECOMES THE RULE: AFSPA AND THE EROSION OF PRESS FREEDOM IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR



Jammu and Kashmir has been a disputed territory between India and Pakistan since the partition of British India in 1947, and the site of a decades-long insurgency against Indian rule. The region has been operating under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), an emergency law applied to areas designated as "disturbed", since September 1990. Although the designation of a "disturbed area" is supposed to be reviewed every six months, successive renewals by state and central authorities have effectively transformed this temporary emergency measure into a permanent feature of governance. In the 36 years that AFSPA has been in place in Jammu and Kashmir, the region has been subjected to a highly militarised security regime characterised by extensive surveillance, arbitrary arrests, restrictions on movement and broad immunity for security forces. AFSPA grants the military extraordinary powers, including the authority to arrest without warrant, conduct searches without judicial authorisation, use lethal force in certain circumstances, and immunity from prosecution without prior approval from the central government. These powers have had a chilling effect on journalism, making it difficult for reporters to investigate allegations of human rights abuses, communicate with sources and challenge official narratives without fear of retaliation. In addition to abuses justified under AFSPA, journalists in Jammu and Kashmir have faced prolonged detentions, repeated internet shutdowns, restrictions on public assembly, and criminal investigations under laws such as the Public Safety Act (PSA), the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), and Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (now Section 163 of Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023). These measures have frequently been used to curb reporting on security operations, protests and political dissent.

A prominent example is **Fahad Shah**, founder and editor of *The Kashmir Walla*, who was arrested in February 2022 under the UAPA for articles allegedly "glorifying terrorism." Although courts granted him bail on multiple occasions, authorities repeatedly arrested him under different cases and subsequently invoked the PSA, extending his detention without trial. Shah ultimately spent 21 months in prison before being released on bail in November 2023, while several charges against him remain pending. His case has become emblematic of how overlapping security laws can be used to keep journalists incarcerated even after the courts order their release.

Similarly, journalist **Aasif Sultan** was arrested in 2018 under the UAPA and remained imprisoned for years despite being granted bail, as authorities repeatedly resorted to preventive detention measures under the PSA. He was not released until 2024, after spending more than five years in custody. In general, rather than being treated as civilians requiring protection from violence, reporters are often viewed by authorities through a security lens, with critical or independent reporting sometimes portrayed as sympathetic to separatists, or in collaboration with anti-state actors. As a result, journalists find themselves targeted by the state and independent reporting is obstructed.

In **Latin America,** news professionals covering drug cartels, insurgent groups or armed organisations had been portrayed as "legitimising" these actors since the 1980s, but this pattern intensified after the "war on terror" expanded across the region. In **Colombia**, reporters in regions such as Arauca, Cauca and Catatumbo have been publicly accused of producing "terrorist propaganda" by interviewing leaders of rebel groups. In **Mexico**, although reporters covering cartels rarely face formal terrorism charges, they have been portrayed as "narco-journalists" in official discourse and stigmatising campaigns, worsening their situation in one of the world's most dangerous countries for the press.

In **Pakistan** and **Afghanistan**, during the "war on terror," journalists were monitored and, at times, targeted by intelligence agencies, as both governments cracked down on reporting deemed "harmful" to the joint fight against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. In Afghanistan, the intelligence services singled out certain journalists in the name of "national interest," particularly those working in unstable provinces whose activities were viewed with suspicion by the authorities. As al-Qaeda and the Taliban were already hostile to reporters, independent investigative journalism came under attack from all sides. According to Iqbal Khattak, RSF Representative in Pakistan, "The same policy continues even a quarter of a century after September 11th."

HOW AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES USE STATES OF EMERGENCY TO TIGHTEN CRACKDOWNS

As exceptional security powers tend to endure long after the rise of the crisis in question, states of emergency are a common vehicle for autocratic governments to cement long-term restrictions on the press. The dire state of media freedom in **Myanmar** — which ranks 166th out of 180 countries and territories in the 2026 RSF World Press Freedom Index — started with the state of emergency declared by the military junta on 1 February 2021, after the army arrested civilian leaders of the national and state governments, alleging fraud in the November 2020 elections. Among the emergency measures put in place were the revocation of the licenses of eight independent media outlets, blocked internet and mobile connections and the amendment of Section 505A of the Penal Code, which was immediately wielded against journalists to prosecute any reporting critical of the armed forces. On 31 July 2025, the military junta ended the nationwide state of emergency after extending it seven times, while simultaneously declaring martial law in 63 townships across the country. The repressive legal architecture built during the emergency remained firmly in place. Section 505A of the Penal Code retained its dangerously broadened language, while the Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law (PPEL) — amended in March 2023 during the emergency to allow publication licences to be revoked on sweeping grounds — remained on the books. To this day, journalists continue to face severe persecution. In April 2026, the junta revoked the publication licences of three local news agencies, invoking the Printing and Publishing Enterprise Law. As of June 2026, at least 40 journalists were still in jail and at least 220 had been arrested since the 2021 coup.

Another major state of emergency was declared in 2021— two decades after the launch of the "war on terror"— in **Ethiopia**, where the federal government battled the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Declared in November 2021 and lifted in February 2022, the emergency measures granted the authorities extraordinary powers that extended far beyond the battlefield. Citizens could be arrested without warrants, movement was restricted, and broad surveillance powers were introduced. At the same time, the government imposed a near-total communications blackout in the region of Tigray, cutting internet and telephone services and severely restricting access to the region for journalists. While officially justified on national security grounds, these exceptional measures effectively shielded the conflict from public scrutiny. Independent verification of civilian casualties, war crimes, mass displacement, food insecurity and detention practices became nearly impossible. The same pattern later emerged in Amhara, where a new state of emergency was declared in August 2023 amid fighting between the federal army and local militias. Journalists covering the region have since faced arrests — such as **Abay Zewdu** from Amhara Media Center — intimidation and censorship, creating another "information blackout" in Amhara. These states of emergency were not merely military responses to armed conflict, but mechanisms for controlling information and reducing public oversight. Even when the conflict was concentrated in Tigray, emergency measures enabled extensive restrictions on fundamental freedoms across the country and the distinction between countering a security threat and controlling the wider population became increasingly blurred. Notably, the end of the state of emergency in February 2022 did not mark the end of these practices. Journalists remained subject to growing administrative pressure, especially when reporting on politically sensitive issues. A particularly emblematic example occurred in February 2024 with the arrest of **Antoine Galindo**, a French journalist for *Africa Intelligence*. He was detained in Addis Ababa while interviewing a spokesperson for the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a legally registered opposition party, during an African Union summit. Despite holding valid accreditation, he was accused of activities likely to "create chaos and violence", detained for a week and subsequently deported. His arrest demonstrated that practices initially justified by conflict-related security concerns had expanded beyond the battlefield and were now being applied to routine political reporting in the capital. The same logic reappeared in February 2026 when the Ethiopian Media Authority refused to renew the accreditation of three *Reuters* correspondents. The decision came shortly after *Reuters* published an investigation alleging that Ethiopia had hosted a training camp for Sudanese Rapid Support Forces (RSF) fighters. In December 2025, the accrediation for journalists from *Deutsche Welle* and the *BBC* were not renewed. The expulsion in June 2026 of French journalist **Augustine Passilly**, correspondent for the French media outlet *La Croix*, is the latest example of this trend.

2. "PATRIOTIC NEWS COVERAGE" AND HEIGHTENED CENSORSHIP

The coordination and collective effort needed to overcome conflict often gives governments a strong excuse to tighten censorship. When Colonel Assimi Goïta's junta took power in **Mali** in May 2021, certain zones of his country were under attack by various armed groups, a problem plaguing most countries in the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa. To make sure his narrative dominated public debate amid the chaos, he urged major local press organisations to "preach the right message so as not to demoralise" the population and the armed forces. Under Goïta, journalists continue to be arbitrarily arrested and news broadcasters are frequently suspended for criticising his government.
In neighbouring Sahel state **Burkina Faso**, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, leader of the country's military junta, declared, "We are at war, in war there is communication to be done," in September 2023, after announcing he would shut down all media that "carry enemy propaganda," adding, "We want people who will communicate, who will encourage the people to hold on." He enforced this by ensuring the country's broadcast regulator suspended every foreign outlet that reported negatively on the country's security situation or talked about alleged abuses carried out by the army.

Sahel regimes refer to this favourable reporting as "patriotic news coverage." Yet, the idea has been iterated in many different ways by governments worldwide in times of war. One of the most recent examples occurred on 14 March 2026, when Brendan Carr, chairman of the US broadcast regulator — who features on the 2025 RSF list of Press Freedom Predators — threatened to revoke the licences of US broadcasters who covered the Iran war in a way President Trump's government deemed unfavourable. "Broadcasters must operate in the public interest," he wrote in a social media post, "and they will lose their licenses if they do not."

In **Pakistan**, in 2012, the Balochistan High Court prohibited news coverage of banned militant and sectarian groups, and police registered First Information Reports against a number of journalists for violating the ban. In May 2014, Balochistan High Court Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa — who later became the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan — reiterated that the media should be the "voice of the victims" instead of "promoting the propaganda of outlawed militant organisations." Eight years later, pressure on the media is now being applied nationwide: on 14 March 2026, Federal Law Minister Azam Tarar warned the media should "exercise caution" while discussing **Pakistan**'s foreign policy concerning the US-Israel war on Iran. He reminded reporters of the caveats to the Constitution. "You have the fundamental right to freedom of expression, but you must be careful when it comes to the glory of Islam [and] the integrity, security and defence of Pakistan," he said.

The phenomenon of "patriotic news coverage" can also be more subtle. Right after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in 2022, the besieged country launched a joint television program called the United News Telemarathon. Funded by the government and run by six major Ukrainian TV channels, opposition channels were never included, there have been reported instances of self-censorship and a lack of content scrutinising the authorities. Although the Telemarathon still exists, audience levels are now very low.

Journalists and military personnel outside the Court of Appeal in Bamako, Mali, on 30 December 2022.

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3. RESTRICTED ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND KEY AREAS

In addition to heightened censorship, states of emergency often provoke increased limitations on access to government data and key reporting locations, such as military areas or bombing sites. In conflict zones, areas subjected to exceptional security measures and physical barriers, and where reporters are likely to be threatened due to their work, often become "information black holes."

Ukraine illustrates this phenomenon on several levels. In the territories occupied by Russia since 2014 and the full-scale invasion of 2022, independent journalism has been virtually eradicated. Local reporters have been forced into exile, Ukrainian media outlets have been shut down or relocated, and residents are exposed almost exclusively to Kremlin-controlled narratives. Access for international journalists is heavily restricted and tightly monitored. While reporters on the frontlines in Ukraine continue to cover events, journalists' access to certain spaces has seen constraints since the full-scale invasion. Some regions — such as Sumy and Kherson, key battle zones — are occasionally still restricted for reporters and curfews in certain cities hamper their ability to cover key events at night. Even in free Ukraine, access to important events, such as certain Parliament sessions and local councils, is still limited. Progress was recently made despite the ongoing war, however, as in January 2026 reporters were reauthorised to attend parliamentary committee sessions.

Sudan represents one of the most extreme examples of an information vacuum created by war. Since fighting erupted in 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces, the country has effectively been partitioned into rival zones of control. Journalists are unable to move freely between army-held territories in the Nile Valley and eastern Sudan and areas of Darfur controlled by the Rapid Support Forces. Many Sudanese journalists only report from the front lines when the fighting reaches their own cities. Hundreds of journalists and media workers have been displaced or driven into exile, while both warring parties have arrested, imprisoned and killed members of the press. Following the Rapid Support Forces' 18-month siege of El Fasher, most remaining journalists were forced to flee in late 2025 — around the time when the paramilitary group captured independent correspondent **Mouammar Ibrahim**, still detained to this day — leaving entire communities without independent witnesses or reliable information.

The presence of armed groups has created similar blind spots in the Sahel's "three-border area," which spans parts of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Jihadist violence has transformed the vast zone into one of the world's most dangerous environments for journalists. Reporters face threats from armed groups, military operations and the collapse of local media infrastructure. The destruction of community media outlets and the absence of safe access routes have further reduced independent coverage, leaving large swaths of the population increasingly isolated from reliable information.

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Yet information black holes are not limited to active war zones. In **El Salvador**, the state of emergency introduced in 2022 was due to gang violence, and has significantly reduced journalists' access to courts, legal proceedings and other institutions of public interest. The Association of Journalists of El Salvador (APES) has documented repeated cases of reporters being prevented from entering courtrooms or covering high-profile hearings. These restrictions take place in a broader environment marked by intimidation, surveillance and threats against independent journalists.

In **Ecuador**, the declaration of an "internal armed conflict" in 2024, also due to organised crime, similarly led to restrictions on access to official information and reporting opportunities. During the prison crisis that erupted in January 2024, journalists denounced the lack of official information regarding prison uprisings and the escape of a notorious gang leader. More recently, new rules governing media access to military and security operations have reinforced concerns that security considerations are being used to limit scrutiny of public institutions.

Whether through war, occupation, counterterrorism operations or emergency legislation, restricting journalists' access to key areas has become a powerful way to control the news narrative. When reporters can no longer reach the places where decisions are made, violence occurs or abuses are committed, entire territories risk disappearing from the radar of independent observation, isolating their populations and depriving the public of essential information.

THE WAR IN GAZA AND ISRAEL'S ATTACKS ON PRESS FREEDOM

Israeli authorities have increasingly invoked "national security" to justify measures that directly threaten press freedom since the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023 and Israel's subsequent invasion of Gaza. In Israel, any news article dealing with the broadly defined category of "security issues" is subject to a military censorship review, as per Israeli law. According to the Israeli-Palestinian news website *+972 Mag*, Israeli media censorship reached extreme levels in 2024, with the military censor completely banning the publication of 1,635 articles and partially censoring another 6,265 news stories. In April 2024, legislation approved by Parliament also allowed the communications minister to suspend foreign media outlets deemed a threat to "national security". The law, renewed in December 2025 for a period that extends to 2027, has been used regularly to silence coverage of Gaza from within Israel.

According to RSF Israel correspondent Oren Persico, the working conditions of journalists have deteriorated following October 7th and the law has been applied beyond formal censorship. The legislation has enabled authorities to block foreign broadcasters, confiscate equipment belonging to media outlets and service providers, and force journalists working for these channels to stop reporting. Journalists not affiliated with blocked channels have also faced harassment from both civilians and authorities, who accuse them of supplying material to banned outlets. Some Palestinian citizens in Israel and residents of East Jerusalem were investigated or charged on accusations of being in contact with Hamas or Islamic Jihad figures. More significantly, Persico notes that "the majority of security-related restrictions that journalists in Israel have experienced are ones they imposed on themselves." He adds that "wartime self-censorship increased dramatically and has constrained reporting far more than official military censorship," making it "the most pervasive and consequential form of press restriction since October 7."

These repressive measures, which help impose a media blackout on Gaza coverage, coincide with the killing of nearly 220 journalists in Gaza by Israeli forces since October 2023, according to RSF data. As of June 2026, at least 69 of these Palestinian reporters were likely targeted or killed by Israeli forces while working, according to RSF information. Israeli forces have also specifically targeted journalists in Gaza by systematically accusing members of the press of being affiliated with terrorist organisations. The conflation of journalism and terrorism is fuelled by rhetoric from high-level Israeli politicians and global propaganda campaigns orchestrated by websites dedicated to smearing journalists. Professional and independent reporters are portrayed as terrorists or members of armed groups posing as journalists. In March 2024, for instance, the Israeli Communications Ministry moved to close down *Al Jazeera*'s Jerusalem bureau, claiming it was a Hamas mouthpiece. Politicians and news commentators in Israel also argued that any journalist who recorded attacks on October 7th should be treated as enemy combatants. These arguments emerged in the context of the unprecedented violence of the Hamas attack, during which two Israeli journalists were killed. The result of all these measures has a chilling effect on journalism, where reporting on military operations is treated as a potential security threat rather than a core democratic function.

This national security rationale has extended to the physical exclusion of journalists from Gaza. Since the start of the war, Israel has enforced a near total ban on allowing foreign media access to the territory. These measures are touted as necessary for the safety of journalists and military operations, but, in practice, prevent the verification of events on the ground and leave coverage overwhelmingly dependent on the Israeli military's own communications and on Gazan journalists operating in extreme danger. As RSF Gaza Correspondent, **Olaa al Zaanoun** explains,

"How to tell the story of the war in Gaza?" - Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Les 3 Ours @loicgosset

the consequences for journalists have been devastating. She notes that Israeli security measures "have gravely impacted the work of journalists who have, in the course of three years, lost all sense of safety, security, and hope." She adds that "the ban on foreign journalists from entering Gaza, along with the loss of personal security have all damaged the coverage of Gaza." Al Zaanoun further argues that this situation "feels intentional: a strategy to terrorise and isolate journalists on the ground, and strip them of their means to work, thus censoring their ability to carry the truth to the world." Meanwhile, in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israeli forces use the pretext of national security as the primary justification for cracking down on reporters. Journalists are regularly interrogated at checkpoints, searched, harassed and intimidated by Israeli soldiers. They are also subjected to raids and arrests, imprisoned following closed-off trials under charges often linked to national security, then detained in Israeli prisons. The practice, known as "administrative detention", has been denounced by Israeli and Palestinian human rights organisations as abusive.

RUSSIA, THE WAR MACHINE

Since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Kremlin has combined military secrecy, counterterrorism, anti-extremism and digital-sovereignty policies into a comprehensive system aimed at eliminating critical reporting. Within Russia, censorship intensified immediately. On 24 February 2022, the day the full-scale invasion began, Roskomnadzor — the Russian telecommunications regulator — ordered the media to rely exclusively on official sources, threatening prosecution for "fake news." This built on earlier measures. In October 2021, for instance, the Federal Security Service (FSB) issued a list of 60 categories of sensitive, non-classified information — including military losses, morale, logistics, budgets and disciplinary issues — and reporting this information could expose journalists to designation as "foreign agents."

In April 2025, amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code expanded the scope of in absentia trials, allowing Russian courts to prosecute exiled defendants for a broader range of offences, including the dissemination of "fake" information about the armed forces and discrediting the military. Three months later, a new law criminalised the intentional searches for or access to materials officially designated as "extremist", including through VPNs, and penalised the promotion of VPN services. Digital repression deepened with the launch of MAX in 2025, a messaging service that was pre-installed on all new devices and widely used despite lacking end-to-end encryption. Meanwhile, WhatsApp, YouTube and other Western platforms face growing restrictions within Russia and Russian-occupied territories, and the number of internet shutdowns reached a record 2,099 in July 2025.

National security charges have become routine and the definitions of "extremism," "terrorism," and "treason" have expanded sharply. In January 2025, Russia designated the Free Nations of Post-Russia Forum (FNPF) and 172 affiliated organisations as terrorist entities, including — for the first time — a media outlet, *Komi Daily*, setting a dangerous precedent in which minority-focused media can be treated as terrorist groups, according to the latest JX Fund report on Russian media in exile. On 4 June 2026, *OVD-Info* — an independent Russian human rights project and media outlet — and 35 other organisations were added to the federal list of terrorists and extremists, before the Ministry of Justice formally registered *OVD-Info* as an "extremist organisation" the following day. The designation stems from the Supreme Court's secret April 2026 ruling against the fictitious "international public movement Memorial", allowing the authorities to classify organisations that had merely collaborated with Memorial as "extremist".
Courts continue to prosecute journalists for alleged ties to opposition groups, and treason and espionage cases have reached record levels, with trials often held in secret.
The "foreign agent" law remains the main tool of repression and new restrictions are added each year, such as the mandatory use of special bank accounts. In November 2025, the first prison sentence in absentia for violating this law was handed down to **Yury Dud**, a renowned YouTube blogger. Other laws introduced in 2025 further restrict software from "unfriendly" countries, criminalise content consumption and penalise advertising or accessing "extremist" materials. In the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia, independent reporters are systematically targeted. According to a Perviy Otdel report, in 2025, 35% of all defendants in Russian courts were Ukrainian citizens. As of June 2026, 26 were arbitrarily jailed by the Kremlin according to RSF data — and they are often subjected to appalling conditions and torture. Reporters in occupied territories are arrested for refusing to broadcast the Kremlin's narrative about the war or refer to it as a "special operation". Most worked for independent media outlets and some had stopped reporting for fear of being thrown behind bars, but were nonetheless detained for their earlier work. Russia has sentenced at least 18 of these news professionals to prison terms of up to 19 years for "terrorism", "espionage" and "extremism".

4. THE PRETEXT OF CONFLICT IN TIMES OF PEACE

Even when there is no obvious threat of warfare or violence, high geopolitical stakes, historical conflicts and regional instability can serve as levers for fearmongering and the repression of journalism.

Türkiye is a prime example: while not at war, its authoritarian tendencies and taboos surrounding certain stories on international relations have jeopardised press freedom. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has built his reputation on a delicate balancing act: maintaining ties with superpowers like the US, Russia, and China while pursuing Türkiye's national interests. Türkiye is both the second-largest army in NATO and deeply concerned with regional crises, which can present occasions for Türkiye to expand its economy and influence. For these reasons, Erdogan has taken a close interest in conflicts in Libya, Syria and the Caucasus and national security charges are frequently brought against journalists investigating his foreign military interventions. In one notable instance, on 3 November 2022, the Ankara Court of Appeal rejected the appeal of **Müyesser Yildiz**, News Director for the *OdaTV* website, and **Ismail Dükel**, Ankara correspondent for the government-critical TV network *Tele1* against their prison sentences for "obtaining or disclosing confidential information" in connection with an investigation into Türkiye's military actions in Libya and Syria in November 2019. Yildiz and Dükel were alleged to have discussed Türkiye's operations in Libya and Syria in phone conversations with an army officer. At the end of the hearing, the court sentenced Müyesser Yildiz to three years and seven months in prison for "obtaining or disclosing confidential information" and Ismail Dükel, to one year and 15 days of prison for "obtaining confidential information".

In **France**, where journalists are rarely detained, reporters investigating defence activities abroad have faced intimidation. Notably, in September 2023, journalist **Ariane Lavrilleux** from the investigative site *Disclose* was placed in custody for 39 hours and police raided her home at the instigation of the General Directorate for Internal Security (DGSI), due to her coverage of "Operation Sirli," a secret French-Egyptian military operation on Egypt's border with Libya. In October 2025, an investigating judge finally dismissed the case against her, ruling that the articles she co-authored were "in the public interest and of interest to public and democratic debate". However, the Public Prosecutor's Office has requested that the investigation be reopened, and the Paris Court of Appeal is set to rule on the matter on 8 July 2026. French intelligence has also targeted journalists from *Disclose* and other media outlets over national security exposés — including arms sales to Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the UAE — and accused its journalists of "compromising national defence secrets" in 2019. More broadly, since the adoption of the 2010 "Dati law" on the protection of journalistic sources, around 30 journalists have reportedly been questioned or summoned by the DGSI in cases involving defence secrets or information deemed sensitive to national security.

Even **Finland**, which comes in sixth place in the 2026 RSF World Press Freedom Index, has seen worrying lawfare against journalists due to its tense past with neighbouring Russia. In December 2017, the leading newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* published leaked details of a Finnish defence intelligence centre. In 2023, in a trial unprecedented in Finland's post-war history, the Helsinki District Court convicted two journalists for both "revealing"

A closer look at...

The case of Can Dündar

The most notorious case in Türkiye concerns one of the country's most celebrated journalists and attests to the Turkish government's perseverance in repressing news professionals. It involves serial prosecutions by the state, the use of the Interpol "red notice" system, threats and even an armed assault. The campaign of intimidation against **Can Dündar,** former editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* ("Republic") came from the very top, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself taking a personal interest in the case. Dündar's legal troubles started in 2015 after *Cumhuriyet* published a dossier entitled "Here are the Weapons Erdogan Says Do Not Exist." It alleged that the Turkish intelligence service was providing arms to Syrian rebel groups. In response, on 1 June 2015, Erdoğan announced during a live broadcast on the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation, "What only matters to them [the journalists behind the report] is casting a shadow on Türkiye's image." He continued, "I suppose the person who wrote this as an exclusive report will pay a heavy price for this. […] I will not let go of him." After an armed attack against Dündar in front of Istanbul Çağlayan Courthouse, the journalist fled for Germany — but the persecution continued. On 23 December 2020, the Istanbul Assize Court sentenced Dündar in absentia to 27 years and 6 months in prison for obtaining state information "for the purpose of political or military espionage". The Court of Cassation in Ankara has yet to rule on the case. Dündar was also accused of "supporting the illegal organisation of Fethullah Gülen' (FETÖ)", which was held responsible for the failed coup of July 2016. In 2021, Interpol announced that it had rejected Türkiye's red notice against Dündar. In 2022, he was placed on a list of wanted terrorists. The Turkish authorities continue to pursue Dündar, who faces years in prison for posting a video about the arms deal to Syrian rebels on the news website *Özgürüz* ("We Are Free," created in exile).

state secrets and “attempting” to reveal them. In the landmark case, the Helsinki District Court rejected the main arguments of the defence: the information in their article had already been publicly accessible and was in the public interest as legislation giving more powers to intelligence agencies were being discussed at the time. An appeal verdict from July 2025 even toughened the original sentences. **Tuomo Pietiläinen** received a four-month suspended prison sentence, while **Laura Halminen** got 80 day-fines, roughly 4,000 EUR. As in the first-instance decision, the charges against the editor, **Kalle Silfverberg**, were dismissed. On the national level, the case ended in December 2025, when the Supreme Court confirmed the appeal verdict. Finnish journalists now treat the outcome as a lasting precedent for the profession.

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The extraterritorial reach of national security policies

As the pretext of national security has been used to target journalists on a state-by-state basis, bad practice has spread as countries learn from each other. Foreign agent laws are a case in point: where Russia has led, others have followed. The same is true for China and its Great Firewall. At the same time, the issue of transnational repression remains a growing concern as authoritarian regimes pursue those deemed a threat to across borders.

1. TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION: ATTACKING JOURNALISTS ABROAD

Of the 749 journalists that received aid from RSF in 2025, more than half (55%) had been forced to flee abroad. The uptick in exiled journalists is undeniable, yet many of these reporters are still not safe even after they have settled in countries that are friendlier towards press freedom. Considered enemies of the state at home, they are surveilled and harassed from afar, the loved ones they left behind are threatened and, in worst-case scenarios, they are targets of murder.

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS

Russian journalist **Elena Kostyuchenko** covered the first few weeks of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine until her Moscow-based newspaper, *Novaya Gazeta*, was forced to suspend publication at the end of March 2022. After receiving serious threats to her life by the Russian security apparatus, and on the insistence of her editor, 2021 Nobel peace co-laureate **Dmitry Muratov**, she sought refuge in **Germany**, where she thought she would be safe. She continued working for the independent outlet *Meduza* — until she was poisoned in October 2022, very likely by the Kremlin.

Assassination attempts against news professionals are not exclusive to **Russia**. Kazakh corruption blogger **Aydos Sadykov** fled to **Ukraine** in 2014 after his wife, journalist **Nataliia Sadykova**, was criminally prosecuted for her work. They continued reporting from abroad and, in October 2023, both were placed on a wanted list in **Kazakhstan** for the criminal offense of "inciting hatred" after releasing reports critical of Kazakh authorities. In June 2024, Aydos Sadykov was shot in Kyiv and died two weeks later.

That same year, in London, **Pouria Zeraati**, a journalist for the exiled media *Iran International,* was stabbed by two men outside his home. The outlet had been labelled by the regime in **Iran** as an "enemy of the Islamic Republic" and the year before the attack, London police had advised *Iran International* to stop broadcasting and relocate due to the profound, pervasive transnational threats to exiled Iranian journalists on **UK** soil.

Meanwhile, blogger **Mahammad Mirzali** has become one of the most prominent targets of the Azerbaijani regime beyond its borders. He has been under police protection in **France** since 2021, after surviving a knife attack in Nantes, western France. Since going into exile in France, the blogger – a persistent critic of President Ilham Aliyev and his inner circle – has faced repeated threats, intimidation campaigns, multiple assassination attempts and legal proceedings initiated against him in both France and **Azerbaijan**, where charges against him include "violence against citizens", "making open calls for the forcible seizure of power" and "forcible change of the constitutional structure of the Republic of Azerbaijan". RSF has also documented threats against his family, a blackmail campaign built around the circulation of an intimate video of his sister and ongoing intimidation targeting the journalist after the knife attack. Asked about the case during an interview with *France 24*, President Ilham Aliyev denied any involvement by his government in the attempted assassination of Mahammad Mirzali or in the harassment of other exiled opponents. Despite the arrest of some members of the hit squad, the pressure on Mirzali never ceased. The blogger also reported three separate attempts to persuade him to withdraw his complaint in exchange for sums of up to one million euros. On 10 June, the Rennes Assize Court sentenced the perpetrators of the attempted assassination of exiled Azerbaijani blogger Mahammad Mirzali to prison terms of up to 30 years, sending a strong signal that acts of transnational repression and state-sponsored violence carried out by authoritarian regimes on French soil will not go unpunished.

CONVICTIONS IN ABSENTIA

Elena Kostyuchenko luckily survived the poisoning attempt, but the transnational persecution continued. Although she lives outside of Russia, she was labelled a "foreign agent" in 2025 and soon thereafter "arrested in absentia" for violating Russia's foreign agent rules. The strange tactic of arresting reporters in exile is the Kremlin's new favourite political weapon, and often leads to in absentia convictions and sentencing. After the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia prosecuted 66 news professionals across borders in a 44-month span, averaging out to about two per month — a pace that shows no sign of slowing. Accusations include "public justification of terrorism", "incitement to hatred or enmity", "evading the obligations of a foreign agent" and "high treason."

The effects of these rulings extend well beyond Russian territory, where they render banking and administrative activity virtually impossible. Some journalists are refused passport renewals at embassies, which blocks their ability to obtain or extend their visas abroad. They also face expulsion or extradition in countries that cooperate with Moscow on security matters, whether these countries are their places of residence or transit.

In **Pakistan**, on 2 January 2026, an anti-terrorism court in Islamabad sentenced four journalists to life imprisonment in absentia on charges of "digital terrorism" because they "incited violence" during the riots that followed the arrest of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan in May 2023. The journalists' portraits were plastered on the streets of Pakistan's major cities, where they were presented as "traitors" to the nation. Yet, all four journalists — freelance YouTube journalists **Wajahat Saeed Khan** and **Sabir Shakir**, former editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper *The News International* **Shaheen Sehbai** and the editor-in-chief of the online outlet *Global Village Space*, **Moeed Pirzada** — were reporting from exile, having left Pakistan for fear of reprisals. All live in the United States except for Sabir Shakir, who resides in the United Kingdom. The recent convictions top years of transnational persecution by the Pakistani state marked by the cancellation of Pakistani passports frozen Pakistani bank accounts, intimidating phone calls and threats against their relatives who remain in the country.

THREATENED COLLEAGUES AND LOVED ONES

Many countries that seek to subdue "enemy journalists" abroad do so by harassing the relatives, friends and colleagues the reporter was forced to leave behind. Journalists' loved ones often face threats, arrests, kidnappings, raids, administrative pressure and blackmail.

Iranian journalists working abroad are among the most affected. Since 2024, every Iranian journalist supported by the RSF Assistance Office has reported pressure on relatives who remained in Iran. Family members have been threatened, interrogated, summoned by intelligence services and, in some cases, have had their property confiscated. In 2023, **Sajjad Shahrabi**, brother of *IranWire* editor-in-chief **Shima Shahrabi,** was arrested by Iranian intelligence agents and detained for more than a month in Tehran's Evin prison. Other relatives were questioned about the activities of the exiled media outlet.

In Russian-occupied territories of **Ukraine**, relatives of detained or displaced journalists face constant threats from security services. According to first-hand accounts gathered by RSF, family homes are searched, electronic equipment seized, and relatives subjected to questioning and intimidation. Some fear their family members could be arbitrarily detained as a means of coercion.

Authorities in other countries have also arrested and forcibly dissapeared journalists' relatives. In **Pakistan**, armed men abducted the two brothers of investigative journalist **Ahmad Noorani** shortly after he published an investigation into military nepotism. In **China**, relatives of Uyghur journalists working for international media have been imprisoned, disappeared or sent to detention camps. Journalist **Gulchehra Hoja**, accused of terrorism, reported that 25 members of her family were detained. Dozens of relatives of other Uyghur journalists have suffered similar reprisals.

Governments also rely on surveillance, travel restrictions and harassment. In **Tajikistan**, the father of exiled journalist **Muhamadjon Kabirov** was prevented from leaving the country, placed under house arrest and forbidden from communicating with his son. In **Nicaragua** and **El Salvador**, relatives of exiled journalists are routinely monitored, questioned by authorities and subjected to administrative pressure.
These cases illustrate a growing pattern: authorities invoke national security as one of the vague legal justifications to extend repression beyond journalists themselves. By targeting family members and close associates, they seek to silence critical reporting through fear, isolation and collective punishment.

CYBER HARASSMENT AND ONLINE CENSORSHIP

Many journalists flee precisely so they can continue working – and their governments keep trying to silence their reports. Such is the case for **Chernoh Alpha M. Bah**, a refugee in the United States, as he has been accused of "treason" and "inciting rebellion" in **Sierra Leone**. An investigative journalist, he co-founded the independent online media *Africanist Press*, where he is currently editor-in-chief. Since 2020, this US-hosted news website has published a number of public interest investigations into government corruption in Sierra Leone, including financial scandals involving former head of government David John Francis and the country's first lady, Fatima Maada Bio. Because of this, Bah has been subjected to online harassment both from political figures – the first lady lambasted him for almost thirty minutes during a Facebook live in 2021 – and anonymous internet users who send him threatening private messages. He is forced to constantly block phone numbers and messages, and the journalists who continue to work for *Africanist Press* from Sierra Leone write anonymously for fear of the repercussions.

BENIN AND THE CÔTE D'IVOIRE: JOURNALIST TARGETED BY SECURITY COOPERATION

In July 2025, Beninese journalist **Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè**, founder of the investigative news outlet *Olofofo* and a political refugee in Togo since 2021, was arrested while visiting the Côte d'Ivoire and forcibly transferred to Benin in an operation presented as judicial cooperation between the two countries. According to RSF investigations, Beninese authorities portrayed him as a "cyber activist promoting terrorism" to their Ivorian counterparts, triggering the involvement of counterterrorism units despite the absence of an international arrest warrant, an Interpol notice or any judicial authorisation. Conducted outside any lawful procedure and in violation of the principle of non-refoulement, the operation amounted to a targeted abduction carried out under the guise of national security. In April 2026, RSF filed a case before the ECOWAS Court of Justice against Benin and Côte d'Ivoire, alleging their responsibility for the journalist's abduction, forced transfer and arbitrary detention, as well as for the prosecution of a second journalist, **Ali Moumouni**, who was also charged with "promoting terrorism" and other national security-related offences for allegedly collaborating with Hugues Comlan Sossoukpè. The case illustrates how security cooperation mechanisms and counterterrorism rhetoric can be instrumentalised to justify transnational repression targeting journalists critical of their home governments.

Since the **Hong Kong** National Security Law was put in place, a number of journalists have been targeted by what appears to be a coordinated intimidation campaign aimed at silencing the territory's remaining independent media outlets. The Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) revealed that dozens of journalists from at least 13 local and international media outlets, including news websites *InmediaHK, HK Feature, Hong Kong Free Press*, and two journalism education institutions have been subjected to "organised attacks" since at least June 2024. This online and offline harassment campaign includes death threats and defamatory content sent via email, as well as trolling, harassment on social media and doxxing. According to HKJA, many of the threatening messages told journalists they could be "endangering national security or violating the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance".

Exiled Hong Kong journalists and media have not been spared. Throughout 2025 and 2026, the exiled outlet *Points Media* has also experienced several cyberattacks against its website points-media.com. In May 2025, readers reported unauthorised links appearing within published articles. Since November 2025, the IT team observed repeated failed login attempts originating from multiple countries, alongside unauthorised posts published under legitimate contributors' names. The activity was assessed as targeted, automated login attempts. In April 2026, unauthorised English-language articles about casinos were automatically generated and published on the website through a compromised account. The associated login was traced to an address in Romania, but the tactics resemble Chinese transnational repression.

2. SPREADING BAD PRACTICES

When one government develops a new nefarious tactic — especially if they are an economic powerhouse — others watch and learn. While the global rise in national security overreach began with the spread of the US "war on terror," today, Russia and China are also disseminating the worst practices to states swayed by their influence.

RUSSIA'S "FOREIGN AGENTS" LAW

One of the most worrying recent global developments in this arena has been the introduction of the Kremlin's foreign agent legislation (see page 9) by more or less authoritarian governments in Russia's orbit to crack down on critics and criminalise dissent.

Promulgated by President Japarov on 2 April 2024 and largely based on the Russian model, the law was adopted by **Kyrgyzstan**'s Parliament on 14 March. It provides for a variety of measures to identify, register, control and suspend any organisation receiving foreign funding, which applies to most of Kyrgyzstan's already hounded independent media outlets. Like the Russian original, Kyrgyz law requires organisations that receive funds from abroad to label everything they publish as having been produced by a "foreign agent". They also have to be entered on a national register or risk being arbitrarily suspended by the government for six months and having all their financial assets frozen. At the end of those six months, a court decides whether they should be permanently liquidated. In a statement posted on Facebook on 2 April 2024, President Japarov said he had promulgated the law "in the interest of the public, non-governmental organisations and their foreign partners" despite the many calls from local NGOs and international organisations, including RSF, not to sign it. Since then, Kyrgyzstan has seen a major purge of its independent media.

Russia's foreign agents law has inspired many copies in other countries, including **Nicaragua** (see page 9) and **Georgia**, where, in May 2024, Parliament adopted a law entitled "Transparency of Foreign Influence", requiring all organisations receiving 20% or more of their funding from foreign sources to register as "serving the interests of a foreign power". The law officially entered into force in August 2024 but was never enforced.
In April 2025, Parliament adopted a stricter version in its third reading — a word-for-word translation of the US Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) but without any of FARA's safeguards — which entered into force in June 2025.

Although **Serbia** finally abandoned the plan to pass its own foreign agents law, the government — one of Russia's most faithful allies in Europe — is behaving as if it had one. In this Balkan state — which ranks 104th out of 180 countries and territories in the 2026 RSF World Press Freedom Index, the last country in the EU-Balkans zone — national and international media professionals are treated as public enemies serving hostile foreign interests. President Aleksandar Vucic, listed by RSF as a "press freedom predator" in 2025, has accused journalists from the independent TV channel *N1* of "terrorism" simply for reporting critically about his administration and the wave of anti-government protests launched in 2024. As a result, reporters from *N1* and other media fell victim to a record number of physical attacks in 2025. When USAID was suspended by the Trump administration, Serbian officials labeled NGOs receiving foreign aid as "criminals". This was followed by a 28-hour arbitrary police raid on the offices of the NGO CRTA, the publisher of the fact-checking outlet *Istinomer*. Serbia is a regional hub for Russian propaganda thanks to RT Balkan — the Balkan branch of the Kremlin-controlled outlet RT — and on at least two occasions between 2023 and 2024, Serbian authorities refused exiled Russian journalists entry into their territory without due justification, labelling one of them a "risk to national security".

THE GREAT FIREWALL OF CHINA

China's strategy of invoking national security to justify extensive control over the flow of information is increasingly spreading across Asia. This trend is particularly evident in the regional diffusion of elements of China's Great Firewall, a sophisticated internet censorship system that combines cybersecurity legislation, online surveillance mechanisms, traffic restrictions and content-filtering technologies.

Officially part of the Golden Shield Project, the Great Firewall is a vast regulatory and technological apparatus used by the Chinese government to monitor, filter and censor the internet within mainland China. It severely restricts access to foreign websites and slows cross-border internet traffic. As a result, China's 1.4 billion internet users are kept at a distance from the global information space, while a large network of censors scrutinises online communications, including private messaging, for content deemed politically sensitive or subversive.
The official narrative states that the Great Firewall protects national security interests and maintains social order. Beijing argues that cyberspace is an extension of national sovereignty; just as physical borders require customs, the government believes a digital border must be established to prevent external threats. All Google services, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, and the websites of most major international news organisations are blocked by the Great Firewall. As part of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, China is also expanding its technological influences with the Digital Silk Road (DSR). The DSR aims to build digital infrastructure and promote Chinese technology and standards globally, including its censorship tool, the Great Firewall.

In 2018, one year after China adopted its Cybersecurity Law, **Vietnam** enacted its own Law on Cybersecurity, containing many similar provisions. Both countries require telecommunications operators and internet service providers to store users' personal information and "important data" within national borders. Both also enforce stringent censorship mechanisms that prohibit online content considered harmful to national security or public order. Similar to China's extensive censorship apparatus, these systems rely on a broad range of actors — from government censors and telecommunications companies to technology firms and device manufacturers — to implement and enforce state-mandated restrictions. Furthermore, both legal frameworks grant authorities the power to compel technology companies to provide user data during investigations into activities perceived as threatening national security — which often includes journalism.

The **Myanmar** military junta has also followed this approach, adopting a new cybersecurity law in January 2025, officially presented as protecting "state sovereignty and national stability". In practice, however, it grants the authorities broad powers to censor online content and suppress the right to information, which includes suppression of the public use of VPNs. The dissemination of "inappropriate information" is punishable by fine or imprisonment. The law's authority can even extend to overseas Myanmar citizens if their online activities or speeches are deemed in violation of the law. For these reasons, the Myanmar Cybersecurity Law is usually considered a "Chinese-style" digital governance model that prioritises state control over individual privacy. Geedge Networks, a software company involved in developing the "Great Firewall" as part of the DSR initiative, supplies software to Myanmar's military junta that allows individuals' network traffic to be monitored. Geedge Networks' software restricts the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of association and digital freedom of movement of the people of Myanmar.

Cambodia, for its part, is drawing inspiration from China's Great Firewall for its National Internet Gateway (NIG) project, launched in 2021. Although the NIG has not yet been officially implemented, it is designed to directly mimic China's Great Firewall, enhancing the government's ability to censor, monitor and blocking access to information by centralising traffic, monitoring user behavior via Deep Packet Inspection (DPI), and enforcing real-name registration to eliminate online anonymity, under the official pretext of "ensuring national security." Major online infrastructure construction and centralised traffic management is expected to begin in 2026.

A closer look at...

OPERATION COLLATERAL FREEDOM

Collateral Freedom: circumventing internet censorship
Launched in 2015 and more relevant than ever, the RSF operation Collateral Freedom mirrors censored news sites onto randomised domain names where the original content is hosted on the servers of major Content Delivery Networks (CDNs), allowing those living under authoritarian regimes to access their content directly from a standard web browser without needing to install a VPN. At the beginning of 2026, no fewer than 57% of the websites protected by RSF were blocked in one of two countries: Xi Jinping's China (53 blocked sites) and Vladimir Putin's Russia (49 blocked sites). The list of sites unblocked by Collateral Freedom is available on the operation's GitHub account, but the names of certain sites are omitted if publishing them might pose a security risk for their staff.

4 | RSF REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS RECOMMENDATIONS

To balance national security concerns with the protection of press freedom, democratic states should adopt safeguards that ensure restrictions on journalism remain exceptional, justified, necessary and proportionate. To this end, RSF recommends the following policies:

1. **Adopt a narrow and precise definition of what constitutes national security threats** to avoid the concept being used as a catch-all justification for restricting journalistic reporting on matters of public interest (the environment, public health, migration etc.). Vague concepts such as "harm to state interest" and "national reputations" should also not constitute lawful grounds to restrict journalism.
2. **Those prosecuted under espionage laws should be allowed a public interest defence.** Journalists facing criminal sanctions for publishing classified or sensitive information should be able to invoke a public-interest defence where the disclosure contributes to debate on matters of public concern. Courts should balance the public interest of the disclosed information against any specific, demonstrable harm to national security.
3. **Ensure that counterterrorism frameworks are not misused against journalists**. Terrorism offences should require clear evidence of intent and knowledge, and a demonstrable link to terrorist acts or organisations. Journalists should not incur criminal liability solely for reporting on or communicating with designated terrorist groups. Counterterrorism financing measures, including those based on the regulations developed by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), should also be implemented in a manner that respects journalists' rights.
4. **Require prior judicial authorisation and oversight of all police and national security surveillance operations targeting journalists** in investigations of the most serious crimes, ensuring the highest possible level of scrutiny and press freedom protection.
5. **Protect the confidentiality of journalists' sources**. Exceptions based on national security should be narrowly tailored, subject to judicial authorisation and review, and authorised only in exceptional circumstances, where disclosure may be necessary to prevent an imminent and serious crime. A list of these crimes should be defined by law.
6. **Ensure journalists accused of violating the law are subject only to ordinary criminal and civil procedures** with the full guarantees of due process and a fair trial. Democratic states should avoid the use of military courts, special national security tribunals, emergency jurisdictions and administrative detention mechanisms to handle cases involving journalists.
7. **Establish effective remedies for abusive national security prosecutions**. Journalists who are subjected to unfounded or disproportionate criminal investigations or prosecutions under national security grounds should have access to effective judicial remedies. Courts should be empowered to award damages where authorities have misused national security laws to intimidate, silence, or retaliate against journalists.
8. **Safeguard press freedom and journalists' rights during armed conflicts and states of emergency.** Emergency situations should not in themselves justify censorship or restrictions on journalists' rights. Any emergency restrictions adopted in such circumstances should be lawful, strictly temporary and subject to independent authorisation and periodic review to evaluate their necessity, proportionality and effects on citizens' access to independent, reliable sources of information.
9. **Prevent international security cooperation mechanisms from being used to facilitate the transnational repression of journalists**. Particular attention should be applied to extradition requests, mutual legal assistance procedures, cross-border surveillance measures and the use of international policing mechanisms such as Interpol Red Notices. States should establish procedures allowing journalists who are targeted by abusive Interpol Red Notices to challenge such actions before an independent authority and be able to obtain remedy.
10. **Establish an international monitoring and alert mechanism to detect and report criminal acts of transnational repression taking place on the territory of democratic states.** Democratic states should stregnthen their cooperation to identify threats and perpetrators, enhance information-sharing and create direct communication channels between at-risk journalists and law enforcement authorities.

For 40 years, REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS (RSF) has defended media freedom, independence and pluralism all over the world. Headquartered in Paris with 14 bureaus and sections and more than 150 correspondents worldwide, it has consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO.

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