

**PRESS CORPS TOPIC SYNOPSIS:
Protecting Journalists From State
Censorship & Retaliation**



I. Topic Background

The United Nations classifies journalism as an essential but dangerous profession, one that is significant for sustainable development, protecting human rights, and consolidating democracy, but it exists as a dangerous and deadly job.¹ Journalists take on their work in many forms, including general or specialist, commercial or non-commercial, opinionated or impartial, magazines, radio, television, newspapers, and more. Despite how journalism is viewed, journalists are essential in strengthening society as they document history, act as a check on power, provide voices to the unheard, and give context to make sense of a complex world.² Society has always expected a constant flow of information from journalism to stay up to date. In addition to universal “awareness,” through their work, journalists facilitate democratic processes such as encouraging people to vote in elections and bridge gaps between different communities by connecting certain people together who are outside of one another’s social groups. The jobs of journalists are necessary to empower humans to make better individual life choices and actions to contribute to the lives of others through the variety of information and effects offered by such information.³

While journalists have a role far more important than simply delivering news, there are many existing risks that can cost their lives, proving the UN’s definition of journalism as a harmful career. Most recently, as of December 2025, the UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists reports that more than 1,843 journalists have been killed since 1993.⁴ Journalists can face violence and intimidation primarily to be silenced for reporting on topics that governments or groups of people want to hide from the general public. These include corruption, crime, government abuses, or conflict such as sensitive issues like war, human rights, and political instability. Threats journalists experience include murder, kidnapping, hostage-taking, harassment, intimidation, disappearances, detention, and torture, and women journalists as well as those who represent minority groups are targeted the most. The trend of journalists being killed in connection to their work has been increasing dramatically, happening every four days. They are targeted by those in power in numerous different ways in order to stifle their reporting.⁵

¹ “Safety of Journalists | United Nations.” the United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/safety-journalists>. Accessed 23 December 2025.

² “The essential role of journalism.” Media Helping Media, <https://mediahelpingmedia.org/advanced/the-essential-role-of-journalism/>. Accessed 23 December 2025.

³ “What Is Journalism And Why Does It Matter In Today's World? -.” Today Digital, 1 December 2024, <https://todaydigital.com/blog/what-is-journalism-and-why-does-it-matter-in-todays-world/>. Accessed 23 December 2025.

⁴ “Observatory of Killed Journalists.” UNESCO, <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/observatory>. Accessed 23 December 2025.

⁵ Maizland, Lindsay, and Khamis Al-Rifi. “Violence Is a Growing Threat to Press Freedom Worldwide.” Council on Foreign Relations, 1 October 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/article/violence-growing-threat-press-freedom-worldwide>. Accessed 23 December 2025.

Authoritarian regimes are popular perpetrators, as many restrict freedoms of expression, viewing the independent press as a fundamental threat to their control and stability. This is because the act of journalism as a watchdog that questions authority and holds power accountable directly contradicts the goals of authoritarian systems that rely on controlling information and suppressing the expression of opinions. As they lack governmental checks and balances, authoritarian-leaning regimes restrict their press more.⁶ While autocratic systems unprecedentedly attack, intimidate, and detain journalists to control information and choke off free expression, democratic systems and institutions also pose threats to journalists as well. Even amid free speeches and press freedom, politicians hold minimal support for independent journalism, oftentimes cutting funding and treating journalists with hostility.⁷ Through subtle, non-violent methods such as surveillance and online harassment, democratic regimes undermine the independence of journalists and their ability to hold power accountable.

Understanding the countless means of retaliation and censorship that journalists face no matter the type of government or freedoms that govern them, protection is crucial for independent media to exist. Journalists should be allowed to carry out their work, free from violence and obstruction. Journalists ensure that governments, corporations, and those in possession of power are held accountable, meaning without them, corruption, human rights abuses, and misinformation exist and can go unchecked, weakening democracy and public trust. When journalists are safe from harm and danger, being able to perform their job and work without risk, societies are more transparent. Journalism is necessary in order to advance human rights.⁸ As attacks on journalists continue to grow worldwide, especially with the rise of digital media, censorship and retaliation is more important than ever to ensure the safety of journalists for the public's access to the increasingly urgent issues of today's world.

Case Study 1: Mexico

Around the world, journalists who expose corruption and abuse of power face censorship and retaliation designed to silence their reporting. One of the most common forms of this retaliation is targeted violence combined with government failure to hold perpetrators accountable. Mexico is a clear example of how censorship can occur not only through laws, but through fear and impunity, directly linking to the broader issue of retaliation against journalists.

Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, particularly those reporting on organized crime, government corruption, and cartel violence. On May 15, 2017, Mexican investigative journalist Javier Valdez was murdered in Culiacán, Sinaloa, shortly

⁶ Lecce, Allison. "Journalists vs. Authoritarians: The State of Press Freedoms in Hungary, Turkey, and Egypt." Fordham Research Commons, 21 May 2022, https://research.library.fordham.edu/international_senior/102/. Accessed 23 December 2025.

⁷ Nielsen, Rasmus Kleis. "The worst threats to journalism come from politicians. The best defence against them is serving the public." Reuters Institute, 28 September 2024, <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/worst-threats-journalism-come-politicians-best-defence-against-them-serving-public>. Accessed 23 December 2025.

⁸ "Safety of Journalists." UNESCO, <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists>. Accessed 23 December 2025.

after publishing articles exposing the relationships between drug cartels and political actors.⁹ Valdez had previously received threats related to his reporting, yet no effective protective measures were provided by the state.¹⁰ His killing was a direct act of retaliation intended to silence investigative journalism.

This violence disproportionately affects local and independent journalists, especially those working in regions dominated by criminal organizations. Women journalists and reporters face additional threats, including harassment and intimidation. Beyond journalists themselves, the broader Mexican public is affected, as fear-driven self censorship limits access to reliable information about crime, corruption, and governance.

Valdez's murder intensified fear among journalists nationwide and contributed to widespread self censorship, particularly in local media. In response, the Mexican government publicly condemned the killing and pointed to its Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists.¹¹ However, investigations were slow, and most cases of journalist killings in Mexico remain unresolved, demonstrating the government's limited effectiveness and weak enforcement.¹²

Mexico is a UN member state and has endorsed the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.¹³ It has also supported UN General Assembly Resolution 68/163, which calls on states to prevent violence against journalists and ensure accountability.¹⁴ Despite participating in Human Rights Council discussions and committing to these frameworks, Mexico's domestic actions have not matched its international obligations, as Mexico remains one of the most dangerous countries for journalists.¹⁵

This case demonstrates that censorship does not require explicit state control of the press but can occur when governments fail to protect journalists and punish perpetrators. The next course of action should include strengthening investigative capacity, fully funding protection mechanisms, and ensuring independent prosecutions for crimes against journalists. Mexico's case shows how retaliation through violence and impunity silences journalists and restricts

⁹ Mexico Violence Resource Project, "Remembering Javier Valdez," Mexico Violence Resource Project, May 22, 2023, <https://www.mexicoviolence.org/el-acarreo/remembering-javier-valdez>.

¹⁰ Committee to Protect Journalists, "Journalists Killed in 2017 – Motive Confirmed: Javier Valdez Cárdenas," Refworld, December 31, 2017, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/annualreport/cpj/2017/en/119697>.

¹¹ UNESCO, "National Safety Mechanisms – Mexico," UNESCO: Mechanisms for Journalist Safety, accessed January 2, 2026, <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/un-plan-action/national-safety-mechanisms/mexico>.

¹² Amnesty International and Committee to Protect Journalists, "'No One Guarantees My Safety': Mexico—Killings of Journalists under State Protection Show Urgent Need to Strengthen Federal Mechanism," Amnesty International, March 6, 2024,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/mexico-killings-journalists-strengthen-federal-mechanism/>.

¹³ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity," United Nations, accessed January 2, 2026, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/safety-of-journalists/un-plan-action-safety-journalists-and-issue-impunity>.

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 68/163: The Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, adopted 18 December 2013; published 21 February 2014, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/68/163>.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Mexico: Events of 2023," Human Rights Watch, accessed January 2, 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/mexico>. Amnesty International and CPJ, "'No One Guarantees My Safety.'"

freedom of expression. This directly reinforces the broader issue that without accountability, censorship thrives and democracy is weakened.

Case Study 2: Russian Federation

In contrast to violence enabled by inaction, some governments retaliate against journalists through direct legal repression. Authoritarian regimes often treat independent journalism as a threat to state control. Russia exemplifies how censorship and retaliation can be embedded into law, making journalism itself punishable, directly aligning with the global issue of press suppression.

Following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Russian government intensified restrictions on the media. In March 2022, Russia passed laws criminalizing the spread of “false information” about the military, with penalties of up to 15 years in prison.¹⁶ These laws were intentionally vague, allowing authorities to punish journalists who report on civilian casualties, military losses, or human rights violations, effectively criminalizing independent reporting.¹⁷

Independent journalists, opposition media outlets, and political dissidents were the primary targets. At least 150 journalists have fled since the war began because of threats and censorship.¹⁸ Minority journalists and regional reporters faced heightened risks, while many journalists were forced into exile.¹⁹ Russian citizens were also affected, as access to independent information rapidly declined.²⁰

As a result of these laws, independent outlets such as Novaya Cazeta suspended operations, and journalists were detained, threatened, or forced to flee the country.²¹ The Russian government defended these actions as necessary for national security, demonstrating an official stance that prioritized informational control over press freedom.²²

Russia is a signatory to international human rights treaties protecting freedom of expression but has rejected criticism from the UN. UN Human Rights Council Special

¹⁶ Freedom House, Freedom on the Net 2022: Russia, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/russia/freedom-net/2022>.

¹⁷ Amnesty International, Russian Federation: End Censorship on Voices Against the War, Public Statement, EUR 46/5345/2022, March 14, 2022,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/EUR4653452022ENGLISH.pdf>.

¹⁸ Amnesty International, “Russia: Kremlin’s Ruthless Crackdown Stifles Independent Journalism and Anti-War Movement,” Amnesty International, March 10, 2022,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/03/russia-kremlins-ruthless-crackdown-stifles-independent-journalism-and-anti-war-movement/>.

¹⁹ Lucy Westcott, “Forced to Flee: Exiled Journalists Face Unsafe Passage and Transnational Repression,”

<https://cpj.org/reports/2024/06/forced-to-flee-exiled-journalists-face-unsafe-passage-and-transnational-repression/>.

²⁰ Amnesty International, “Russia: Journalists and Independent Monitors Being Silenced to Stifle Reporting of Protests – New Report,” Amnesty International, November 24, 2022,

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/11/russia-journalists-and-independent-monitors-being-silenced-to-stifle-reporting-of-protests-new-report/>.

²¹ Amnesty International, Russian Federation: End Censorship on Voices Against the War.

²² Kateryna Serohina, “Kremlin Openly Acknowledges Using Censorship to Control Media amid War,” RBC-Ukraine, July 12, 2025,

<https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/kremlin-openly-acknowledges-using-censorship-1752280394.html>.

Rapporteurs and OHCHR have condemned Russia's media laws as violations of international standards.²³ Despite participating in previous human rights mechanisms, Russia has ignored recommendations and withdrawn cooperation.

This case shows how laws can be weaponized to silence journalists without physical violence. The next course of action for the international community includes sustained diplomatic pressure, support for exiled journalists, and stronger enforcement of international human rights standards. The core issue reinforces that when journalists are punished for reporting, public access to information collapse and human rights abuses can persist unchecked.

II. Past UN Involvement

Protecting journalists from censorship and retaliation has become a central concern of the United Nations as attacks on press freedom increase worldwide. The UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have repeatedly affirmed that pluralistic media is essential to democracy and human rights. Through resolutions such as the UN General Assembly Resolution 68/163 on the safety of journalists and Human Rights Council Resolution 45/18, the UN has formally condemned censorship directed at media workers.²⁴ These resolutions call on member states to prevent attacks against journalists and conduct impartial investigation to combat crimes against the press. In high level meetings and General Assembly debates, UN officials have emphasized that censorship silences public discourse and weakens accountability, particularly during conflicts and political unrest.

Several UN branches play direct roles in addressing this issue, mainly UNESCO, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the UN Secretary General's office.²⁵ Both UNESCO and OHCHR lead the *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and*

²³ United Nations, "UN Experts Condemn Sentencing of Journalists in Russia," 23 July 2024, <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/news/2024/07/95668/un-experts-condemn-sentencing-journalists-russia>.

United Nations, "Russia Using 'Rule of Fear' to Silence Anti-War Dissent, Says UN Independent Human Rights Expert," 28 October 2025, <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/news/2025/10/112230/russia-using-rule-fear-silence-anti-war-dissent-says-un-independent>.

²⁴ United Nations. General Assembly Resolution 68/163: The Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, A/RES/68/163, 68th sess., 70th plenary meeting, December 18, 2013. <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/68/163>.

United Nations Human Rights Council, The Safety of Journalists, Resolution 45/18 (Geneva: United Nations, October 6, 2020), A/HRC/RES/45/18.

https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3888335/files/A_HRC_RES_45_18-EN.pdf.

²⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "UNESCO," accessed December 19, 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en>.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "OHCHR," accessed December 19, 2025, https://www.ohchr.org/en/ohchr_homepage.

United Nations, "Executive Office of the Secretary-General," accessed December 19, 2025,

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/global-leadership/entity/secretariat-and-regional-commissions/executive-office-of-the-secretary-general>.

Issue of Impunity, coordinating international efforts to protect media professionals and monitor violations.²⁶ UNESCO's reports and statistics show a 67% rise in attacks against journalists over the past decade, with hundreds killed and many cases still unresolved, highlighting a culture of impunity.²⁷ OHCHR has organized expert panels, country reviews, and special rapporteur briefing to examine patterns of censorship. These findings are frequently presented during Human Rights Council sessions, reinforcing the urgency of international cooperation.

UN leadership has consistently used speeches and public statements to draw attention to the dangers journalists face. The Secretary General underscores the global consequences of censorship, stating that "Impunity anywhere is not only an injustice to the victims and their families — it is an assault on press freedom, an invitation to further violence and a threat to democracy itself."²⁸ International days such as World Press Freedom Day, recognized by the UN, serve as platforms for announcements and calls to action urging governments to strengthen legal protections for journalists.²⁹ The UN's treaties, resolutions, meetings, and public advocacy demonstrate their ongoing commitment to defending press freedom. However, the persistence of censorship and retaliation shows that stronger enforcement for accountability is needed to ensure journalists can operate safely without fear.

III. Bloc Positions and Possible Solutions

Journalism is essential when cultivating a transparent, accountable, and, most importantly, informed society. Internationally, a multitude of stances have been taken regarding the protection of journalists. We often see a clear connection between a state's form of governance and the rights given to the Press. States that emphasize state sovereignty and security commonly oppose the protection of the Press, while states that prioritize human rights and freedom of speech frequently advocate for the upholding of press rights.

States such as Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Turkmenistan, North Korea, China, Vietnam, and Iran strongly believe that national stability and governmental authority outweigh providing unrestricted freedom to the press. These same states clearly demonstrate the pervasive nature of censorship. For example, in Eritrea, North Korea, and Turkmenistan, the Press serves as a proxy to further the state's agenda. By funneling government policies and ideas through a seemingly

²⁶ UNESCO, "UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity," accessed December 19, 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/un-plan-action>.

²⁷ UNESCO, "New Report: UNESCO Warns of Serious Decline in Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists Worldwide," press release, December 12, 2025, last updated December 15, 2025, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/new-report-unesco-warns-serious-decline-freedom-expression-and-safety-journalists-worldwide>.

²⁸ António Guterres, "When the Press Is Silenced, Everyone Loses Their Voice," press release SG/SM/22876, United Nations, October 23, 2025. <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sgsm22876.doc.htm>.

²⁹ United Nations, "World Press Freedom Day," United Nations, accessed December 19, 2025, <https://www.un.org/en/observances/press-freedom-day>.

credible source, they effectively gain control over the public's opinion.³⁰ Such states rarely permit foreign journalists to enter, and, in the case that they do, the foreign press is constantly monitored. Additionally, states such as Saudi Arabia, China, Vietnam, and Iran employ tactics such as strict surveillance, harassment, and threats while monitoring the internet and social media for the purpose of censoring and supervising independent journalism. These states perceive independent and foreign journalists to be potentially destabilizing in nature thus resulting in the inhibition of journalistic liberties. Moreover, although many authoritarian regimes typically do not have enumerated forms of censorship, this does not insinuate that such instances do not occur.

On the other hand, states that believe in the universal human right of freedom of speech often take a more defensive stance on journalistic liberties. As Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly mentions, "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression."³¹ Prominent countries such as Norway, Estonia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Ireland firmly maintain their stance of journalism, affirming journalists' role as a safeguard against corruption and power. Similarly, these same countries view the control of the Press as a direct threat to democracy and a violation of human rights.

A combination of both short-term and long-term solutions is needed to protect journalists from censorship and retaliation. Short-term solutions may focus more on the immediate safety of journalists, while long-term solutions should address the systematic causes of censorship.

In the short term, the emergency response funds and emergency hotlines can provide media agencies protection. For example, several countries have implemented systems that monitor and report journalist rights violations in real time, serving as a rapid intervention emergency support system used to aid journalists in times of crisis. Additionally, public condemnation is a major measure that can be taken almost immediately to bring attention to the censorship of the media. Despite these short-term solutions' ability to provide quick impact, they are heavily limited in their ability to produce any lasting change.

On the other hand, long-term solutions provide a foundation for continual and lasting legal frameworks that can protect journalists from censorship. Processes that prevent impunity when it comes to censorship are a prime example of long-term protections for journalists. This involves the creation and strengthening of judicial systems that prosecute and investigate attacks against journalists' ability to report accurately and independently. Likewise, initiatives such as journalist safety training and digital security education provide the skills and knowledge to help journalists avoid censorship and navigate through instances in which censorship occurs. Such solutions aim to reduce censorship by providing a sustainable chance that continually upholds journalistic liberties.

³⁰Committee to Protect Journalists: 10 Most Censored Countries, <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/09/10-most-censored-eritrea-north-korea-turkmenistan-journalist/>

³¹United Nations: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

Ultimately, in order for protection against the censorship of journalists to be effective, a complementary approach consisting of both short-term and long-term solutions must be used. Short-term solutions will help to mitigate immediate risks while long-term reforms will address the underlying causes of censorship.

IV. Questions to Consider

- 1) How does the censoring of journalists prevent governmental accountability, intrude on the protection of human rights, and erode the public's trust in their government?
- 2) To what extent should governments be held accountable for violence against the press, and in what ways should the government protect the Press against such violence?
- 3) Should reporters in foreign countries be subject to their native journalism rights or the press rights in the country they are covering?
- 4) How can regulatory legislation such as anti-misinformation laws be used to silence the Press, and what are some strategies to prevent this from happening?
- 5) Should female reporters and other minority journalists be provided additional protections outside of the freedoms given to the general press?
- 6) How can international law safeguard journalists who reside in authoritarian states where restrictive governments have the ability to reject protections given to the Press?
- 7) How has automated content moderation through tools such as AI impacted legitimate journalism and how has it affected freedom of speech?
- 8) How does state corruption influence journalists' rights and the consequences they face when government conduct is exposed?
- 9) How do differences in government structure create gaps in the regulation and protection of journalists, and how can such gaps be minimized?
- 10) What happens when journalist protections exist in law but not in enforcement?

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