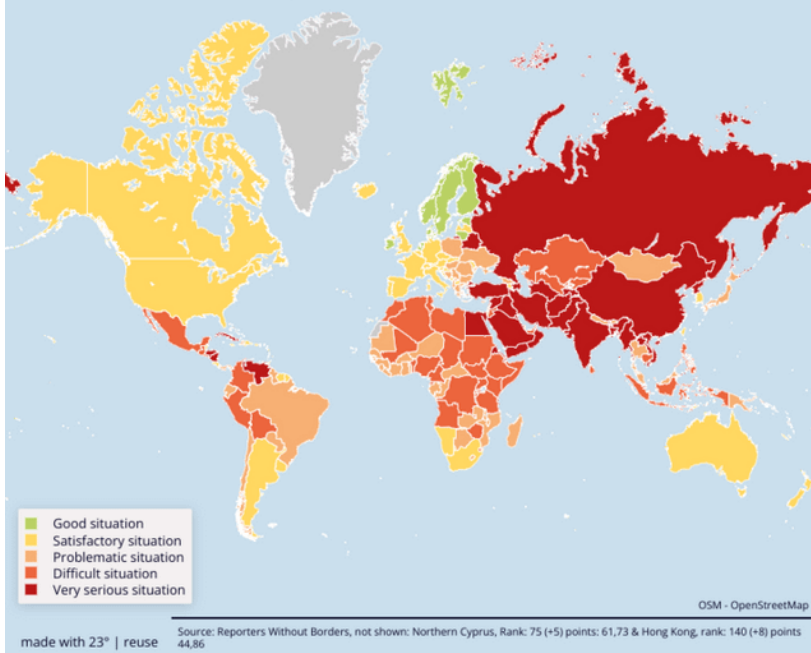




Press Freedom Index 2023



TEXT 1 - Media freedom in dire state in record number of countries, report finds

Oliver Holmes, *The Guardian*, Wed 3 May 2023

Media freedom is in dire health in a record number of countries, according to the latest annual snapshot, which warns that disinformation, propaganda and artificial intelligence pose mounting threats to journalism. The World Press Freedom Index revealed a shocking slide, with an unprecedented 31 countries deemed to be in a “very serious situation”, the lowest ranking in the report, up from 21 just two years ago.

Increased aggressiveness from autocratic governments – and some that are considered democratic – coupled with “massive disinformation or propaganda campaigns” has caused the situation to go from bad to worse, according to the list, released by the advocacy group Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

“There is more red on the RSF map this year than ever before, as authoritarian leaders become increasingly bold in their attempts to silence the press,” the RSF secretary general, Christophe Deloire, told the Guardian. “The international community needs to wake up to reality, and act together, decisively and fast, to reverse this dangerous trend.”

Wednesday marks the 30th anniversary of the first World Press Freedom Day, which was created to remind governments of their duty to uphold freedom of expression. However, the environment for journalism today is considered “bad” in seven out of 10 countries, and satisfactory in only three out of 10, according to RSF. The UN says 85% of people live in countries where media freedom has declined in the past five years.

The survey assesses the state of the media in 180 countries and territories, looking at the ability of journalists to publish news in the public interest without interference and without threats to their own safety.

It shows rapid technological advances are allowing governments and political actors to distort reality, and fake content is easier to publish than ever before. “The difference is being blurred between true and false, real and artificial, facts and artifices, jeopardising the right to information,” the report said. “The unprecedented ability to tamper with content is being used to undermine those who embody quality journalism and weaken journalism itself.”

Artificial intelligence was “wreaking further havoc on the media world”, the report said, with AI tools “digesting content and regurgitating it in the form of syntheses that flout the principles of rigour and reliability”. This is not just written AI content but visual, too. High-definition images that appear to show real people can be generated in seconds.

At the same time, governments are increasingly fighting a propaganda war. Russia, which already plummeted in the rankings last year after the invasion of Ukraine, dropped another nine places, as state media slavishly parrots the Kremlin line while opposition outlets are driven into exile. Last month, Moscow arrested the Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, the first US journalist detained in Russia on espionage charges since the end of the cold war. Meanwhile, three countries: Tajikistan, India and Turkey, dropped from being in a “problematic situation” into the lowest category. India has been in particularly sharp decline, sinking 11 places to 161 after media takeovers by oligarchs close to Narendra Modi. The Indian press used to be seen as fairly progressive, but things changed radically after the Hindu nationalist prime minister took over. This year, the BBC was raided by the country’s financial crimes agency in a move widely condemned as an act of intimidation after a BBC documentary was critical of Modi. (...)

The Middle East is the world’s most dangerous region for journalists. But the Americas no longer have any country coloured green, meaning “good”, on the press freedom map. The US fell three places to 45th. The Asia Pacific region is dragged down by regimes hostile to reporters, such as Myanmar (173rd) and Afghanistan (152nd).

“We are witnessing worrying trends, but the big question is if these trends are a hiccup or a sign of a world going backwards,” said Guilherme Canela, the global lead on freedom of speech at Unesco. “Physical attacks, digital attacks, the economic situation, and regulatory tightening: we are facing a perfect storm.”

A separate Unesco report released on Wednesday said healthy freedom of expression helped many other fundamental rights to flourish.

Nordic countries have long topped the RSF rankings, and Norway stayed in first place in the press freedom index for the seventh year running. But a non-Nordic country was ranked second: Ireland.

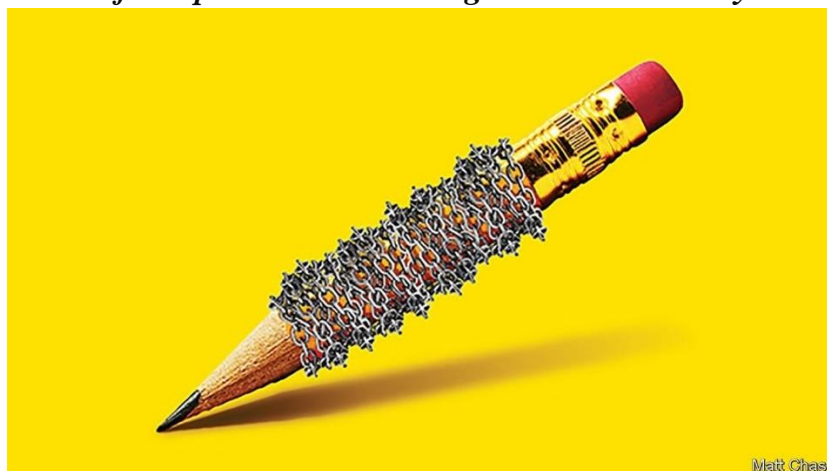
The western world's media landscape remains mixed, according to RSF and other press freedom groups, with political and financial pressures. In the first quarter of this year, news media job cuts in the UK and North America ran at a rate of 1,000 jobs a month, a Press Gazette analysis found.

Last week, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists released a report warning against complacency in the EU, which has traditionally been considered among the world's safest and freest places for journalists. The group expressed concern about rising populism and illiberal governments such as in Hungary and Poland trampling on the rule of law, including press freedom. The Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia and the Slovakian journalist Ján Kuciak had been murdered in connection with their work. (842 words)

[Leaders](#) | The gag tightens

TEXT 2 -Press freedom is under attack. It needs defenders

Autocrats pay lip service to free speech while eroding it in insidious ways



The Economist, May 7th 2022

Here's a thought experiment. If Russia had a free press, how many Russians would support Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine? Here's another: how might the early days of covid-19 have unfolded if the virus had first emerged in a country with a free press, rather than China? Could the government of such a country have hushed it up* for those crucial early weeks?

As news junkies celebrated World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd, it was worth remembering why it matters. A free press can scrutinise the mighty, expose corruption and deter abuses*. For a tyrant, as Napoleon Bonaparte once lamented, "Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than 1,000 bayonets." The free flow of information is the lifeblood of democracy. Without it, voters cannot make informed choices. Governments struggle to notice or correct their mistakes. And free media make it easier for good ideas and useful information to spread, thereby accelerating progress.

Yet around the world, press freedom is in decline. Around 85% of people live in countries where it has been constricted in the past five years. It is now as hamstrung* as it was in 1984, during the cold war. The nature of censorship has evolved since then, however. Hundreds of reporters are still jailed, and dozens are killed each year. But most modern autocrats at least pay lip service* to the idea of a free press, and choose more subtle weapons with which to attack it.

State advertising budgets are lavished on fawning outlets*. Critical ones get tax audits and fines for defamation. Such harassment can tip struggling media firms into the red. Some may then be bought by ruling-party cronies*, who may not mind if their television stations lose money, so long as they please the people who dole out* public-works contracts. Mr Putin pioneered this approach; it has been widely imitated.

Technology is being used to make life hell for uppity hacks*. New tools make it easier to spy on them. Investigations last year found **Pegasus** eavesdropping software had been slipped into the mobile phones of almost 200 journalists, to read their messages, track them and identify their sources. Social media can be used to harass reporters. A survey found almost three-quarters of female journalists have endured online abuse. This is scariest when it is organised, and has the tacit backing of the ruling party. In India, for example, critics of the prime minister, Narendra Modi, face torrents of death and rape threats from Hindu nationalist trolls, who sometimes publish their addresses and incite vigilantes to visit them.

Even in liberal democracies, laws against libel* and invasion of privacy are often abused. Oligarchs from elsewhere sue muckraking* reporters in London, hoping to impose on them ruinous legal costs and endless hassle. In Poland one popular newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, has been hit with more than 60 cases in recent years, many brought by leaders of the ruling party. A Maltese journalist who exposed state corruption was dealing with over 40 cases when she was assassinated in 2017.

How can defenders of press freedom fight back? An easy place to start would be for **liberal** governments to scrap archaic laws that criminalise defamation, which are still surprisingly common. They should also curb bogus* lawsuits, as the European Commission is currently contemplating. Next, independent media need to find new sources of funding. Charities can chip in, as can crowdfunding and rich proprietors who care about free speech. Public broadcasters can play a useful role, but only if they have enough safeguards to be truly independent.

In more repressive places the task is harder, but technology can help. Where reporting on the ground is too risky, satellite imagery and big data sets allow journalists to pull together stories from afar. Free countries should offer them asylum, and a safe place to keep working. Where censorship is tight, citizens can use virtual private networks to access blocked content and online tools to capture web pages before they are censored.

Journalists in free countries can help those in autocracies. Cross-border collaborations have exposed scandals such as Pegasus and the **Panama papers**. The *Washington Post*'s cloud-based publishing system allowed *Apple Daily*, a beleaguered pro-democracy tabloid in Hong Kong, to keep publishing for longer than it otherwise could have.

The struggle will be uphill*. The pandemic has given governments a plausible excuse to curb* press freedom: nearly 100 have done so in the name of public safety. Donald Trump has shown how a demagogue can undermine trust in the media, and others are copying him. In a survey last year, almost 60% of respondents in 28 countries said journalists deliberately mislead the public. Some do, of course, and World Press Freedom Day is a moment for journalists who enjoy protection to ask themselves if they are making the best use of their freedom. (802 words)

PRESS FREEDOM PARTNERSHIP

TEXT 3 -We must help exiled journalists continue their vital work

By [Jason Rezaian](#)

The Washington Post, May 1, 2023

As we mark World Press Freedom Day on May 3rd, one ugly trend stands out above all others: journalists are fleeing countries with repressive regimes in unprecedented numbers.

While there have never been greater resources devoted to protecting free expression than right now, the truth is that the organizations whose mandate it is to defend press freedom are not yet fully prepared to handle this evolving crisis.

They need help from the news industry and governments of free societies. If something is not done, we run the risk of losing invaluable independent insight into parts of the world that desperately deserve our attention.

There are still many traditional cases of journalists under direct threat. We must not lose sight of them. In recent weeks, Russia has detained a Wall Street Journal journalist on absurd unsubstantiated national security charges, while also sentencing my Post Opinions colleague Vladimir Kara-Murza to 25 years for his political activism. In Iran at least 100 journalists have been arrested since nationwide protests began there last September. And just last week, the family of Yuyu Dong, a journalist who was once a Harvard Nieman Fellow, announced that he has been detained in China since February of 2022.

These kinds of outrageous efforts to silence critical voices are filling up prisons with journalists, which in turn forcing the remaining independent writers to make a difficult calculation: remain in country but abandon their profession or leave only to face an uncertain future.

Many find they are unable to continue working in journalism once they leave — but not because they don't want to or because they fear becoming far removed from the realities on the ground. After all, staying connected has never been easier, even in some of the world's most repressive societies. Rather, the barriers they face upon arrival in their new home makes restarting their careers all but impossible.

In the U.S., many of these journalists are granted entry because their presence is deemed to be in the national interest. But getting asylum status without getting a work authorization — which makes it virtually impossible to do very ordinary things like open a bank account, get a driver's license or access healthcare — is counterproductive.

"Despite being safe, exiled journalists often lose their voice. I went from being a well-known journalist and influencer in Iran who received several international awards to the person I am now with a job unrelated to my experience," Mohammed Mosaed, who now works in IT at The National Press Club, told me. "This means that a light was turned off and this is good news for the Iranian government."

The democratic world can do better.

Congress should move swiftly to pass legislation that would expedite work authorization for known and established journalists. We are squandering a key source of human capital and highly specialized knowledge to the advantage of our adversaries.

But the immigration issues are only one piece of the puzzle. Independent news organizations and investors also have a role to play.

"For those journalists working outside of Russia, we can create platforms so they can continue to inform us and ease the process of acquiring immigration status for them so that they can actually work legally," Evgenia Kara-Murza, Vladimir's wife, told me recently. "Do anything necessary so that these journalists don't switch to driving Ubers. So that they can continue the hugely important work of countering propaganda."

Reporting on any place from afar is always an option of last resort for international news organizations. But the situation in Russia, Iran, China and other countries now demands it. And while it's far from ideal, the industry has never been better equipped to do that work.

Digital forensic reporting is a prime example of what is possible from afar right now and The Post and other news organizations have produced stunning journalism about atrocities we might never know about otherwise. It's expensive and time consuming, but it can provide unprecedented levels of documentation and certainty. With journalists from major media organizations increasingly facing arrest and persecution, reporting from afar will likely become the norm.

Bringing together the resources of a well-funded newsroom and experienced journalists able to explain societies far from Western capitals seems like a recipe for potential success.

Or at least a temporary remedy.

Jason Rezaian is a writer for Global Opinions. He served as The Post's correspondent in Tehran from 2012 to 2016. He spent 544 days unjustly imprisoned by Iranian authorities until his release in January 2016. Twitter

TEXT 4- 'Threats are increasing': the EU official on a mission to protect media freedom

Jennifer Rankin in Brussels, *The Guardian*, Tue 2 May 2023

Věra Jourová was 13 when she was first investigated for her political views. It was 1977 in communist Czechoslovakia and the state was cracking down on political dissidents who had signed a human rights declaration – Charter 77. Her civics teacher wanted to know what she thought of the document. Jourová's parents were already blacklisted and she feared the wrong answer would make things worse. "It was a horror moment," recalls Jourová, who knew about Charter 77 from the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe broadcasts that her family listened to in secret. So she said nothing and saw her school marks slide.

Nearly half a century later, Jourová is one of the European Commission's most powerful officials and seeking to protect the media in the European Union. "There are increasing threats and a very dangerous trend," she told the Guardian.

On Wednesday, World Press Freedom day will be marked, during which global alarm about the state of media freedom is expected to be raised, and Jourová warned of the risks. Journalists are facing online and physical attacks, and are even killed for their work; public service media in some countries are pressured to become state or party mouthpieces; powerful businessmen are buying up outlets struggling to cope with the digital age, an "oligarchisation" that could endanger media pluralism, she said.

The European Commission vice-president was speaking in a week when the human rights watchdog Civil Liberties Union for Europe said abusive lawsuits against journalists were on the rise in a dozen EU countries. Meanwhile in four central European countries – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – the majority of people told the Median pollster they were concerned about media freedom, an increase on last year in each state.

The European Commission, long a powerful regulator of the free market, used to argue it had no powers to defend the free press. EU treaties left the commission with "weak equipment", Jourová said in defence of her predecessors. But starting her job as vice-president for values and transparency in 2019, she realised "passivity might be a fatal mistake".

"If we understand the rule of law principle as a healthy and functioning division of powers, then of course the media belong to this game." A year ago she proposed measures to protect journalists and campaigners from vexatious lawsuits, so-called strategic lawsuits against public participation, or Slapps, used by wealthy individuals and companies attempting to quash investigative reporting. This was followed last autumn with the proposed European media freedom act, intended to prevent political interference in editorial decisions, ensure the independence of public service media and ban the use of spyware on journalists.

The proposal has to be agreed by EU governments and the European parliament. Not everyone is enthusiastic. The German government, under pressure from powerful media groups that dislike the plans, such as Axel Springer, the owner of Bild and Politico, argues that EU regulation could dilute national media protections. Jourová insists this is not the case, because the legislation proposes minimum standards. Even countries, with long traditions of free media, such as Denmark, should not be complacent, she suggested. "My message is no country is immune, for instance, against the appetite of politicians to interfere into the job of journalists." (...)

In contrast the Committee to Protect Journalists has welcomed the various EU plans but warned that the EU shift to protect the media still needed "to be translated into meaningful action".

The proposed media freedom act, Jourová acknowledged, cannot "undo the damage" in some member states, such as Hungary, where last year independent election monitors found that "biased and unbalanced news coverage" in favour of the ruling party had limited voters' ability to make a choice. Hungary's rightwing pro-government media group spanning TV companies, internet portals, newspapers and sports publications that dominates the news agenda. (...)

Inspired by her own upbringing, the Czech politician also wants to support Russia's exiled independent journalists, now labelled "foreign agents" by the Kremlin. She says the creation of Radio Free Russia will help Russian independent journalists in the EU find an audience in their home country. Rather than just a radio station, she proposes a broader set of initiatives to fund and help journalists working for the likes of the Dozhd TV station, Novaya Gazeta and the Meduza internet portal. The EU has set aside €3m (£2.65m) in seed funding to create a

media freedom hub that will give grants and raise money for Russian media groups that have lost their business model. (...)

She remembered the “horrible brainwash” of her youth, countered by secret listening to the free media. “Without Voice of America, I only would have known that Václav Havel [dissident and later statesman] and others were enemies of the people,” she said recalling the station’s jaunty Yankee Doodle jingle. “The official doctrine was very intense.”

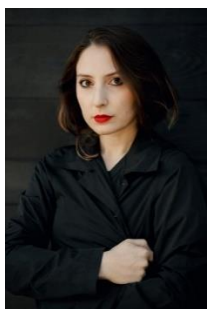
Radio Free Russia would also help Russian journalists distribute their work in their home country, whether via VPN, satellite or the internet. “We cannot remove the fear – I know what it is to live in such a kind of fear – but we can remove the lack of information, with the Radio Free Russia initiative.” (859)

DOC 5 Blocked, censored, jailed or laid off: why it’s never been harder to be a journalist

On World Press Freedom Day, readers can make a difference to struggling independents via supporter models that beat the censors

Taisia Bekbulatova, Abhinandan Sekhri, Murat Bayram, Gabriel Arana, Dan Hayes, Analy Nuño and Sasha Pushkina
Wed 3 May 2023

Taisia Bekbulatova, Russia



In December 2021, I was declared a “foreign agent” by Russia’s justice ministry. I now have to declare this status on every post, even on Instagram selfies. I refuse to comply. As a result, I could face criminal charges in Russia at any moment.

After the Ukraine war began, I had to evacuate the editorial team of my news website, Holod, from Russia because even writing the word “war” became illegal, and sharing unapproved information risked up to 15 years in prison. It’s difficult for me to count how many laws we have broken in the past year.

Working in exile is challenging. Our correspondents are used to travelling across Russia to cover often dark stories that reveal the true life beyond Moscow. Now, getting such stories is increasingly difficult, but we still manage. Information blockades are like hunger; even if you can no longer prepare gourmet dishes, you must make bread because your audience needs it more than ever.

In April last year, our website, along with all independent media, was blocked by Russian authorities. We counter this by actively working on various

platforms, including social media and email. But our audience remains hungry for information they can trust. *You can support Holod’s independent journalism about Russia [here](#).*

Abhinandan Sekhri, India



Being a journalist in India has consequences. Sometimes, those consequences are called “tax surveys”. Sometimes, journalism results in hours of confinement and questioning for the reporter involved. If you happen to do a report that shows the government in a poor light, expect one or all of the above.

You have to be highly motivated to stick it out. As if social media algorithms and the perils of ad-funded news were not enough, the ever-mutating and restrictive rules and policy changes mean you have to stay on your toes. If you are resolute enough to navigate the minefields, there are police complaints, fear of arrests, police notices and “surveys” – as we too found out. Newslaundry was set up in 2012 with the motto “pay to keep news free”. Governments in India remain

a significant source of advertising. Our basic pitch was a subscriber-funded model with no ads. It was novel at the time, but it's not any more. Nor is bullying and intimidation by the powerful, although it's now at peak persecution.

What *is* new, is the spike in instances of broadcast media cheering on the assaults on independent media, and usually buckling in complete obedience. Watching the biggest news media houses abandon democratic values and celebrate the annihilation of their sanctum is the story of the decade.

But there is always hope. A small but determined bunch of online news platforms remain committed to high-quality, independent journalism. Newslaundry is one among them.

You can support Newslaundry's independent journalism here.

A journalist, China

Press freedom in China has been in decline in recent years – even more so since the pandemic – which makes it increasingly difficult to produce in-depth and original reporting. As a reporter, I get physical reactions from the stress I feel when I notice I'm being followed or tailed by a car.

There are four main challenges:

First, journalists are often closely watched when reporting, particularly those working for western news organisations. Authorities expect them to report in a narrow, controlled way. Other than being followed, reporters on the ground might be given “help” in an an-offer-you-cannot-refuse style, in which authorities assist in sourcing contacts. But it's hard not to wonder what impact they're having on what the interviewees say.

Second, journalists working for western media publications are deemed to have their own agenda, with the intention of smearing China's image. We once met an interviewee who called the police after learning we were doing vox pops for a western news outlet.

Third, it's becoming increasingly difficult to get interviews. Before the pandemic, we could pay an unscheduled visit to a government agency and be granted an interview, but now more and more public institutions and companies have adopted a rigorous interview-approving system. Many fear that a simple slip of the tongue could easily jeopardise their whole career.

Finally, it can be easy to suppress coverage of certain issues if they are deemed “sensitive”, but the definition of “sensitive” is becoming increasingly vague.

The space for independent journalism is shrinking rapidly in China because the average journalist's courage and determination to continue reporting will amount to nothing if their personal safety cannot be guaranteed.

(Name withheld for security reasons)

Murat Bayram, Turkey



Last month, Kurds celebrated the 125th anniversary of the first Kurdish newspaper, but all these years later, there is still no Kurdish daily among the 2,000 papers published in Turkey. Though 20% of the population identify as Kurdish, the only publication is a weekly called Xwebun, whose editor-in-chief is in prison.

Why? The state considers the publication of Kurdish media an act of terrorism. Kurdish journalists struggle to get accreditation. In effect, they are gagged. It's no wonder Turkey, where opposition journalists are also threatened, intimidated and jailed, has been relegated in today's new global press freedom index of countries to 165th out of 180.

Similarly, only one of the 477 TV broadcasters in Turkey has a news programme in Kurdish: the state-owned TRT Kurdi. In other words, the only choice for those wanting to listen to a news bulletin on a TV in Turkey is the voice of the state.

In February 2022, 344 news links and news sites were banned. One of them was our news outlet, Botan International. We had discussed a video about the Kurds on the French TV channel France 24, and this was punished as “supporting terrorism”.

Six months ago, we partnered with Reporters Without Borders (RSF), to organise digital media workshops and seminars in the Kurdish language for the first time in Turkey's history. Course textbooks are forbidden too, but we have made a book to accompany these workshops. Now we are continuing our work thanks to the European Endowment for Democracy, and have made our studio and newsroom free of charge for those wanting to produce news

Gabriel Arana, US



I am the editor-in-chief of the Texas Observer, a 69-year-old progressive, investigative outlet. In early April, the publication nearly went under after our nonprofit board voted to sack the entire staff and cease publication because we had run out of money. In a testament to how much our readers and the people of Texas love and value the free press, in just a few days the staff raised \$350,000 to keep the doors open.

The million-dollar question is now: how do we make sure the Observer is here in another seven decades?

I've been working in legacy and digital media, at for-profit and nonprofit institutions, for 15 years. The main challenge we all face is keeping our outlets going since all our ad money went to Google and Facebook. I've seen higher-ups desperately try to reinvent the wheel. The editor at one publication I was at drained the coffers with corporate consultants. At another, two rich kids with no experience in journalism thought gamifying the newsroom would help, with a cowbell ring at 12 to announce the winner of the "best article of the day". Yet another publication put all its chips on Facebook – and sank once the algorithm changed.

There's no one answer, and no quick fix. Our readers stepped in to save the day for us, and they are key to our long-term survival. Nonprofits such as the Observer must nurture the communities that sustain us as if democracy depends on it – because it does.

You can support the Texas Observer's independent journalism [here](#)

Dan Hayes, UK



Looking back it was the sausage sandwich story that did it. The moment I realised I wanted out. The BBC television presenter Louise Minchin had revealed she favoured marmalade rather than the more traditional ketchup or brown sauce with her breakfast butty. Unusual, sure. Worth a story? Hardly.

I remember seeing the stories popping up on Twitter and despairing at the state of local journalism. But it wasn't long before I was asked to do the story for my paper. My heart sank.

My former managers at the Star in Sheffield weren't to blame. They were working in an environment where the click was everything. Our competitors had pounced on the story and there was pressure to respond. But this kind of journalism is a race to the bottom.

When I joined the paper in 2018, people were still proud of the journalism we produced. But year upon year of relentless cuts have inevitably taken their toll. What was once a newsroom of more than 100 reporters had shrunk to just a few dozen five years ago. Now, there's only a handful left.

Since I set up [the Sheffield Tribune](#) with Joshi Herrmann from the Manchester Mill in 2021, I haven't done any stories about TV presenters' unusual breakfast habits. Our subscription-based model means we can pursue the stories we think are important and not just what "does well online".

Just two years later we're only a few hundred members away from achieving sustainability. People told us a subscription model would never work for local journalism online. They were wrong.

You can support the Sheffield Tribune [here](#)

A journalist, Ethiopia

An Ethiopian newspaper vendor arranges a stone at his stall. Photograph: Eduardo Soteras/AFP/Getty Images
The free press has always been under threat in [Ethiopia](#). Independent journalists like me are no strangers to intimidation, arrest and exile. This seems to have changed in 2018 when a new government led by Abiy Ahmed lifted media censorship. But it wasn't long before media freedom deteriorated once again, reaching a new nadir during the Tigray war that lasted for close two to years.

The war that started in November 2020 has led to the arrest of 63 journalists and media workers, according to [Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#). At the height of the war, when a state of emergency was declared, CPJ ranked Ethiopia as the [second worst jailer of journalists](#) in sub-Saharan Africa next to its most

repressive neighbour, Eritrea. In some cases, arrests were accompanied by the confiscation of equipment, sending shock waves through the industry and effectively curtailing independent reporting about the war.

The war is now over, with a peace agreement that restored hope for the country, but the attack on the press sustains. Independent journalists are still exposed to arbitrary arrests, forced disappearance and physical attacks, with no end in sight.

(Name withheld for security reasons)

Analy Nuño, Mexico



For years, Mexico has been ranked the deadliest country for the press, more than war-torn places such as Ukraine or Syria. Every day, we learn of attacks against colleagues in remote regions where they are paid \$3 for a story and lack job security.

According to the freedom of expression group Article 19, a journalist in the country is attacked for their work every 14 hours. Perpetrators don't just commit violence against journalists with impunity but sometimes with the complicity of the authorities. Censorship, threats, espionage, displacement, disappearance and murder are common and share the same objective: silencing the truth.

The normalisation of this growing violence is compounded by verbal attacks from President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who repeatedly rails against the press when an article or investigation displeases him. This stokes a climate of hostility against the press and encourages social media attacks, which often publicise journalists' photographs and personal information.

In response, journalists have organised networks such as Frontline Freelance México, a group that promotes self-care strategies, mutual support, training and accompaniment in dangerous areas. It is working on building an emergency fund to support reporters.

This type of network is essential to combat violence against journalists – and to make sure they can continue to report the essential information the public needs to know.

Sasha Pushkina, Belarus



Independent media from Belarus has been driven into exile. In May 2021, the news portal Tut.by was dismantled by the authorities and 15 people, including the editor-in-chief, Marina Zolotova, were detained. Today, four of them are on the terrorist list, and two have prison sentences of 12 years each.

Part of the team fled abroad and launched a new project – zerkalo.io. It is now blocked in Belarus, but still gets more than 3 million unique users a month in a country of 9 million.

Being a Belarusian journalist comes with great risks. And that extends to readers too. For any interaction with zerkalo.io, readers can get fined, be detained or even receive a prison sentence. For that reason, interviews with people from Belarus are anonymous. Authors are anonymous too because there is no other way to protect family in the country. Correspondents cannot go out into the streets of Belarus, be an eyewitness or directly request a comment from an official. The information comes from subscribers and is subject to rigorous factchecking. Zerkalo uses mirrors (replica websites) that are attacked daily. It has already changed domains 25 times.

But challenges will not stop Zerkalo from doing its work, because otherwise Belarusians will be left with nothing but propaganda. Thousands of political prisoners will be forgotten, repressions will become routine.

Belarusian media are looking for resources to do our job even in such conditions. Placing ads on zerkalo.io for the Belarusian advertiser is a direct way to lose business and a criminal term, so Zerkalo really needs support from readers.

One way to do this is with a small monthly subscription. Please help if you can.

TEXT 6 - « Les journalistes doivent pouvoir travailler en toute indépendance – notamment indépendamment des désirs de leurs actionnaires »

Tribune

Un collectif d'universitaires, d'éditeurs et d'intellectuels, dont Patrick Boucheron, Julia Cagé et Joseph Stiglitz, demandent, dans une tribune au « Monde », aux pouvoirs publics de garantir le pluralisme de la presse, l'indépendance des rédactions et la liberté d'informer.

Le Monde, 27 juin 2023

La liberté des médias est un bien précieux qui constitue l'un des fondements de notre démocratie. Depuis la loi du 29 juillet 1881, la presse jouit en France d'un statut spécifique qui reconnaît son rôle éminent pour la vitalité démocratique du pays. Les entreprises de médias sont soumises à des règles particulières et à une régulation dont le principe fait l'objet d'un large consensus depuis les ordonnances sur la presse de 1944. Les journalistes exercent leur métier dans un cadre protecteur : sur le papier au moins, ils peuvent se prévaloir de la clause de cession et de conscience.

Face à un mouvement de concentration protéiforme dans le secteur des médias, alors que de nombreux titres sont tombés dans les mains de milliardaires aux engagements politiques et aux pratiques controversées, de nombreux élus et représentants de la société civile, des associations de rédacteurs et de lecteurs, les syndicats représentatifs s'inquiètent. Comme devraient le faire tous les citoyens soucieux d'avoir accès à une information indépendante et de qualité.

Le Sénat a créé une commission d'enquête, en 2021, « afin de mettre en lumière les processus ayant permis ou pouvant aboutir à une concentration dans les médias en France, et d'évaluer l'impact de cette concentration sur la démocratie ». Son rapport a été remis, en mars 2022, mais, depuis, aucune décision n'a été prise par l'exécutif, aucune proposition de loi n'a été présentée, le débat reste suspendu. Et, pendant ce temps, les atteintes à l'indépendance des rédactions se multiplient, hier l'éviction du directeur de la rédaction des *Echos*, aujourd'hui la nomination à la tête du *Journal du dimanche* de l'ancien directeur de la rédaction de *Valeurs actuelles* et ce contre l'avis de l'ensemble de la rédaction. Comme si les journalistes n'avaient pas leur mot à dire – comme si la ligne éditoriale était du seul ressort des actionnaires.

Informé en toute liberté

Il ne s'agit pas de prendre parti pour tel ou tel média, d'applaudir une ligne éditoriale de droite ou une position plus marquée à gauche. Les médias peuvent se positionner politiquement tout en restant des médias d'information et non d'opinion, c'est aussi leur raison d'être, tant que la régulation de la concurrence dans le secteur garantit un pluralisme d'idées suffisant. Mais de droite comme de gauche, en démocratie, les journalistes doivent pouvoir travailler en toute indépendance – et, notamment, indépendamment des désirs de leurs actionnaires. Un média n'est pas une entreprise comme une autre ; c'est une entreprise qui produit un bien public, l'information, ce qui suppose que les salariés – et, en particulier, les journalistes – y disposent de protections particulières, leur permettant de nous informer en toute liberté.

L'association Un bout des médias s'est donné pour mission de contribuer au renforcement de l'indépendance des médias selon trois axes : soutenir les rédactions qui souhaitent acquérir tout ou partie du capital de leur média ; porter un plaidoyer auprès des parlementaires et de l'exécutif pour améliorer les conditions d'exercice du métier de journaliste ; sensibiliser, former et mobiliser les citoyens de tous âges sur les questions relatives à la liberté de la presse. Aujourd'hui, dans un contexte de polémique relancée par le recrutement du futur directeur du *Journal du dimanche*, nous reprenons à notre compte l'un des constats du rapport sénatorial : « La place du directeur de la rédaction [est] essentielle pour garantir la déontologie du travail des journalistes. Le directeur de la rédaction ou de la publication fait office de "paratonnerre" en cas d'attaque pour diffamation et est le garant d'une certaine déontologie. Cependant, nommé par l'actionnaire, il est parfois soupçonné d'être son cheval de Troie et d'intervenir pour orienter la ligne des journalistes, sous couvert de ligne éditoriale. Si certains médias ont instauré un mécanisme d'agrément du directeur de la rédaction par une majorité des membres de la rédaction, la plupart des patrons de médias sont opposés à des règles trop strictes, comme à un éventuel statut juridique des rédactions, au nom de la liberté d'entreprendre. »

Forts de ce constat, nous rappelons l'une de nos préconisations : pour être éligible aux aides à la presse ou à l'attribution d'une fréquence audiovisuelle, un média doit garantir que la nomination du directeur ou de la directrice de la rédaction doit être agréée à la majorité des deux tiers des votants par l'ensemble des journalistes, avec un taux de participation d'au moins 50 %. En cas de non-agrément, le candidat ou la candidate ne pourra pas être nommé.

C'est dans cet esprit que nous lançons, aujourd'hui, un appel pour que le gouvernement et les parlementaires prennent leurs responsabilités et imposent cette règle par la loi à l'ensemble des médias d'information.

Etant donné l'urgence actuelle et l'histoire récente d'i-Télé, d'Europe 1 ou encore de *Paris Match*, autant de

médias tombés dans l'escarcelle de Vincent Bolloré qui ont perdu, de ce fait, et leurs journalistes et leur indépendance, nous appelons, dès à présent, à une mobilisation massive autour du *Journal du dimanche*, en soutenant les journalistes qui ont courageusement appelé à la grève, en refusant de collaborer avec ce journal tant qu'il n'aura pas retrouvé sa liberté, en renonçant à le lire tant que ses journalistes ne pourront plus nous informer dans des conditions dignes d'un média d'information dans une démocratie en bonne santé.

Les journalistes du *Journal du dimanche* ont le droit de se prononcer sur le choix du ou de la directrice de leur rédaction. C'est une revendication simple mais essentielle et indispensable. Faisons-en sorte de leur garantir ce droit, comme à l'ensemble des journalistes des autres médias d'information.



More Links and resources

- The International consortium of Investigative Journalists

<https://www.icij.org/>

See for instance their page on The Panama Papers investigation

<https://www.icij.org/investigations/panama-papers/>

- Interactive briefing *The Economist*

<https://www.economist.com/interactive/briefing/2022/05/03/press-freedom>

- Video by *The Economist* on Press Freedom endangered

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oivsUv_08Zk&t=2s&ab_channel=TheEconomist

- The Reporter Without Borders' Index

<https://rsf.org/en/index>

Their report on the UK <https://rsf.org/en/country/united-kingdom>

Their report on the U.S. <https://rsf.org/en/country/united-states>

- The International Federation of journalists' page on media concentration

<https://www.ifj.org/what/press-freedom/media-concentration>

<https://www.ifj.org/what/press-freedom/media-concentration>

- The Freedom House Report

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-and-media/2019/media-freedom-downward-spiral>

- 2022 Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2022/dnr-executive-summary>

- NPR radio programmes on China cracking down on press freedom

<https://www.npr.org/2021/12/30/1069027436/china-escalated-its-crackdown-on-press-freedoms-this-year>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/08/18/1118274550/a-small-handful-of-journalists-are-trying-to-keep-press-freedom-alive-in-hong-ko>

- A look at Press Freedom and Regulation in the U.K.

<https://www.npr.org/2017/08/06/541877762/a-look-at-press-freedom-and-regulation-in-the-u-k>

<https://www.politics.co.uk/reference/press-regulation/>

European Media Freedom Act

On 15 September 2021, on the occasion of her [State of the Union Address](#), President Ursula von der Leyen said: *“Information is a public good. We must protect those who create transparency – the journalists. That is why today we have put forward a recommendation to give journalists better protection.”*

As announced by President Ursula von der Leyen in her State of the Union address, the Commission presents today its first-ever Recommendation to strengthen the safety of journalists and other media professionals.

Journalists have been facing an increasing number of attacks over the past years, including assassinations in the most tragic cases. The COVID-19 crisis has made their work even more difficult, with lower incomes, especially for freelancers, and limited access to venues.

To reverse this trend, the Commission lays down actions for Member States to improve the safety of journalists – offline and online. Among others, the Recommendation calls for the creation of independent national support services, including helplines, legal advice, psychological support and shelters for journalists and media professionals facing threats. It also calls for an increased protection of journalists during demonstrations, greater online safety and particular support to female journalists.

Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Věra Jourová, said: *“No journalist should die or be harmed because of their job. We need to support and protect journalists; they are essential for democracy. The pandemic has showed more than ever the key role of journalists to inform us. And the urgent need for public authorities to do more to protect them. Today we ask Member States to take decisive action to make the EU a safer place for journalists.”*

Commissioner for the Internal Market, Thierry Breton, added: *“Media freedom and pluralism lie at the very core of our EU values and we must actively defend them. As the media industry continues to adapt and evolve, so do the threats faced by media professionals when exercising their profession. Online threats are a new reality. Today, we are presenting a Recommendation which is placing the core of our efforts where they are needed most: ensuring the safety of journalists, both online and offline.”*

Recommendation on the safety of journalists

The Recommendation sets out recommendations, including ones focused on protests and demonstrations; online safety and digital empowerment; female journalists and journalists belonging to minority groups.

More here: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_4632

Liberté de la presse en France : quel cadre légal ?

Les fondements de la liberté de la presse en France - Vie Publique, Sept 2020

<https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/19351-liberte-de-la-presse-en-france-quel-cadre-legal>

Principe fondamental des systèmes démocratiques, la liberté de presse est inscrite dans :

- l'article 11 de la [Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen\(nouvelle fenêtre\)](#) du 26 août 1789
- l'article 19 de la [Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme\(nouvelle fenêtre\)](#) du 10 décembre 1948
- l'article 10 de la [Convention européenne des droits de l'Homme\(nouvelle fenêtre\)](#) du 4 novembre 1950.

Avec la [loi du 29 juillet 1881](#), la liberté de la presse en France fait l'objet d'une consécration particulière, au-delà de la reconnaissance générale de la liberté d'expression.

L'article 11 de la Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen dispose que *"tout citoyen peut parler, écrire, imprimer librement, sauf à répondre de l'abus de cette liberté dans les cas déterminés par la Loi"*.

La **loi du 29 juillet 1881 sur la liberté de la presse** définit les libertés et responsabilités de la presse française. Elle impose un cadre légal à toute publication, ainsi qu'à l'affichage public, au colportage et à la vente sur la voie publique. Son article 1 dispose que *"l'imprimerie et la librairie sont libres"*.

La loi de 1881 a été modifiée plusieurs fois pour encadrer cette liberté au-delà des règles liées au respect de la personne, la protection des mineurs, la répression de l'injure, la diffamation ou l'atteinte à la vie privée.

Ainsi la **loi Pleven du 1er juillet 1972** relative à la lutte contre le racisme crée un nouveau délit et punit la discrimination, l'injure ou la diffamation à l'égard d'une personne ou d'un groupe de personnes à raison de leur origine ou de leur appartenance ou de leur non-appartenance à une ethnie, une nation, une race ou une religion déterminée. La **loi Gayssot du 13 juillet 1990** sanctionne, en outre, la négation des crimes contre l'humanité perpétrés par le régime nazi.

La lutte contre la diffusion des fausses informations (fake news) s'est traduite par deux lois (**loi organique(nouvelle fenêtre)** et **loi ordinaire** relatives à la manipulation de l'information pendant les périodes de campagne électorale). Promulguées en décembre 2018, ces lois *"anti-fake news"* autorisent un candidat ou un parti à saisir le juge des référés pour faire cesser la diffusion de fausses informations durant les trois mois précédant un scrutin national. Les principales plateformes numériques ont l'obligation de signaler les contenus politiques sponsorisés, en publiant le nom de leur auteur et la somme payée.

Par ailleurs, le Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel obtient le pouvoir de suspendre ou d'interrompre le temps de la période électorale la diffusion d'une chaîne de télévision contrôlée ou placée sous influence d'un État étranger, et portant atteinte aux intérêts fondamentaux de la nation.

En parallèle aux dispositions relatives à la liberté de la presse, la nécessité de lever les soupçons pesant sur **l'indépendance des titres de presse et des journalistes vis-à-vis du pouvoir politique et du secteur économique** a également conduit le législateur à intervenir afin de réguler la concentration de la presse quotidienne française.

L'ordonnance du 26 août 1944 interdit les concentrations d'organes de presse.

Rendue le 11 octobre 1984, préalablement à la promulgation de **la loi du 23 octobre 1984, dite loi "anti-Hersant"**, une décision du Conseil constitutionnel reconnaît le pluralisme des quotidiens d'information politique et générale comme étant "en lui-même un objectif de valeur constitutionnelle".

La **loi du 1er août 1986** portant réforme du régime juridique de la presse interdit *"à peine de nullité, l'acquisition d'une publication quotidienne d'information politique et générale ou la majorité du capital social ou des droits de vote d'une entreprise éditant une publication de cette nature, lorsque cette acquisition aurait pour effet de permettre à l'acquéreur de détenir plus de 30% de la diffusion totale sur l'ensemble du territoire national des quotidiens d'information politique et générale"*.

La presse sur internet doit-elle faire l'objet d'une régulation spécifique ? Une **étude du Conseil d'État, intitulée "Internet et les réseaux numériques"** et publiée en décembre 1998, confirme que *"l'ensemble de la législation existante s'applique aux acteurs d'internet"*.

Complements on Selection 1 – The Pegasus Project

Spyware can make your phone your enemy. Journalism is your defence

[Laurent Richard](#) and Sandrine Rigaud

The Pegasus project poses urgent questions about the privatisation of the surveillance industry and the lack of safeguards for citizens

The Guardian, Mon 19 Jul 2021

Today, for the first time in the history of modern spying, we are seeing the faces of the victims of targeted cyber-surveillance. This is a worldwide scandal – a global web of surveillance whose scope is without precedent.

The attack is invisible. Once “infected”, your phone becomes your worst enemy. From within your pocket, it instantly betrays your secrets and delivers your private conversations, your personal photos, nearly everything about you. This surveillance has dramatic, and in some cases even life-threatening, consequences for the ordinary men and women whose numbers appear in the leak because of their work exposing the misdeeds of their rulers or defending the rights of their fellow citizens.

All of these individuals were selected for possible surveillance by states using the same spyware tool, Pegasus, sold by the NSO Group.

Our mission at Forbidden Stories is to pursue – collaboratively – the work of threatened, jailed or assassinated journalists. For the Pegasus project, we investigated this new threat against press freedom for months, working alongside more than 80 journalists from 16 media organisations.

[This investigation](#) began with an enormous leak of documents that Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International had access to. In this list of more than 50,000 phone numbers identified in advance of potential surveillance by clients of NSO Group, we even found the names of some of our colleagues – journalists we had worked with on past investigations.

But the scale of this scandal could only be uncovered by journalists around the world working together. By sharing access to this data with the other media organisations in the Forbidden Stories consortium, we were able to develop additional sources, collect hundreds of documents and put together the harrowing evidence of a surveillance apparatus that has been wielded ferociously against swaths of civil society – outside of all legal restrictions.

Among those whose phone numbers appear in the data: human rights defenders, political opponents, lawyers, diplomats, and heads of state – not to mention more than [180 journalists](#) from nearly two dozen countries. Some are local reporters, others renowned television anchors. Many investigate corruption and political scandals that threaten the highest levels of power. Most already face censorship and intimidation. But few of them could have imagined having been selected by their governments for possible targeting by such an invisible and invasive form of surveillance.

The list of journalists targeted using Pegasus is long: award-winning Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismayilova; reporter Szabolcs Panyi from Direkt36, a Hungarian investigative media outlet; freelance Moroccan journalist Hicham Mansouri; the director of the French investigative site Mediapart, Edwy Plenel; and the founders of the Indian independent media the Wire, one of the few news organisations in the country that does not rely on money from private business entities.

For NSO Group’s government clients, Pegasus is the perfect weapon to “kill the story”. Invasive surveillance of journalists and activists is not simply an attack on those individuals; it is a way to deprive millions of citizens of independent information about their own governments. When they hack a journalist’s phone, they are able to extract the most sensitive information that it holds. What was that journalist working on? Who are their sources? Where are they stashing their documents? Who are their loved ones? What private information could be used to blackmail and defame them?

Journalists have long thought that new technologies – the armada of encrypted communications that they rely on – are their allies, critical blockades against censorship. With the existence of cyber-surveillance tools as advanced as Pegasus, they have been brutally awoken to the fact that the greatest threats are hiding in the places they once thought to be the safest. The Pegasus project poses important questions about the privatisation of the surveillance industry and the lack of global safeguards for everyday citizens.

When a threat as large as this emerges, imperilling fundamental rights such as the right to free speech, journalists need to come together. If one reporter is threatened or killed, another can take over and ensure that the story is not silenced. Forty-five years ago, the first collaborative journalism project was launched after the murder of Don Bolles, a journalist in Phoenix, Arizona. In 2018, Forbidden Stories coordinated the Daphne project in the wake of the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta. We have continued to pursue the work of journalists who have been murdered for their work – whether that was investigating environmental scandals or tracking Mexican drug cartels – alongside dozens of news organisations.

The collaboration of journalists from around the world is without a doubt one of the best defences against these violent attacks on global democracy.

(763 words)

Laurent Richard is the founder and director of Forbidden Stories, a consortium of journalists that was awarded the 2019 European press prize and the 2021 George Polk award for its work continuing the investigations of threatened reporters. Sandrine Rigaud is the editor-in-chief of Forbidden Stories.

The Pegasus project: why investigations like this are at the heart of the Guardian's mission

Guardian editor-in-chief Katharine Viner reflects on our recent investigation into NSO Group, which sells hacking spyware used by governments around the world, and explains why journalism like this is so vital

[Katharine Viner](#), *The Guardian*, Fri 23 Jul 2021

When the Guardian's head of investigations, Paul Lewis, first told me about a huge data leak suggesting authoritarian regimes were possibly using smartphone hacking software to target activists, politicians and journalists, perhaps the worst part is that I wasn't particularly surprised.

The more we've learned about global surveillance, ever since the Guardian's Snowden revelations in 2013, the more the world has become accustomed to the idea that governments, both democratic and otherwise, are keenly interested in using technology and the phones in our pockets to keep tabs on us.

This week's revelations, by the Guardian and 16 other media organisations working with Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based media nonprofit, illustrate the disturbing way that journalists, human rights campaigners, politicians and others can be targeted using spying software, or 'spyware'.

The phone hacking tool, Pegasus, can gather data, record video using a phone's camera, activate the microphone covertly, take screenshots and location information - all without the owner's knowledge. A phone can be infected without its owner even clicking on an incoming call or message.

NSO sells its software to 40 governments around the world (it does not say which ones), and says its purpose is to help them investigate terrorists and criminals. But a leaked list of tens of thousands of numbers, many belonging to people with no apparent connection to criminality, and forensic analysis carried out on some of their phones, suggests some governments are spying on pro-democracy activists, journalists investigating corruption, and political opponents.

Investigations such as these are legally fraught and technically complex, involving dozens of journalists, IT experts and in-house lawyers in multiple locations. Those being investigated are often highly secretive and extremely well-resourced, financially and technologically. They don't want the

scrutiny that courageous journalists subject them to. There can be great jeopardy in publishing things that powerful people do not want published.

And yet for the Guardian, such investigations are at the heart of our mission. Because of our independence, we are able to investigate boldly, putting the truth ahead of the agenda of an owner, investors or shareholders. And because we are reader-funded we have been able to keep our journalism open for all to read, so when important stories like this come along, everyone gets to read them.

From the Snowden revelations to our ongoing scrutiny of big technology, the Guardian has a long track record of exposing how technology can be subverted to abuse democracy and human rights.

If that is a mission that you appreciate, [please do join us today](#). Your support will empower our journalists to continue scrutinising governments and others who exploit technology with a disregard for people's rights.

[Support the Guardian's independent investigative journalism with a single or recurring contribution today.](#)

Q&A What is the Pegasus project?

The Pegasus project is a collaborative journalistic investigation into the NSO Group and its clients. The company sells surveillance technology to governments worldwide. Its flagship product is Pegasus, spying software – or spyware – that targets iPhones and Android devices. Once a phone is infected, a Pegasus operator can secretly extract chats, photos, emails and location data, or activate microphones and cameras without a user knowing.

Forbidden Stories, a Paris-based nonprofit journalism organisation, and Amnesty International had access to a leak of more than 50,000 phone numbers selected as targets by clients of NSO since 2016. Access to the data was then shared with the Guardian and 16 other news organisations, including the Washington Post, Le Monde, Die Zeit and Süddeutsche Zeitung. More than 80 journalists have worked collaboratively over several months on the investigation, which was coordinated by Forbidden Stories.

More Links and Resources

- **Le Monde: projet Pegasus**

https://www.lemonde.fr/projet-pegasus/article/2021/07/18/projet-pegasus-revelations-sur-un-systeme-mondial-d-espionnage-de-telephones_6088652_6088648.html

- **A short video presentation by *The Guardian* about the Pegasus spyware and their investigation**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7H9uo3j5FQ>

- **The Forbidden Stories website**

<https://forbiddenstories.org/fr/case/le-pegasus-project/>

- **Edward Snowden on the Pegasus spyware**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5WjTTi67BE&ab_channel=TheGuardian