



# Getting Away With Murder

## 2017 Global Impunity Index



A special report by the Committee to Protect Journalists



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CPJ's Impunity Index is compiled as part of the organization's Global Campaign Against Impunity, which is made possible thanks in part to the Leon Levy Foundation.

Cover Photo: A vigil in Sliema, Malta, for Daphne Caruana Galizia, a critical blogger killed in a car bombing in October 2017. (AFP/Matthew Mirabelli)



# Getting Away With Murder

By Elisabeth Witchel, CPJ Impunity Campaign Consultant

Impunity in the murders of journalists can be an intractable cycle stretching over a decade or more, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists' 10th annual Global Impunity Index, a ranking of countries where journalists are murdered and their killers go free. Seven countries on this year's index have been listed every year since the index launched a decade ago—including Somalia, which is the worst country for unsolved murders for the third year in a row.

Impunity thrives in conflict environments, where powerful actors often use violent intimidation to control media coverage, while weak-to-nonexistent law and order increases the likelihood of attacks. Justice for over two dozen journalists murdered in Somalia in the past decade is one casualty of prolonged civil war and an insurgency waged by al-Shabaab extremists.

The war in Syria pushed that country into the second worst spot on the index, compared with third last year. Third on this year's index is Iraq, where journalists are menaced by the militant group Islamic State and state-backed militias, among other groups.

Fighting between political factions in South Sudan, number four on the index, is the backdrop behind a 2015 ambush during which five journalists were killed. Threats from violent extremist groups operating beyond the reach of authorities underpin high impunity rates in three other countries on the index: Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nigeria.

Afghanistan dropped off the list for the first time since CPJ began calculating the index in 2008. Though security conditions remain volatile and no convictions in journalist murders were achieved, targeted killings of journalists have declined. Instead, larger-scale acts of violence such as a truck bomb attack in downtown Kabul in May that killed 150 people, including one journalist, are responsible for recent fatalities. Over a dozen journalists have been killed there in the past decade while covering combat, by crossfire, or while covering dangerous assignments. CPJ

records only two murders, both unsolved, for the period covered by this index.

The Impunity Index, published annually to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on November 2, calculates the number of unsolved murders over a 10-year period as a percentage of each country's population. For this edition, CPJ analyzed journalist murders in every nation that took place between September 1, 2007 and August 31, 2017. Only those nations with five or more unsolved cases for the period are included on the index—a threshold that 12 countries met this year, compared with 13 last year. Read more about CPJ's methodology.

Conflict is not the only cause of impunity. In countries such as the Philippines, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, and India—countries that bill themselves as democracies but have repeatedly appeared on the index—government officials and criminal groups go unpunished for murdering journalists in high numbers.

Over the decade that CPJ has published the Global Impunity Index, Somalia's impunity rating shot up by 198 percent. Other countries that saw impunity ratings increase the most over the past decade are: Mexico (142 percent), Pakistan (113 percent), and India (100 percent); Syria (up 195 percent) and Brazil (up 177 percent) experienced huge increases in impunity despite not appearing on the index all 10 years.

In addition to Afghanistan, four countries that appeared on the index have come off at various times since 2008: Colombia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Their exit from the list is attributable primarily to declines in violence associated with the end of civil wars rather than with prosecutions being achieved. Only Colombia and Nepal convicted the perpetrators of journalist killings, and only in a handful of cases.

International attention to the issue of impunity in journalist murders has increased in the past 10 years. The

# Impunity Index 2017

CPJ's Impunity Index calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of each country's population. Only those nations with five or more unsolved cases are included.



United Nations has adopted a total of five resolutions—three by the Human Rights Council, one by the General Assembly and the one by the Security Council—urging states to take measures to promote justice when journalists are attacked. This year also marked the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the U.N. Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

This year, 23 states responded to the UNESCO director general's request for information on the status of investigations into killed journalists, including eight countries on this index. Pakistan acknowledged receipt of the request, but did not provide information.

Three index countries—India, South Sudan, and Syria—failed to respond at all. CPJ and other press freedom groups advocate for full participation by all states in this accountability mechanism.

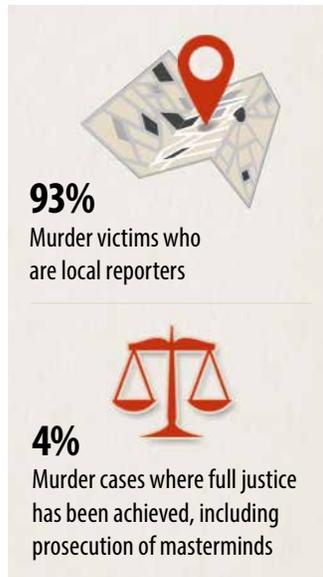
Among the other findings from CPJ's data on murdered journalists:

- The 12 countries on the index account for nearly 80 percent of the unsolved murders that took place worldwide during the 10-year period ending August 31, 2017.
- Four countries on this year's index—India, Mexico, Nigeria, and the Philippines—are on the governing council of the Community of Democracies, a coalition dedicated to upholding and strengthening democratic norms.
- In five countries listed on the index, new murders took place over the past year, a testimony to the powerful cycle of impunity and violence.



A tribute to Javier Valdez Cárdenas is left at a café in Culiacan that the Mexican journalist used to visit. Valdez was shot dead outside his office in May 2017. (AFP/Yuri Cortez)

- Political groups, including Islamic State and other extremist organizations, are the suspected perpetrators in one third of murder cases. Government and military officials are considered the leading suspects in about a quarter of the murders.
- About 93 percent of murder victims are local reporters. The majority cover politics and corruption in their home countries.
- In at least 40 percent of cases, murder victims reported receiving threats before they were killed,



highlighting the need for robust protection mechanisms.

- In only 4 percent of total murder cases has there been full justice, including prosecution of those who commissioned the crime.
- In the past 10 years, around 30 percent of murdered journalists were first taken captive—higher than the historical average of 22 percent since CPJ began tracking in 1992. The majority of those taken captive are tortured, sending a chilling message to the victims’ colleagues.

# The Index

## 1. SOMALIA

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 26

**Getting away with murder:** Militant groups like al-Shabaab, government officials

**Targeted for murder:** Local journalists covering politics, culture, and war

**Progress:** None since early 2016, when military courts sentenced suspects in connection to six murders.

**Setback:** At least one journalist, Abdiaziz Ali, was murdered since last year's index was compiled. Somalia has issued the death penalty against at least three individuals accused of murdering journalists, in contrast with international human rights norms. In February, newly elected President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed announced his support for media freedom, but he has failed to advance justice in the killings of any journalists.

**Illustrative case:** Abdiaziz Ali was walking home from his parents' house in Mogadishu in September 2016 when two men on motorbikes pulled over and shot him several times. Abdiaziz had reported on the civilian toll of Somalia's conflict between government forces and the Islamist militant group al-Shabaab. At least eight journalists murdered in the past decade were affiliated with Abdiaziz's news outlet, the Shabelle Media Network.

## 2. SYRIA

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 17

**Getting away with murder:** Islamic State and other militant groups, security forces

**Targeted for murder:** Local journalists and international correspondents covering human rights, war, and politics

**Progress:** CPJ has not confirmed any murders of journalists in Syria since last year's index, though it has recorded at least six other journalist fatalities in that period, including deaths by crossfire and while carrying out dangerous assignments.

**Setback:** Syria moved up one spot, from number three to number two, on the Impunity Index. Not a single case of a journalist's murder has been prosecuted in Syria since CPJ began keeping track. Syria has never responded to UNESCO's requests for the judicial status of journalist killings in the country.

**Illustrative case:** In December 2015, 23-year-old Ahmed Mohamed Al-Mousa was shot twice in the head in front of his family home in Abu al-Duhur, a town in northwestern Syria. Al-Mousa was an editor for Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently (RBSS), a Syrian citizen journalist group. Al-Mousa's murder came amid a campaign of violence by Islamic State against members of RBSS and other Syrian journalists.



A Kurdish Muslim cleric on May 6, 2010, leads mourners in a prayer over Kurdish journalist and student Sardasht Osman who was kidnapped and killed that day in Erbil in the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq. Seven years later, no one has been convicted of his murder. (AFP/Safin Hamed)

## 2. IRAQ

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 34

**Getting away with murder:** Militias, Islamic State, government officials. More than half of the murders over the past decade took place in or near Mosul

**Targeted for murder:** Local journalists covering culture, politics, war, corruption, and human rights

**Progress:** Iraq fell to the third spot on the index from number two last year. The number of journalist murders has fallen since the mid-2000s, when sectarian violence was even more pervasive.

**Setback:** Iraq has failed to fully prosecute a single killing of a journalist. In only one case, the 2013 murder of Kawa Garmyanein Kurdistan, have any suspects been convicted; the mastermind behind the assassination remains at large. In addition to killings and abductions by Islamic State in recent years, Shia militias that mobilized to fight the terrorist group also menace journalists with impunity.

**Illustrative case:** In January 2016, broadcast reporter Saif Talal and his colleague, cameraman Hassan al-Anbaki, were driving in Diyala province in eastern Iraq when unidentified gunmen intercepted their vehicle, forced them out the car, and shot them dead. Their station, Al-Sharqiya, accused “one of the militias on the loose” of carrying out the murder.



A UN peacekeeper patrols a camp in Juba for people displaced by the civil war. South Sudan has never responded to UNESCO requests for updates on the cases of killed journalists. (AFP/Albert Gonzalez Farran)

## 4. SOUTH SUDAN

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 5

**Getting away with murder:** Unknown

**Targeted for murder:** Local journalists covering politics and war

**Progress:** None.

**Setback:** No culprits have been identified, let alone convicted, in any of the five journalist murders CPJ has documented in South Sudan. In this climate of impunity, journalists have been detained, harassed, and physically attacked, as well as killed in crossfire. Several journalists have been murdered for reasons that CPJ was unable to connect to their work, such as ethnic strife. South Sudan has never responded to UNESCO's requests for the judicial status of journalist killings in the country.

**Illustrative case:** In January 2015, five journalists were shot, attacked with machetes, and set on fire in an ambush in Western Bahr al Ghazal state. The journalists were in a politician's convoy.

## 5. PHILIPPINES

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 42

**Getting away with murder:** Government officials

**Targeted for murder:** Local journalists from outside the capital covering politics, corruption, business, and crime

**Progress:** The Philippines dropped one place in the index from last year. In October 2016, President Rodrigo Duterte formed the Presidential Task Force on Media Security, which includes a designated team of investigators and prosecutors for the speedy probe of new cases of media killings. The commission has announced investigations into several murders, but no convictions have been achieved. Meanwhile, two people including a former policeman claimed Duterte ordered the killing of radio broadcaster Jun Palain 2003, when Duterte was mayor of Davao City. Duterte has denied any connection to the crime.

**Setback:** There has been one murder since the previous index, the March 2017 shooting of reporter Joaquin Briones. Justice has not advanced for the 2009 Maguindanao massacre victims, among them 32 journalists and media workers. Three (out of dozens) of suspects were acquitted in July this year on grounds of insufficient evidence. The regional appeals court also upheld petitions for bail by Datu Sajid, a principal suspect, according to news reports.

**Illustrative case:** In April 2014, two gunmen went into the home of tabloid reporter Rubyrita Garcia and shot her multiple times. She died in the hospital shortly after. Garcia had worked to expose wrongdoing in the Cavite province police force. A senior police officer was named by the justice department as the main suspect, but no one has been prosecuted.

## 6. MEXICO

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 21

**Getting away with murder:** Criminal groups such as drug traffickers

**Targeted for murder:** Local journalists reporting on crime, corruption, and politics in cartel-dominated states

**Progress:** Partial justice was meted out in March 2017 when police commander Santiago Martínez was sentenced to 30 years in prison for the 2016 murder of reporter Marcos Hernández Bautista. The mastermind has not been prosecuted. In May, President Enrique Peña Nieto pledged in a meeting with a CPJ delegation to prioritize combating impunity in the murders of journalists. He subsequently replaced the special prosecutor for crimes against free expression, a post tasked with investigating the killings of journalists. The move followed the release of CPJ's special report "No Excuse," which calls on the government to do more to break the cycle of violence in Mexico.

**Setback:** In 2017 alone, at least four journalists have been murdered in connection to their work

**Illustrative case:** On May 15, 2017, investigative reporter Javier Valdez Cárdenas was dragged from his car and shot dead in Culiacán in Sinaloa state. Valdez, who received CPJ's International Press Freedom Award in 2011, dedicated his life to telling the stories of the victims of Mexico's drug war. The office of the federal Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) has taken charge of his case, but no one has been arrested.

## 7. PAKISTAN

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 21

**Getting away with murder:** Islamist militants, military and intelligence agencies, political parties, criminal groups

**Targeted for murder:** Local journalists reporting on war, politics, corruption, and human rights

**Progress:** CPJ has not confirmed any work-related murder of a journalist since 2015, though several journalists have been victims of non-fatal attacks or killings that CPJ has not been able to link to journalism.

**Setback:** Perpetrators have been prosecuted in only two murders that have taken place in the past decade. An investigation that was reopened last year in the 2014 New Year's Day murder of journalist Shan Dahar appears to be at a standstill. A draft "Journalists Welfare and Protection" bill has been working its way through a broad consultation process but the independent Pakistan Press Foundation has criticized it for failing to include measures to combat impunity in attacks on the media.

**Illustrative case:** In April 2014, two unidentified gunmen stormed the offices of the independent news agency Online International News Network in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, and shot dead bureau chief Irshad Mastoi and trainee reporter Ghulam Rasool. Prior to the attack, Mastoi had been threatened by an array of actors, including sectarian and militant groups and security personnel, according to family and colleagues. Local journalists in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and Balochistan work under pressure from many sources: pro-Taliban groups, Pakistani security forces and intelligence agencies, separatists, and state-sponsored anti-separatist militias. More than two-thirds of the killings that took place in Pakistan included in this index took place in these areas.

## 8. BRAZIL

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 15

**Getting away with murder:** Government officials, criminal groups

**Targeted for murder:** Journalists reporting on corruption, crime, and politics outside the major cities

**Progress:** For the first time since 2009, CPJ has not recorded any new murders of journalists in Brazil, a possible indication that its stepped-up efforts to combat impunity-in the past four years Brazil has convicted suspects in six cases-are having an impact.

**Setback:** While the murders of journalists have slowed, so have prosecutions. No one has been sentenced for a journalist murder since 2015, when the gunman who perpetrated the murders of photographer Walgney Assis de Carvalho and reporter Rodrigo Neto was convicted.

**Illustrative case:** Gleydson Carvalho was shot live on the air while presenting his afternoon radio show in April 2015. Prior to his murder, Carvalho, who was known to be critical in his broadcasts of local police and politicians, including a local mayor, had received death threats. Five suspects, including the alleged gunman, have been arrested but not tried. The suspected mastermind remains at large.



Siberian editor Dmitry Popkov was shot dead in May 2017, ending a three year lull of targeted journalist killings in Russia. (Yulia Mullabayeva/Ton-M)

## 9. RUSSIA

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 9

**Getting away with murder:** Government officials, political groups

**Targeted for murder:** Journalists reporting on corruption, human rights, politics, and war

**Progress:** Suspects have been convicted in three cases of journalists murdered in the past decade, though in only one, the 2009 shooting of Anastasiya Baburova, was the mastermind identified and prosecuted.

**Setback:** At least two journalists, Dmitry Popkov and Nikolai Andrushchenko, have been murdered in retaliation for their journalism in 2017, ending a lull of nearly three years in which CPJ did not record any targeted killings.

**Illustrative case:** Natalya Estemirova, contributor to the independent newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* and an advocate for the Moscow-based human rights group Memorial, was abducted near her home in Grozny, Chechnya, early on July 15, 2009. A few hours later, her body, with gunshot wounds in the chest and head, was found in a ditch next to a highway. Estemirova had reported relentlessly on human rights violations committed by federal and regional authorities in Chechnya. No one has been prosecuted for her murder, and the investigation has been at a standstill since 2013.



Indian journalists form a human chain near the Press Club of India to protest the killing of journalists in New Delhi on October 2, 2017. All murders of journalists in India have been carried out with complete impunity. (AP/Tsering Topgyal)

## 10. BANGLADESH

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 7

**Getting away with murder:** Members of extremist and criminal groups

**Targeted for murder:** Secular bloggers, journalists reporting on drug trafficking

**Progress:** In November last year, police arrested a member of the militant group Ansarullah Bangla Team who admitted involvement in the murders of two secular bloggers, Niloy Neel and Faisal Arefin Dipan, according to news reports. Since 2015, several suspects have been detained in these and other brutal attacks against secular bloggers and editors.

**Setback:** Only in one case, that of Ahmed Rajib Haider, who was hacked to death in 2013, have the killers been convicted.

**Illustrative case:** In 2015, two assailants stabbed and hacked blogger Avijit Roy to death as he was leaving a book fair in the Dhaka University campus area. Roy's wife was badly injured in the attack. Roy, a naturalized U.S. citizen of Bangladeshi origin, wrote blog posts on secular issues including atheism and free expression. Despite multiple leads and arrests, no one has been prosecuted.

## 11. NIGERIA

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 5

**Getting away with murder:** Extremist group Boko Haram, unknown assailants

**Targeted for murder:** Local journalists covering war, politics, and human rights.

**Progress:** None.

**Setback:** Several nonfatal attacks and arrests of journalists took place this year. In June, editor Charles Otu was abducted and beaten by thugs who told him to stop writing critically of the Ebonyi state government.

**Illustrative case:** Boko Haram claimed responsibility for the October 2011 murder of Zakariya Isa, a reporter and cameraman for the state-run Nigeria Television Authority.

## 12. INDIA

**Journalists killed with complete impunity in past decade:** 13

**Getting away with murder:** Criminal and political groups, government officials

**Targeted for murder:** Journalists reporting on local corruption, crime, and politics outside main urban areas

**Progress:** In April, India's Maharashtra state passed legislation outlying stiffer penalties for incidents of violence against journalists and news outlets. The new law requires high-ranking police officers to investigate incidents of violence against journalists and designates such attacks a non-bailable offense, according to the International Federation of Journalists.

**Setback:** All murders of journalists in India documented by CPJ have been carried out with complete impunity. On September 5, 2017, after the research period for this index closed, independent journalist Gauri Lankesh, was shot dead outside her home in Bangalore. India has never responded to UNESCO's requests for the judicial status of journalist killings in the country.

**Illustrative case:** Umesh Rajput, a reporter with the Hindi-language daily *Nai Dunia*, was shot dead outside his home in Chhura village, on the outskirts of Raipur district in the central state of Chhattisgarh, on January 23, 2011. The 33-year-old journalist reported on allegations of medical negligence and claims that the son of a politician was involved in illegal gambling. Six years later, no one has been arrested for Rajput's murder.

# Statistical Table

Rank	Nation	Unsolved Cases	Population (in millions) *	Rating	Change from 2016
1	<b>Somalia</b>	<b>26</b>	14.3	1.816	Down 18.4%
2	<b>Syria</b>	<b>17</b>	18.4	0.922	Up 0.3%
3	<b>Iraq</b>	<b>34</b>	37.2	0.914	Down 53.1%
4	<b>South Sudan</b>	<b>5</b>	12.2	0.409	Up 0.1%
5	<b>Philippines</b>	<b>42</b>	103.3	0.407	No change
6	<b>Mexico</b>	<b>21</b>	127.5	0.165	No change
7	<b>Pakistan</b>	<b>21</b>	193.2	0.109	Down 2.1%
8	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>15</b>	207.7	0.072	No change
9	<b>Russia</b>	<b>9</b>	144.3	0.062	No change
10	<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>7</b>	163.0	0.043	No change
11	<b>Nigeria</b>	<b>5</b>	186.0	0.027	No change
12	<b>India</b>	<b>13</b>	1,324.2	0.010	No change

\* Source: population 2016 World Bank development indicators <http://data.worldbank.org>

# Methodology

CPJ's Impunity Index calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of each country's population. For this index, CPJ examined journalist murders that occurred between September 1, 2007, and August 31, 2017, and that remain unsolved. Only those nations with five or more unsolved cases are included on this index. CPJ defines murder as a deliberate attack against a specific journalist in relation to the victim's work. Murders make up nearly two thirds of work-related deaths among journalists, according to CPJ research. This index does not include cases of journalists killed in combat or while on dangerous assignments such as coverage of street protests. Cases are considered unsolved when no convictions have been obtained. Cases in which some but not all suspects have been convicted are classified as partial impunity. Cases in which the suspected perpetrators were killed during apprehension are also categorized as partial impunity. The index only analyzes murders that have been carried out with complete impunity; it does not include those where partial justice has been achieved. Population data from the World Bank's 2016 World Development Indicators were used in calculating each country's rating.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elisabeth Witchel is CPJ's impunity campaign consultant. Witchel served for many years as the organization's journalist assistance coordinator and has more than 16 years' experience in human rights and international journalism. In 2007, Witchel launched CPJ's Global Campaign against Impunity. She has authored several reports for CPJ, including "Road to Justice: Breaking the Cycle of Impunity in the Killing of Journalists." Witchel, who is based in the United Kingdom, has presented at international forums, including UNESCO, and served on panels in London, Geneva, Belgrade, Paris, Manila, and New York. Prior to joining CPJ, she worked at Grassroots Enterprise in San Francisco and reported from Seoul, Korea, for *The Korea Times* and *US News & World Report*.







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