

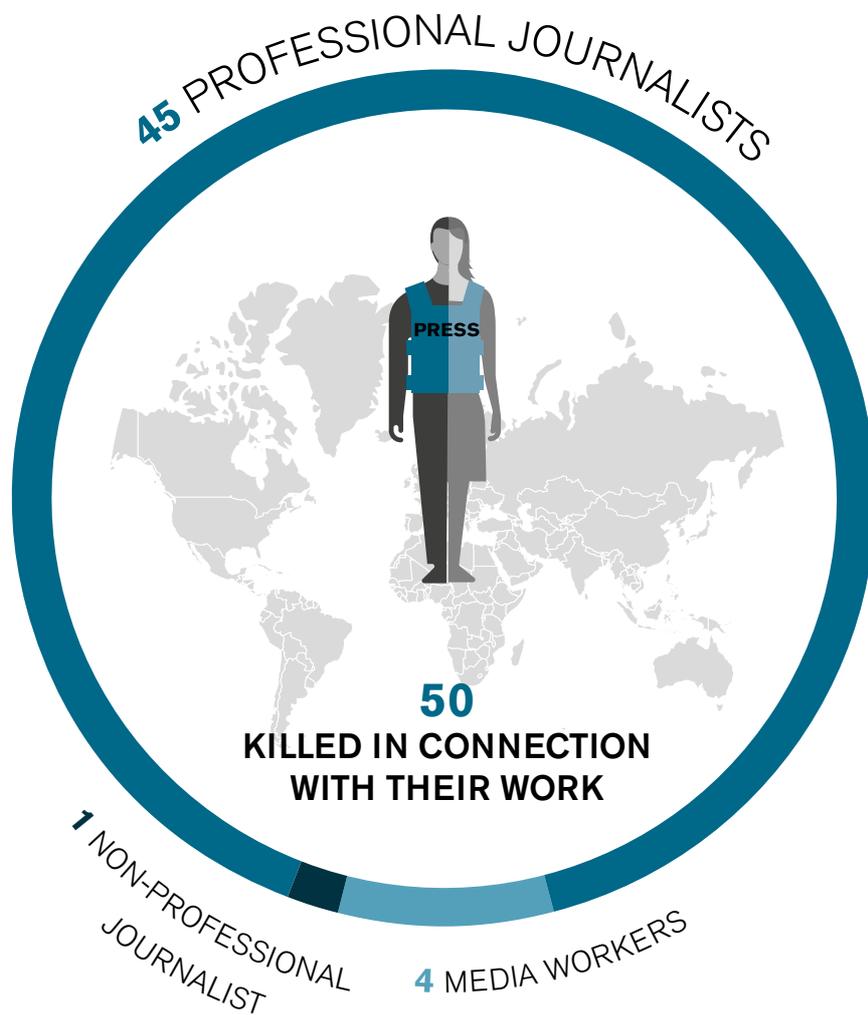
# ROUND-UP 2020

## JOURNALISTS KILLED

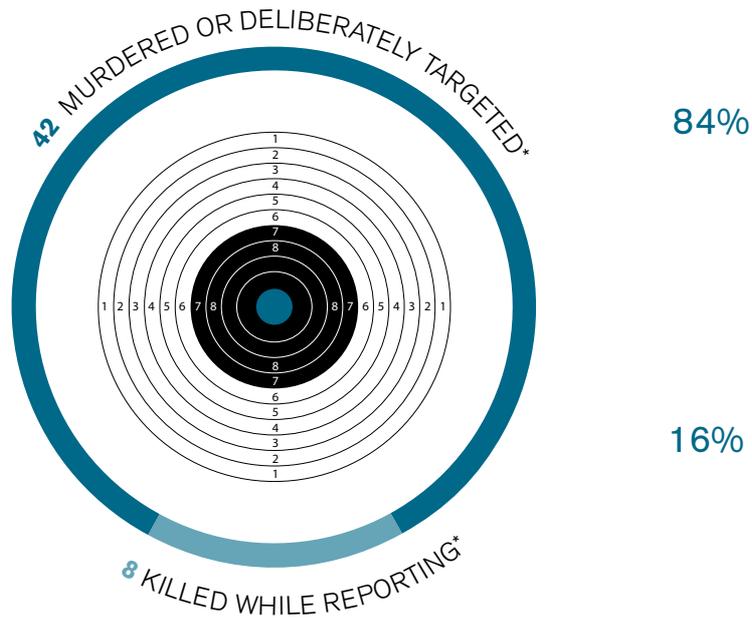
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# JOURNALISTS **KILLED**

## THE FIGURES



## JOURNALISTS KILLED

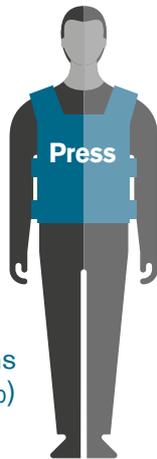


**\* MURDERED OR DELIBERATELY TARGETED:**

journalists deliberately killed in connection with their work

**\* KILLED WHILE REPORTING:**

journalists killed while in the field without being deliberately targeted as journalists



**48 mens**  
(96%)



**2 women**  
(4%)

**49**  
national  
journalists  
(98%)



**1**  
foreign  
journalist  
(2%)

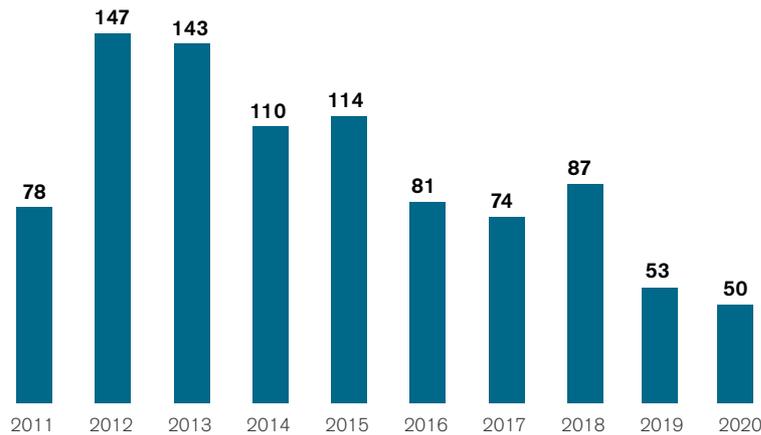
**16**  
in a  
war zone  
(32%)



**34**  
not in a  
war zone  
(68%)

## JOURNALISTS KILLED

937 journalists killed over the past decade



50 journalists killed in 2020, most of them deliberately targeted

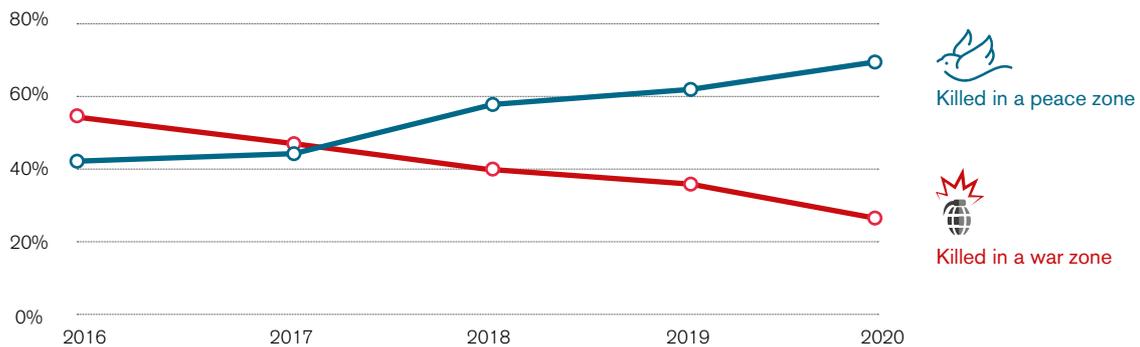
**Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has tallied 50 cases of journalists killed in connection with their work in 2020** (from 1 January to 15 December). This figure is very similar to 2019 (when 53 journalists were killed), although fewer journalists worked in the field this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This year's figure **brings the number of journalists killed over the past 10 years to 937**.

### Seven of every ten victims were killed in countries not at war

This year's figures confirm a trend that began in 2016 and has become more marked over the past two years: **the number of journalists killed in war zones keeps on falling**. It is now countries considered to be "at peace" that are proving to be the deadliest for journalists. In 2020, **nearly seven out of every ten journalists killed (68%) lost their lives in countries "at peace,"** whereas in 2016, it was only four out of every ten.

## JOURNALISTS KILLED

### Journalists killed in a war zone



#### 84% of journalists killed were deliberately targeted

Unsurprisingly, the rising number of journalists killed while reporting in countries “at peace” corresponds with a marked increase in the rates of journalists knowingly singled out, targeted and killed for their work. In 2020, **84% of journalists killed were deliberately targeted**, as opposed to 63% in 2019. Some were **murdered in a particularly gruesome manner**, especially in Mexico and India, where journalists were beheaded, cut into pieces, or hacked to death with machetes.

#### An increase in murders of investigative journalists

Many of the murder victims were journalists working on sensitive subjects. This year, four journalists were murdered while investigating the activities of organised crime groups; **ten were murdered in connection with their investigations into cases of local corruption or misuse of public funds; and three were murdered while working on subjects linked to environmental issues** (such as illegal mining or land-grabbing).

#### Extreme violence during protests

RSF witnessed another development in 2020, as civil unrest worldwide presented particular dangers: **seven journalists were killed while covering protests** in Iraq (four), Nigeria (two) and Colombia (one).

## JOURNALISTS KILLED

THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS COUNTRIES  
FOR JOURNALISTS

## The five deadliest countries



## Latin America

## Barbarity goes unpunished in Mexico

With eight journalists killed<sup>1</sup> in 2020, **Mexico has tragically confirmed its position as world leader of the most dangerous countries for the media.** For the past five years, Mexico has seen an average of eight to ten journalists murdered every year. The election of a new president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, exactly two years ago has not alleviated the scourges that plague the country. The links between drug traffickers and politicians remain, and journalists who dare to cover these or related issues continue to be the targets of barbaric murders.

Julio Valdivia Rodríguez, a reporter for the daily *El Mundo*, was [found beheaded](#) in the eastern state of Veracruz. Víctor Fernando Álvarez Chávez, the editor of the local news website *Punto x Punto Noticias*, was [cut to pieces](#) in Acapulco, in the western state of Guerrero. These murders, like the others, are still unpunished.

<sup>1</sup> There are two additional murder cases under investigation by RSF, which is still trying to determine with certainty whether they were linked to the victims' journalistic work.

## JOURNALISTS KILLED



Luis Almdares  
© DR

A nearby country is also becoming locked in a spiral of violence and impunity. With at least three journalists [shot dead](#) in 2020, **Honduras is the second deadliest country for members of the media in the Americas for the second year running**. The latest victim was **Luis Almdares**, a freelancer who criticised local corruption and police violence. Like the other two Honduran journalists murdered in 2020, he was gunned down without any response from the authorities and without any serious investigation. More than 91% of murders of journalists in Honduras go unpunished, according to the National Commission for Human Rights (CONADEH).

The circumstances of Indigenous reporter **Abelardo Liz**'s death in southwestern Colombia have not been clarified either. A reporter for a community radio station, *Emisora Nación Nasa*, Liz died shortly after [sustaining several gunshot injuries](#) when local police, riot police and soldiers used force to disperse a protest by Indigenous communities against the privatisation of local land.

### Middle East and Central Asia

#### Archaic punishment and a return to the past



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The end of 2020 was marked by **Rouhollah Zam's execution by hanging in Iran**. The editor of the *Amadnews* website and Telegram news channel, Zam was a refugee in France who was kidnapped by Iranian Revolutionary Guards while visiting Iraq and was forcibly taken back to Iran. There he was given an unfair trial and was sentenced to death for "corruption on earth," one of the most serious charges that can be brought before Iran's revolutionary courts. [No journalist had been the victim of this archaic and barbaric form of punishment for the past 30 years](#). Zam's execution confirms Iran's record as a country that has officially put the most journalists to death in the past half-century.



Malalai Maiwand  
© DR

In Afghanistan, December was marked by another execution, that of **Malalai Maiwand**, a journalist with *Enekaas TV* and representative of the [Centre for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists \(CPAWJ\)](#) in the eastern city of Jalalabad. She was the victim of an execution-style murder when she and her driver were shot dead by gunmen near her home. **Mohammad Aliyas Dayee**, a journalist with the Pashto-language section of *Radio Azadi*, the Afghan branch of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, was also killed by a bomb placed under his car in the southwestern city of Lashkargah in November. Violence against journalists and media has increased in Afghanistan in recent months, although a respite might have been expected as a result of the peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Three other journalists were killed by car bombs and explosions this year. While none of these killings have been claimed, Afghan civil society members continue to denounce a campaign of terror against those who criticise religious obscurantism.

## JOURNALISTS KILLED

Iraq has also seen a return to the darkest times, with six journalists killed in 2020. The method is usually the same. Unidentified gunmen [fire on journalists](#) as they cover the street protests that have been frequent since 2019. Other [media professionals](#), such as **Husham Al-Hashimi**, a specialist in terrorism, and **Nizar Thanoun**, the head of the *Al-Rasheed* TV channel, were gunned down in the street, often near their home. None of these murders has even been properly investigated and those responsible have not been found and brought to justice.

### Asia-Pacific

#### Cruelty as modus operandi



Rakesh Singh « Nirbhik »  
© NDTV - Prabhat Khabar



Isravel Moses  
© Twitter

The year also ended in a particularly violent fashion for Indian journalists. In three quarters of the cases, local organised crime was behind the murders of journalists. Two of these murders were especially barbaric. **Rakesh “Nirbhik” Singh**, a reporter for the *Rashtriya Swaroop* newspaper, was [burned alive](#) in December after being doused with a highly flammable, alcohol-based hand sanitiser in his home in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh by men sent by a local official whose corrupt practices he had criticised. **Isravel Moses**, a TV reporter in the southeastern state of Tamil Nadu, was [hacked to death](#) with machetes in November after neighbours identified him as a journalist to members of the local underworld.



Zulfiqar Mandrani  
© photo fournie par la famille  
- Asif Hassan / AFP

In Pakistan, the body of local newspaper reporter **Zulfiqar Mandrani** was found in southeastern Sindh province in May with [two gunshot wounds to the head](#) and evidence of torture across his back. The local police claimed that it was an “honour killing” but he was probably murdered for investigating the activities of a local drug trafficker with links to a police officer. He was one of four journalists murdered in Pakistan in 2020.

## JOURNALISTS KILLED



Virgilio «Vir» Maganes  
© RSF / Twitter



Jobert Bercasio  
© Balangibog TV - RSF

In the Philippines, President Rodrigo Duterte created a Presidential Task Force on Media Security with much fanfare shortly after taking office in 2016, but nothing has changed. Three journalists have been killed each year since 2018. Two of those murdered in 2020 – *Radyo Pilipino* host [Virgilio «Vir» Maganes](#) and [Jobert Bercasio](#), a former reporter for the *Bicol Today* local news website – were killed by six and five shots respectively, fired by hitmen on motorcycles.

## Africa

### Terrorism and police violence



Abdulwali Ali Hassan  
© Facebook



Said Yusuf Ali  
© Somalia Latest News

In Somalia, Al-Shabaab's insurgents were expelled from Mogadishu in 2011 but they continue to control parts of the country's interior and to carry out terrorist attacks and targeted murders, some of them directly targeting media personnel. Journalists who cover government atrocities or military defeats are often singled out. This was the case with two TV reporters in 2020 – *Universal TV's* Abdulwali «Online» Ali Hassan, who was [gunned down](#) in February, and *Kalsan TV's* Said Yusuf Ali, who was [stabbed to death](#) in May.



Onifade Pelumi  
© Gboah TV

Two journalists were killed in Nigeria, which has emerged as West Africa's deadliest country for the media. Nigerian journalists were not spared the climate of violence surrounding major protests, especially protests against the brutality of a police unit tasked with combating crime. The latest victim was a young trainee reporter, **Onifade Pelumi**, who was [found dead](#) in a morgue in Lagos, the economic capital, nearly two weeks after his arrest while covering a demonstration outside a food warehouse.

## JOURNALISTS KILLED

## THE CORONAVIRUS AGGRAVATING FACTOR

Like the rest of the world's population, journalists have not been spared by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hundreds have been killed by the virus throughout the world, [in some countries more than others](#), without it being possible to determine whether they caught it while working as journalists. But at least three journalists are known to have died as a result of not receiving adequate treatment after probably catching the virus in prison.

One was [Aleksandr Tolmachev](#), who died aged 65 in a Russian penal colony on 9 November, a month before he was due to complete a nine-year sentence. The editor of two Rostov-on-Don publications, *Pro Rostov* and *Upolnomochen Zayavit*, he was arrested in 2011 in connection with his coverage of local corruption. According to his widow, he was in very poor health as a result of the extremely harsh conditions in the penal colony and the mistreatment to which he had been subjected. She said he was coughing a great deal prior to his death and she accused the authorities of letting him die in prison without proper medical care.



Mohamed Monir  
© DR

In Egypt and Saudi Arabia, two journalists [also died after probably catching COVID-19 in prison](#). One was **Mohamed Monir**, who was arrested in Egypt after participating in an Al Jazeera broadcast. The other was **Saleh Al-Shehi**, who worked for the reformist daily *Al Watan* in Saudi Arabia. Both were hastily and unexpectedly released shortly before their deaths. Monir had tested positive for COVID-19 a few days before he was freed. Al-Shehi died of an unexplained illness after some time in intensive care as a result of a sudden decline in his health after his release from prison. Several local media thought it was a case of COVID-19 but this could not be confirmed because of the complete absence of transparency on the part of the Saudi authorities.



Saleh Al-Shehi  
© DR



# HOW WE CALCULATE THESE FIGURES

The 2020 round-up figures compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) include professional journalists, non-professional journalists and media workers. The round-up distinguishes these categories in its breakdowns in order to facilitate comparison with previous years.

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

The figures in this round-up of journalists killed in connection with their work reflect those killed between 1 January and 15 December 2020. It takes no account of journalists killed after 15 December.

We distinguish between journalists who were deliberately targeted because of their work and those who were killed while reporting in the field without being specifically targeted. We have not included a journalist in this round-up if we are still investigating their death because we are not yet confident that it was linked to their work.