

# **WORLDWIDE ROUND-UP**

**of journalists killed,  
detained, held hostage,  
or missing in 2018**

**REPORTERS  
WITHOUT BORDERS**  
**FOR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION**

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## About RSF

**Reporters Without Borders** (RSF) is an independent NGO that defends and promotes journalistic freedom and independence worldwide. Based in Paris, it has six international bureaux (in Washington, Rio de Janeiro, Taipei, Tunis, London, and Brussels), six European sections (Austria, Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland) and a network of more than 130 correspondents across the world. It has consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF).

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# OVERVIEW: FIGURES AT A GLANCE



# HOW WE CALCULATE THESE FIGURES

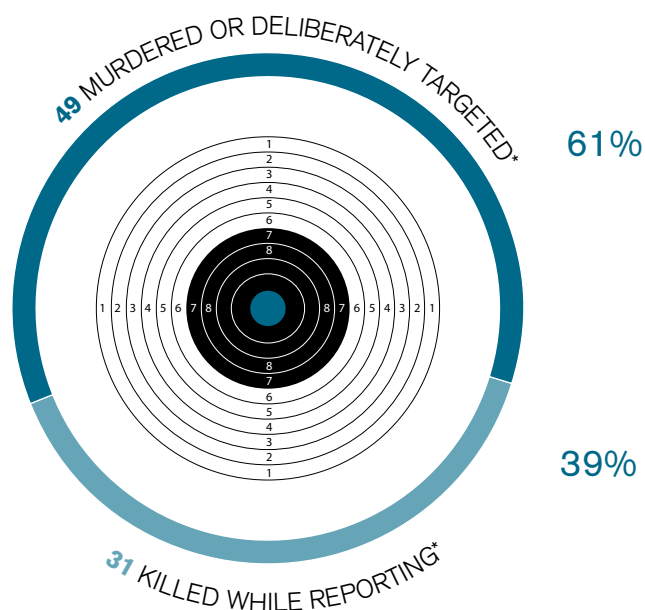
The 2018 round-up figures compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) include professional journalists, non-professional journalists and media workers. The round-up distinguishes these categories of media workers in order to facilitate comparison with previous years.

Compiled by RSF every year since 1995, the annual round-up of abusive treatment and deadly violence against journalists is based on precise data. We gather detailed information that allows us to affirm with certainty or a great deal of confidence that the death, detention, abduction, or disappearance of each journalist was a direct result of their journalistic work. In regard to the number of deaths, we distinguish as much as possible between journalists who were deliberately targeted and those who were killed while reporting in the field. We do not include a journalist in the round-up if we are still investigating their death, detention, abduction, or disappearance because we are not yet confident that it was linked to their work.

### 3.1 The figures



## JOURNALISTS KILLED

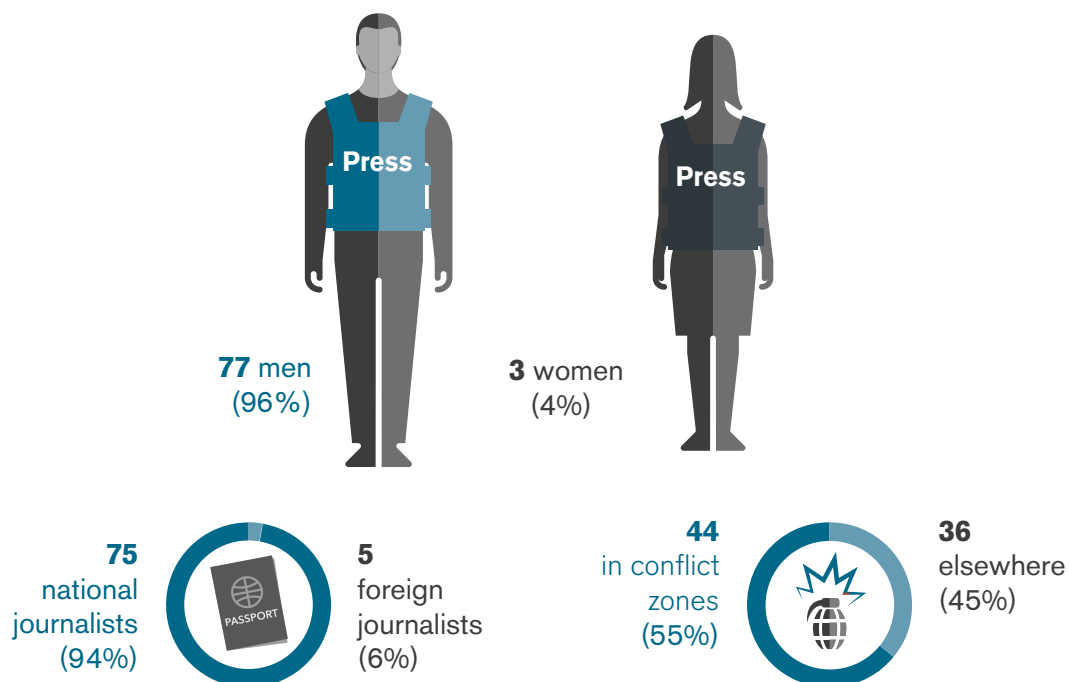


## \* MURDERED OR DELIBERATELY TARGETED:

Journalists deliberately killed because of their work

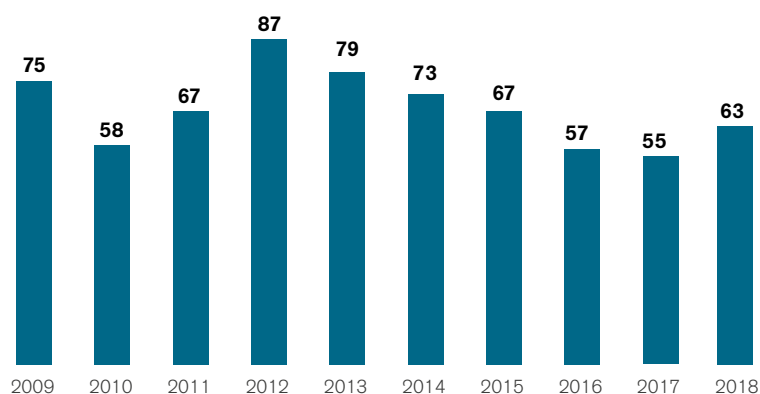
## \* KILLED WHILE REPORTING:

Journalists killed while in the field without being targeted as journalists



## JOURNALISTS KILLED

In all, 702 professional journalists have been killed in the past 10 years



Although the number of journalists killed in 2017 was less than in previous years, 2018 saw the death toll of journalists rise to a shocking total of **80 journalists** killed worldwide (including professional journalists, non-professional journalists and media workers). The number of **professional journalists** killed rose 15%, **from 55 in 2017 to 63 in 2018**. The number of **non-professional journalists also rose, from seven last year to 13 this year**. Non-professional journalists play a fundamental role in the production of news and information in countries with oppressive regimes and countries at war, where it is hard for professional journalists to operate. In addition to these very alarming figures, there are ten other deaths that RSF is still investigating.

In all, **49 of these journalists (61% of the total)** were deliberately targeted because their reporting threatened the interests of certain people in positions of political, economic, or religious power or organized crime. The cases of [Ján Kuciak](#), a Slovak investigative reporter shot dead in his home on 21 February, and [Jamal Khashoggi](#), a Saudi columnist murdered in the Consulate of Saudi Arabia in Istanbul on 2 October, show how far some people will go to silence “troublesome” journalists.

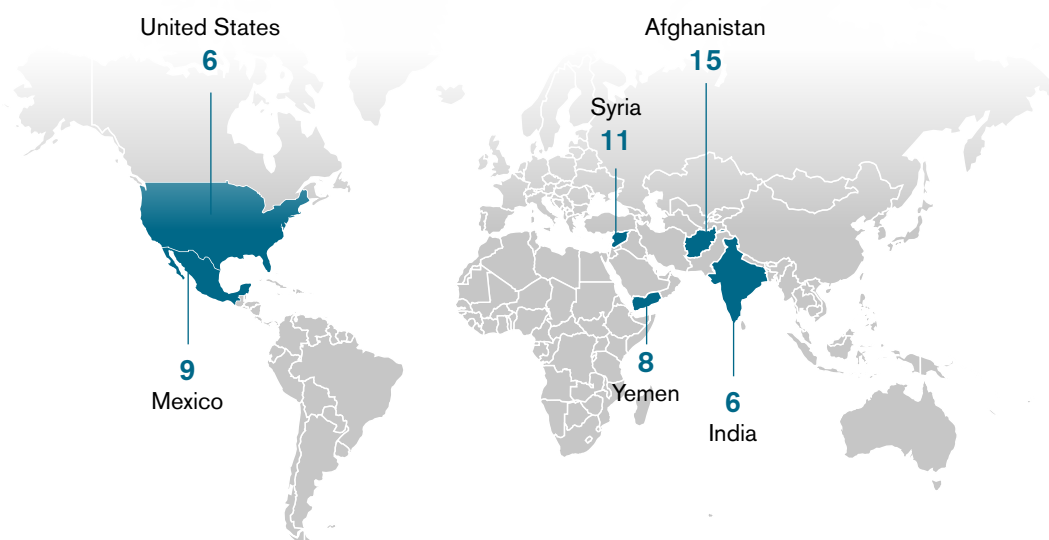


Jan Kuciak  
© DR



Jamal Khashoggi  
© DR

### 3.2 Deadliest countries



#### Afghanistan

This year's increase in the number of media fatalities is due in part to bombings and shootings targeting the media in **Afghanistan, which was the world's deadliest country for journalists and media workers in 2018, with a total of 15 killed** in violent attacks. A double bombing in Kabul on 30 April killed nine journalists, including *AFP* photographer [Sha Marai Fezi](#) and six *Radio Free Europe* and *Tolo News* reporters. Claimed by Islamic State, this attack deliberately targeted journalists. It is regarded as the deadliest attack on the media in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, and the **deadliest attack against journalists in the world since the 2009 massacre in Maguindanao, in the Philippines**, in which at least 32 journalists were killed. A tenth journalist, *BBC* reporter [Ahmad Shah](#), was shot dead by unidentified gunmen a few hours later the same day in Khost.

#### Syria

A total of **11 journalists**, all Syrians, were killed in connection with the conflict in **Syria** in 2018. They included two professional journalists, eight non-professional journalists and a media worker, nearly all killed in airstrikes and artillery bombardments. The number of deaths is falling but some journalists, especially non-professional ones, are taking ever-greater risks to cover the war.



## Yemen

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**Eight journalists were killed in Yemen in 2018, up from two last year.** The country is descending ever deeper into a horrific war and fighting continues to rage despite international calls for an end to the conflict. The UN recently described the situation in Yemen as the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis.” When not being killed in air strikes, journalists die as a result of mistreatment in prison. This was the case with [Anwar al Rakan](#), a journalist who was held by the Houthis for nearly a year. He died on 2 June just days after being released in an already terminal condition. His family said he was ravaged by starvation, torture, and disease when released.

## Iraq

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**For the first time since the US-led invasion in 2003, RSF has registered no media fatalities in Iraq.** After three years of bloody clashes, government forces have succeeded in defeating Islamic State and retaking control of the country. The recovery of Mosul and other strategic points marked the end of a conflict in which many journalists lost their lives in the preceding years.

### 3.3 Nearly half of the media fatalities were in countries not at war

The world's five deadliest countries for journalists include three – India, Mexico, and for the first time the United States – where journalists were killed in cold blood although these countries were not at war or in conflict. Once again, **Mexico was the deadliest of the countries not at war, with nine journalists murdered** in 2018.



Rubén Pat  
© Source Facebook



José Guadalupe  
Chan Dzib  
© El Comercio/ Perú



Sandeep Sharma  
© archives Twitter

In Mexico, which has many press freedom predators, journalists who cover stories related to political corruption (especially at the local level) and organized crime are often the targets of intimidation and attacks or execution-style murder. Because of the widespread corruption, impunity reigns and is reaching unprecedented levels, feeding the vicious cycle of violence. The protection provided to journalists who have been threatened is very often insufficient and ineffective. Local news website editor [Rubén Pat](#) was gunned down on the street in the state of Quintana Roo on 24 July, a month after requesting urgent protection when one of his reporters, **José Guadalupe Chan Dzib** was murdered. He was given nothing more than a “panic button” and a GPS. [Mario Leonel Gómez Sánchez](#) was killed by gunmen on a motorcycle in the state of Chiapas on 21 September, the day after members of the Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists announced that the government was yet again cutting back funding for protection.

Journalists also live in fear in India. **Six were murdered this year** and many others were the targets of murder attempts, physical attacks, and threats. Hate campaigns against journalists, including incitement to murder, are common on social networks and are fed by troll armies linked to the Hindu nationalist right. Those who murder journalists often use extremely barbaric methods. A village chief in the northeastern Indian state of Bihar killed two journalists, **Navin Nischal** and **Vijay Singh**, in retaliation for their reporting by deliberately running them down with his SUV on 25 March. On the same day in the central state of Madhya Pradesh, a dump truck was used to run down and kill [Sandeep Sharma](#), a journalist who had been investigating a local “sand mafia.” At least six journalists have been killed in the past three years by criminal organizations involved in the illegal extraction of sand or other illegal mining.

The **United States** joined the ranks of the world's deadliest countries for the media this year, with a total of **six journalists killed**. Four journalists were among the [five employees of the Capital Gazette](#), a local newspaper in Annapolis, Maryland, who were killed on 28 June when a man walked in and opened fire with a shotgun. He had been harassing the newspaper for six years on Twitter about a 2011 article that named him. It was the deadliest attack on a media outlet in the US in modern history. Two other journalists, a local TV anchor and cameraman, were killed by a falling tree while covering Subtropical Storm Alberto's extreme weather in North Carolina in May.

Capital Gazette

### 3.4 Murders with an international impact

#### Jamal Khashoggi (Saudi Arabia)

Dissident Saudi journalist **Jamal Khashoggi**'s murder inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October sparked international outcry. Reported missing until the Saudi authorities acknowledged his murder, Khashoggi was strangled and then dismembered, according to Turkish authorities. The operation was reportedly carried out by a team that was dispatched from Saudi Arabia for this express purpose and left immediately afterwards. Living in self-imposed exile in the United States, Khashoggi had gone to the consulate to get the papers he needed to marry his Turkish fiancée. His shocking murder highlighted the appalling nature of the Saudi regime and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's oppressive methods. More than 160 NGOs, including RSF, asked the UN secretary-general to launch an independent international inquiry into Khashoggi's death.



Yaser Murtaja  
© Middle East Monitor

#### Yaser Murtaja and Ahmed Abu Hussein (Palestine)

Although clearly identified as a journalist, **Yaser Murtaja**, 30, was fatally shot by an Israeli army sniper on 6 April while covering one of a series of "Great Return March" demonstrations by Palestinians on the border between the Gaza Strip and Israel. Another Palestinian journalist, **Ahmed Abu Hussein**, 25, was fatally shot while covering a similar protest at the border two weeks later. Witnesses said he was in a calm area 700 metres from the border when he was brought down by a clearly deliberate shot.



Ahmed Abu Hussein  
© Chronique de Palestine

#### Ján Kuciak (Slovakia)

Four months after Maltese journalist **Daphne Caruana Galizia**'s murder in October 2017, another investigative reporter was murdered in Europe. The victim was **Ján Kuciak**, a Slovak journalist who was shot dead in his home together with his fiancée, Martina Kusnirova, on 21 February. Although only 27, Kuciak had established himself as an effective investigative reporter who had shed light on the presence that the Calabrian mafia, known as the 'Ndrangheta, has established in Slovakia, including its role in diverting European Union funding intended for Slovak agriculture. Several suspects were arrested in October, including the person alleged to have organized the murder, [identified as Alena Zs](#), a 44-year-old woman with close links to Marián Kočner, a Slovak businessman with a shady reputation whose activities Kuciak had covered. [After extending its presence into many other European countries, the Italian mafia now poses a significant threat to investigative journalists in Europe.](#)

#### A second murder in Europe that RSF is still investigating

The body of **Viktoria Marinova**, the 30-year-old presenter of a current affairs programme on a local TV channel in Ruse, in northern Bulgaria, was found in a city park on 6 October. She had been beaten, raped and strangled, the authorities said, adding that all hypotheses were being considered, including the possibility that she was killed in connection with her work. In her last broadcast, she presented a report by the investigative news website *Bivol* about the alleged embezzlement of a large amount of EU funds involving businessmen and politicians. Was she assassinated to set an example? For the time being, no hypothesis can be ruled out.



Viktoria Marinova  
© YouTube

### 3.5 Five journalists killed while abroad

**In 2018, 75 journalists were killed in their country of origin and five were killed while on a reporting assignment to another country.**

Much is still unknown about the murder of three Russian freelance journalists – [Orkhan Dzhemal](#), [Kirill Radchenko](#), and [Alexander Rastorguyev](#) – in the **Central African Republic** on 31 July. They were killed by unidentified armed men while investigating the presence in the CAR of mercenaries working for Wagner, a private Russian security company that is also known to be active in Syria. The fixer who was accompanying them has still not been identified. Neither the Russian nor CAR authorities who are investigating this triple murder have so far provided any information as to the identity of those responsible.



Orhan Džemal  
© Caucasian Knot



Kirill Radtchenko  
© AnnaNews



Alexandre  
Rasstorgouïev  
© The Guardian



Javier Ortega  
© RFI

**Two Ecuadorian journalists** working for the Quito-based daily *El Comercio*, [Javier Ortega](#) and [Paul Rivas](#), and their driver, **Efraín Segarra**, were killed in **southern Colombia** on 26 March after being kidnapped on 26 March by a breakaway faction of Colombia's FARC guerrilla group. They had gone to do a report in Mataje, an Ecuadorian village a few kilometres south of the Colombian border in the province of Esmeraldas, in an area that had seen frequent clashes between the authorities and drug traffickers since January. On 12 April, Ecuador's President Lenin Moreno confirmed that the three men had been killed after photos of their lifeless bodies were circulated on social networks.

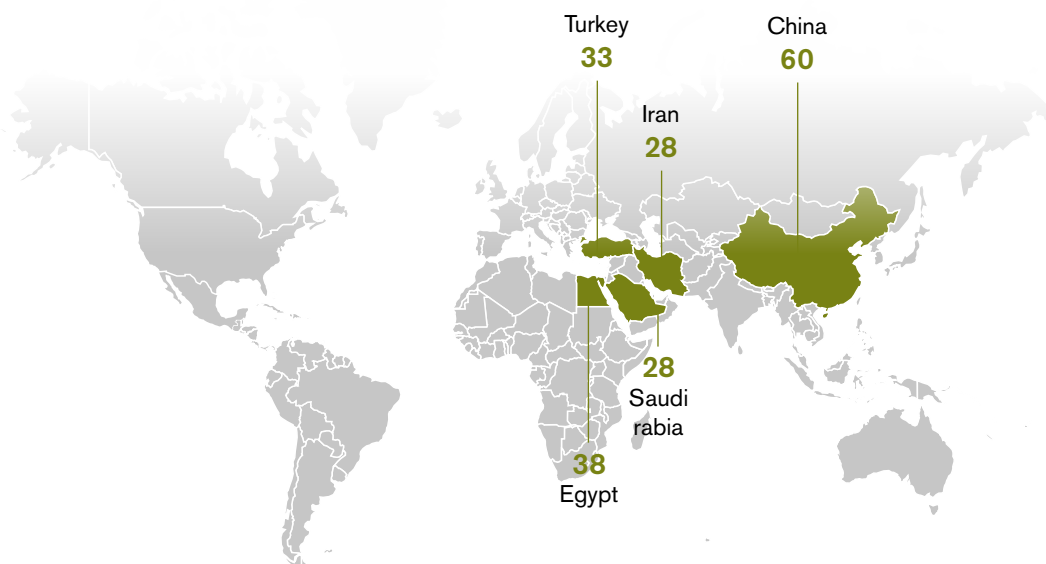
# DETAINED JOURNALISTS

## 4.1 The figures



Worldwide, a total of 348 journalists were held in connection with the provision of news and information at the start of December 2018. This is seven percent higher than on the same date last year, when 326 journalists were detained. The number of detained professional journalists fell from 202 to 179, but **the number of non-professional journalists increased sharply by 40%, from 107 to 150**. After clamping down on the traditional media, countries such as China, Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia are improving their repressive apparatus in various ways including the adoption of “cyber-laws” that make it easier for them target those reporting online.

## 4.2 The biggest jailers of journalists



As in 2017, more than half of the world's imprisoned journalists are being held in just five countries

**China continues to be the world's biggest jailer of journalists with 60 held. Three quarters of them (46) are non-professional journalists** who have tried to compensate for the Communist Party's increasingly tight control on the traditional media. As a result of tougher Internet regulations, non-professional journalists are being held in often inhuman conditions for nothing more than a post on social networks or messaging services. News and information providers who don't toe the official line are increasingly subjected to censorship, surveillance, arrest, and arbitrary detention. Many detainees are mistreated and some are tortured. **RSF is aware of at least ten non-professional journalists who are in danger of dying in Chinese prisons.** They include [Ilham Tohti](#), a 2016 Sakharov Prize nominee, who is serving a life sentence, and [Huang Qi](#), a recipient of the RSF Press Freedom Prize in 2004, who has been held without trial for more than two years.

**In Iran**, more than two thirds of the detained journalists are non-professional ones, the victims of the regime's determination to suppress independently reported news and information. Operating on social networks, non-professional journalists are now at the heart of the fight for freedom of information and political change in Iran, but they are targeted by the Revolutionary Guards. Religious minorities that dare to circulate information about themselves are also one of the regime's priority targets. **Twelve journalists were arrested in a single night** on 19 February. They all worked for the same news website, *Majzooban Noor*, the only source of independent news about the Gonabadi dervishes, a Sufi religious community that is persecuted in Iran. Some of them have disappeared inside Iran's prison system and no information is available about their fate.

## DETAINED JOURNALISTS



Jamal Khashoggi was murdered because he had become a prominent critic of the Saudi regime. **At least 28 other journalists, columnists, and bloggers are currently detained in Saudi Arabia for the same reason:** their columns or posts questioned the established order. Some were arrested several years ago, under King Salman or his predecessor, King Abdullah. They include [blogger Raif Badawi, sentenced in 2012 to ten years in prison and 1,000 lashes for “insulting Islam.”](#) Others, such as the well-known blogger and women’s rights activist [Eman al Nafjan](#), were arrested during the crackdown launched in the autumn of 2017 by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. Most are still awaiting trial. When sentences are finally passed, they can be shocking. Religious intellectual and blogger [Salman al Awdah](#) was sentenced to death in September 2018. **Fayez Ben Damakh**, a journalist and poet, has simply disappeared. There has been no trace of him since September 2017, when he was about to launch a TV news channel in Kuwait. Kuwaiti media report that he was extradited to Saudi Arabia and imprisoned there.



Journalists, especially professional journalists, continue to be persecuted in Egypt. Cases of arrest and arbitrary detention are widespread, and the number of journalists in pre-trial detention continues to rise. Of the 38 journalists currently held, 30 are still waiting to be tried. Some, such as [Hisham Gaafar](#), have been held pending trial for more than three years without being officially charged. *Al Jazeera* journalist [Mahmoud Hussein Gomaa](#) has been awaiting trial for the past two years. Other cases echo that of photojournalist **Shawkan**, who should have been released in September but is still being held. [Ismail Alexandrani](#) does not know whether the completely opaque military justice system has given him a ten-year prison sentence.



Turkey’s despotic regime continues to be the world’s biggest jailer of professional journalists. The fall in the number of detainees, compared with this time last year, is deceptive. Many journalists, such as **Şahin Alpay, Ahmet Şık, Murat Sabuncu**, and **Çağdaş Erdoğan**, have been granted bail pending trial or the outcome of their appeal, so some of them could return to prison very soon. After years of preventive detention, 2018 was the year of verdicts for many journalists. More than 80 were given long prison sentences or fines on charges such as “terrorist propaganda,” “denigrating Turkish identity” and “insulting the head of state.” The inhumanity of some of the sentences is shocking. [Mehmet Altan, Ahmet Altan](#), and [Nazlı Ilıcak](#), three journalists aged respectively 65, 68, and 74, were sentenced in February to life imprisonment under the severest form of isolation, with no possibility of a temporary release or a pardon. These Kafkaesque trials, in which journalists are accused of terrorism on the basis of a single word or a single phone contact, have helped to tighten the regime’s grip on Turkish society.



**RSF's round-up** detention figures are based on a rigorous methodology that aims to establish on a case-by-case basis that the detained journalist was arrested in connection with their work as a journalist and not for another reason. Of the approximately 100 journalists detained in Turkey, RSF is currently able to confirm that at least 33 are being held because of their journalism. Many other cases are currently being investigated.

### 4.3 Journalists still in prison although officially “released”

**Several journalists were kept in prison this year despite court orders for their release. Some were finally freed after months of delays while others are still detained. In all these cases, the authorities used spurious grounds to delay or prevent the release of journalists. Others simply ignored the decisions of their own judicial authorities, confirming the end of the rule of law.**

#### Shawkan (Egypt)

On 8 September, a Cairo court sentenced **Mahmoud Abou Zeid**, a young photojournalist better known as [Shawkan](#), to five years in prison. As he had already spent more than five years in prison, he should have been freed at once. But he is still detained three months later on the pretext that he has not yet paid a fine and legal costs and, because of a backlog of work, the judicial administrative authorities have yet to determine how much he owes. This Kafkaesque situation is intended to prolong the persecution of this journalist, the recipient of this year's UNESCO press freedom prize and an emblematic figure of arbitrary detention. According to his lawyer, the prosecutor's office recently went one step further, unilaterally deciding to extend his detention by six months, which would mean he would not be released until mid-February 2019. Shawkan was arrested on 14 August 2013 while covering the use of deadly force to break up a sit-in in a Cairo square by supporters of the recently deposed Muslim Brotherhood government.



Mahmoud Abou Zeid  
© The Independent

#### Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed (Mauritania)

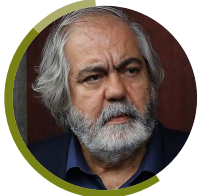
The Mauritanian blogger [Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed](#) is still being held in a secret location, although he should have been freed more than a year ago after his 2014 death sentence for apostasy was commuted to two years in prison in November 2017. The authorities initially claimed that they were holding him for his own security after he was the target of extensive hostility in street demonstrations in Nouakchott. A new law that took effect in November 2018 has toughened the penalties for blasphemy and apostasy, eliminating the possibility of commuting the death sentences on the grounds of repentance. Although in theory it is not retroactive, this law could be used as a pretext for continuing to hold him.



Mohamed Cheikh  
Ould Mohamed  
© Human Rights Watch



## DETAINED JOURNALISTS



Mehmet Altan  
© DW



Şahin Alpay  
© Milliyet

### Mehmet Altan and Şahin Alpay (Turkey)

The path to the release of journalists [Mehmet Altan](#) and [Şahin Alpay](#) was full of pitfalls showing the extent to which the rule of law has collapsed in Turkey. The constitutional court raised hopes on 11 January when it ordered their immediate release on the grounds that their preventive detention was unconstitutional. However, the Istanbul courts refused to comply with this order from the country's highest court, and they continued to turn a deaf ear after the European Court of Human Rights ruled in March that their detention was neither "necessary" nor "proportionate" and violated their right to freedom of expression. Alpay was transferred from prison to house arrest in mid-March, but had to wait until May to be granted a conditional release under judicial control, and Altan was not freed until June. Both could return to prison if the Court of Cassation upholds the life sentences they received in February.

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## 4.4 Reuters reporters jailed for investigating Rohingya massacre in Myanmar



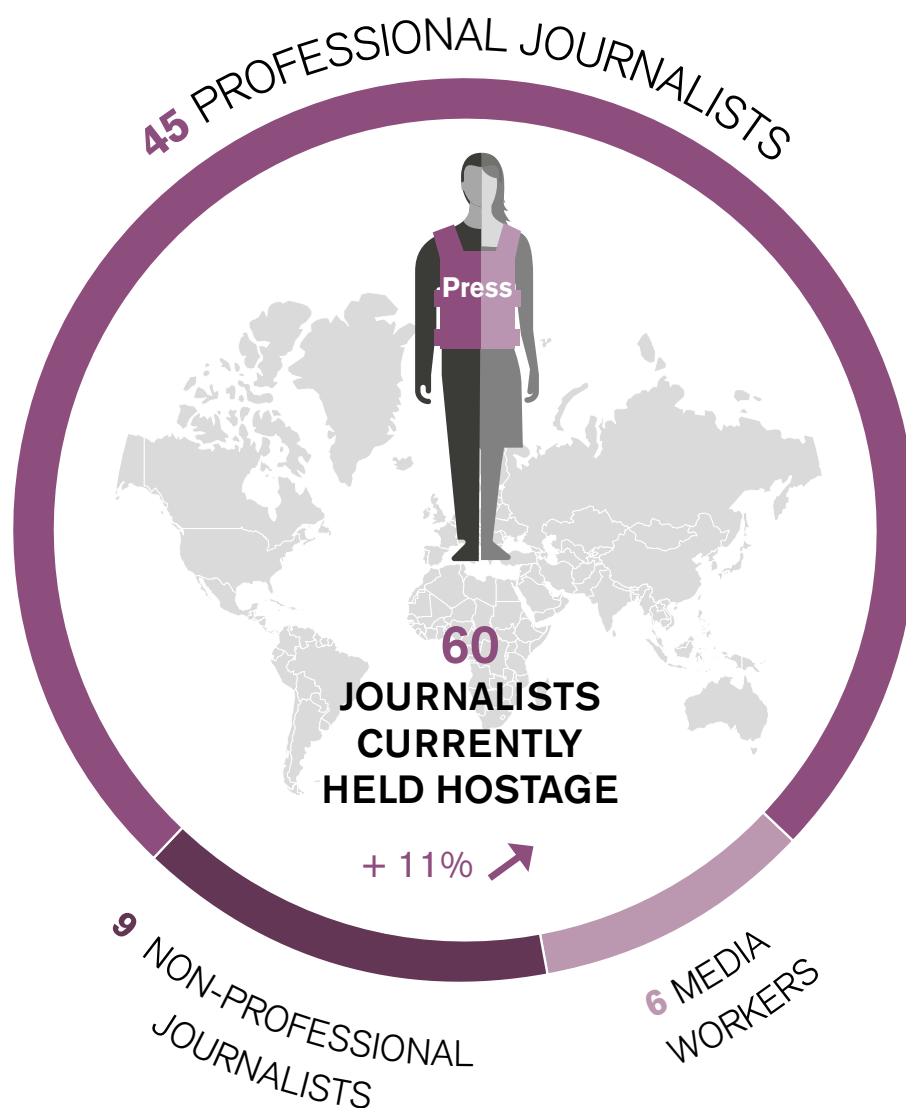
Kyaw Soe Oo  
© Committee to Protect Journalists



Wa Lone  
© New Indian Express

Despite international protests, **Kyaw Soe Oo** and **Wa Lone**, two Burmese journalists employed by the *Reuters* news agency who have been held since December 2017, [were sentenced to seven years in prison in Yangon on 3 September](#). They were convicted on a trumped-up charge of violating the Official Secrets Act in reprisal for investigating a massacre of Rohingya civilians by soldiers in the village of Inn Dinn, in the north of Rakhine state, in September 2017. The army had been forced to acknowledge the massacre and seven soldiers were given ten-year jail sentences for their role in the bloodshed. The sole evidence against the two reporters was the supposedly classified documents found in their possession at the time of their arrest. However, a police officer testified during a preliminary hearing that they had been lured to a meeting where they were given the documents and then immediately arrested. The journalists have appealed the decision.

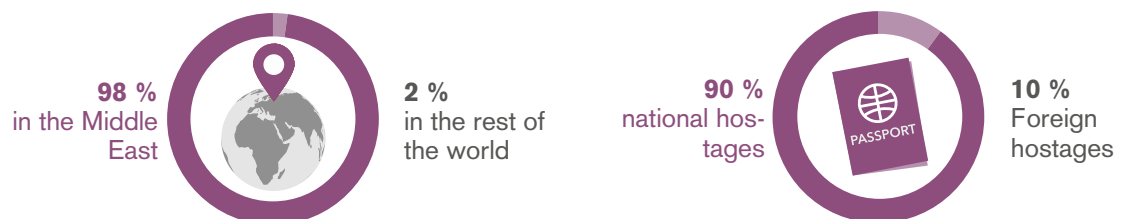
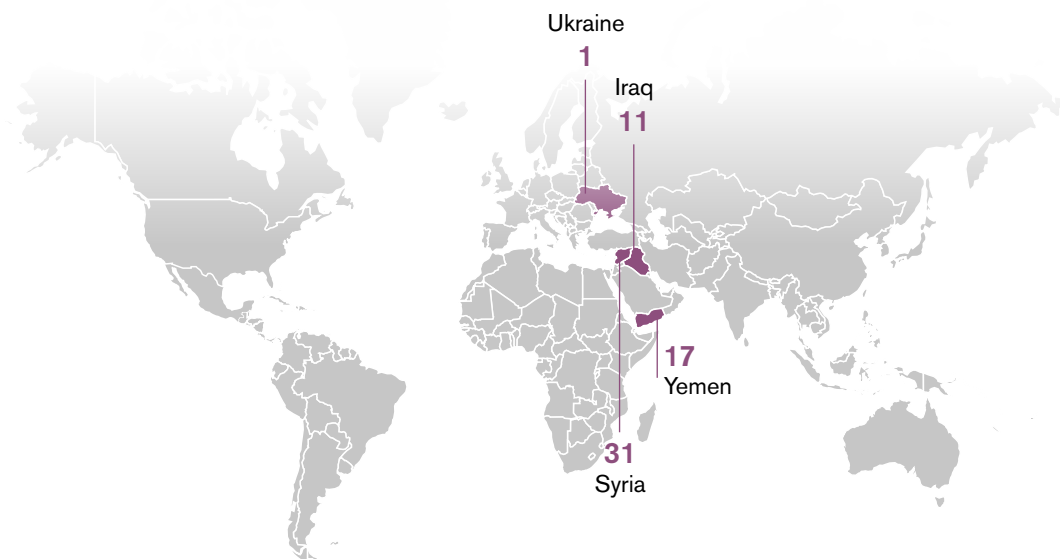
### 5.1 The figures



**Worldwide a total of 60 journalists are currently held hostage**, an 11% increase from this time last year, when the total was 54. Aside from six foreign journalists held hostage in Syria, they are all national journalists or underpaid reporters working in extremely risky conditions. These reporters are often the only remaining witnesses of the deadly conflicts in war zones that are now virtually inaccessible for the international media.

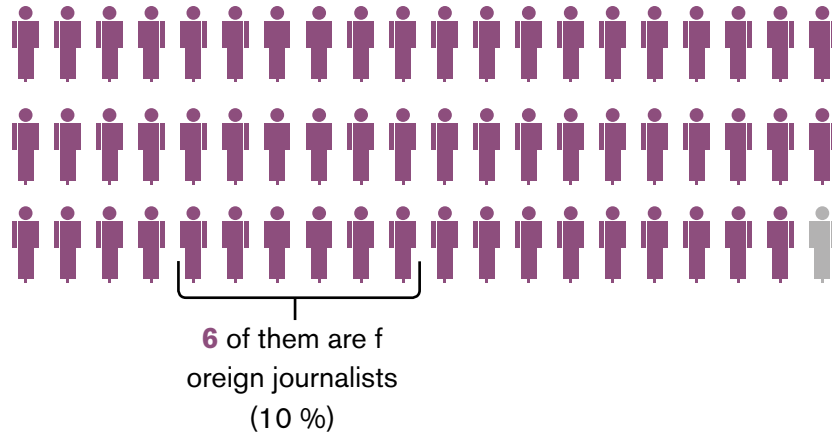
**Hostages:** RSF regards journalists as hostages when they are being held by non-state actors who threaten to kill or injure them or continue to hold them as means of pressure on a third party (a government, organization or group) with the aim of forcing the third party to take a particular action.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

## 5.2 Hostages – mainly a by-product of Middle Eastern wars



## JOURNALISTS HELD HOSTAGE

**59** of the 60 journalists held hostage are in the Middle East.



Taking journalists hostage continues to be a tool of war in the Middle East. Of the 60 journalists or media workers held hostage worldwide, 59 are in just three Middle Eastern countries – Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. **Armed groups operating in war zones abduct journalists both for ransom and for the purpose of intimidating their colleagues** and thereby obtaining their complete submission.

Under an amnesty in June 2018, the Syrian jihadi group Haya Tahrir al Sham (HTS) released a local journalist it had been holding for six months. But seven new abductions brought the number of journalists held hostage nationwide to 31 and maintained Syria's status as the world's greatest holder of media hostages.

No release was reported in Iraq where 11 journalists continue to be held hostage although the three-year war against Islamic State was officially declared over in December 2017. The lack of news about the fate of these hostages makes us fear the worst.

In Yemen, a country embroiled in civil war fuelled by regional rivalry since 2015, more journalists fell victim to the widespread practice of abduction in 2018. A total of 17 are now illegally detained, up from 12 in 2017.

### 5.3 Bargaining chips for armed militants

#### Main hostage takers



**Islamic State continues to be the Middle East's leading media hostage-taker following Yemen's Houthi rebels**, who alone are holding 16 journalists. Two were captured in October in Hodeida, the strategic port city that has seen intense fighting since the summer. The other 14 are being held in the capital, Sanaa, which the Houthis have controlled for the past four years. Ten of them have been held since 2015, while another three were taken hostage this year. The other Houthi captive is **Hamza al-Jubaihi**, an occasional contributor to the *Tagheer* news website, who was taken hostage in exchange for the release of his father, **Yahya al-Jubaihi**, a well-known *Tagheer* journalist who was abducted by the Houthis in April 2016 for refusing to take a pro-Houthi stance in his reporting and was sentenced to death in April 2017 on a charge of spying for Saudi Arabia.

Al Qaeda is also holding a journalist hostage in Yemen, in the southeastern province of Hadramaut. **Mohammed Al Moqri**, *Al Yemen al Youm TV*'s correspondent in Al Mukalla, the provincial capital, was covering an anti-Al Qaeda demonstration when he was abducted in 2015. There has been no news of him since Al Qaeda lost control of Al Mukalla in 2016. His whereabouts are unknown.

**Radical Islamist armed groups have also taken many journalists hostage in Syria.** As well as Islamic State, which has abducted a total of 24 journalists in Syria and Iraq, Haya Tahrir al Sham (HTS) – a jihadi group created from the merger of six Syrian Islamist rebel groups in 2017 – is holding two journalists in the northwestern Idlib region. Four media workers are being held hostage by a Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army brigade, which is now believed to be holding them somewhere near the Turkish border. Kurdish rebels are holding two journalists in Hasakah province, in northeastern Syria, one of whom was kidnapped four years ago.

Far from the Middle East's conflicts, **the Russian-backed self-proclaimed "republics" in eastern Ukraine's Donbass region have become news and information black holes** where the separatists silence independent reporting. [Stanislav Aseyev](#), a Ukrainian journalist who worked for the local service of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* and several Ukrainian newspapers, has been held since June 2017 by the authorities in the

self-proclaimed “Donetsk People’s Republic” on a spying charge. It was only after he had been held for more than a year that he was shown on the Russian state TV channel *Rossiya 24* in August “confessing” to being a spy. The confession, clearly extracted under duress, has fuelled concern about his physical and psychological well-being.

## 5.4 Foreign journalists missing after being taken hostage

[Jumpei Yasuda](#), a Japanese freelancer who was released in October 2018 after more than three years as a hostage, was the first foreign journalist to be freed from captivity in Syria since April 2014, when four French journalists were freed. Yasuda’s release reduced the number of foreign journalists still held in Syria to six.



Austin Tice  
© Tice family

The US government recently said that it believes [Austin Tice](#), an American journalist who was kidnapped near Damascus in 2012, is still alive and that it is doing everything possible to bring him back to the US as soon as possible. Before he was detained, Tice’s work was published in The Washington Post and Al Jazeera amongst others. : It is believed that the journalist is not being held by an Islamist armed group. Gift of the Givers, the South African humanitarian NGO with which South African freelance photojournalist [Shiraz Mohamed](#) was working when he was abducted near the Turkish border in northwestern Syria in January 2017, reported in August that it had been unable to pay the exorbitant ransom demanded by his kidnappers but still hoped that he would be freed soon.



John Cantlie  
© Minute News

Aside from these two cases, there has been no news of any of the other kidnapped journalists in Syria, and no proof of life. The lack of information is all the more worrying given the major changes in the situation in Syria in the past year. [Bashar al-Kadumi](#), a [Jordanian-Palestinian journalist working for Al-Hurra TV](#), disappeared in August 2012 in the Aleppo region, which is now controlled by forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad. Mauritanian reporter **Ishak Mactar** and Lebanese cameraman **Samir Kassab**, who were working for *Sky News Arabia* when they were kidnapped in October 2013, were seen alive in Raqqa province six months later. [John Cantlie](#), a [British journalist who was used in Islamic State propaganda videos after being kidnapped in November 2012](#), last appeared in a video recorded in Mosul in December 2016. There has been no news of him since then, except that the former Islamic State strongholds of Raqqa and Mosul were reduced to ruins by devastating bombardments and air strikes. The Caliphate’s rule over much of Syria and Iraq is now over, but its remaining hostages have not yet been found.

## Three journalists reported missing in 2018

The two journalists reported missing last year in Pakistan and Bangladesh are no longer missing, but RSF registered three new disappearances in 2018 -- two of them in the Americas and one in Russia.

RSF regards journalists as missing when there is insufficient evidence of their death or abduction and no credible claim of responsibility for their death or abduction has been made.



Agustín Silva Vázquez  
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### Agustín Silva Vázquez, missing since 21 January in Mexico

The 22-year-old [Agustín Silva Vázquez](#) was seen for the last time on 21 January in Matías Romero, a municipality in the southern state of Oaxaca, where he covered crime for the *El Sol del Istmo* regional newspaper. A few days before disappearing, he covered a military operation resulting in the seizure of firearms and the arrests of three persons. Silva's father said a man identifying himself as the lawyer of the three detainees had asked Silva to testify in their defence, and Silva had refused.



Vladjimir Legagneur  
© Press Lakay

### Vladjimir Legagneur, missing since 14 March in Haiti

[Freelance photographer Vladjimir Legagneur, 30](#), never returned after leaving his Port-au-Prince home on 14 March to do a report in Grand-Ravine, a section of the southern district of Martissant that is one of the Haitian capital's poorest and most violent neighbourhoods. A few days after his disappearance, the police said they had found human remains in an unused lot near where he was seen for the last time. Despite being pressed by his family and by local journalists' associations, the police never released the findings of the DNA tests conducted on these remains. Since then, neither the police nor the judicial authorities have reported any progress in the investigation.



Leonid Makhinia  
© DR

### Leonid Makhinia, missing since 7 June in Russia

The editor of the local news website *Volgogradsky Reporter* in the southwestern city of Volgograd, [Leonid Makhinia](#), 35, has been missing since 7 June. His wife's last contact with him was a phone call that morning, during which she noticed nothing unusual. *Volgogradsky Reporter* is an independent website that often publishes articles critical of the local authorities. After all attempts to locate him drew a blank, the local Investigative Committee opened an investigation into the case in July, treating it as a suspected homicide. No progress has so far been reported.

## ACTION TAKEN BY RSF

- > Since the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution 2222 on the safety of journalists in May 2012, RSF has been leading the [#ProtectJournalists](#) campaign for the appointment of a special representative of the secretary-general for the protection of journalists. [Backed by 130 media outlets, journalists' organizations and journalists' unions worldwide and by a growing number of governments](#), the campaign has so far succeeded in getting UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres to appoint [14 focal points responsible for journalists' safety within the main UN agencies and bodies](#).



- > RSF assists journalists, media outlets and local press freedom NGOs by providing protection, legal assistance, and capacity building.
- > It also monitors abuses and acts of violence against journalist and informs the public about them.



- > In an increasingly difficult environment for journalists and journalism, RSF is developing proposals designed to create a new order. The latest is [the initiative for a Pledge on Information and Democracy](#). It would establish the right to reliable news and information, define the global information and communication space as a common good of humankind, make online platforms accountable, and create an international group experts on information and democracy, with a function akin to the IPCC's role with regard to climate change.