

**INSI**

INTERNATIONAL NEWS SAFETY INSTITUTE



# KILLING THE MESSENGER

# 2019

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An analysis of news media casualties carried out  
for the International News Safety Institute by  
Cardiff School of Journalism



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BIEK TAĦARBU L-HABS

# Foreword from our Director

2019 recorded the lowest number of journalists killed in 16 years. It was also a year of apparent breakthroughs in investigations into the murder of our colleagues. But that doesn't mean journalism is becoming a safer profession.

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Forty-eight journalists died last year in incidents, and accidents, directly related to their job. While that is 48 deaths too many, the number is a fraction of the triple digit figures repeatedly seen over the past decade.

Last year also saw charges being brought in the murder of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée in Slovakia; a UN rapporteur calling Jamal Kashoggi's assassination an international crime for which Saudi Arabia is responsible; and Malta's Prime Minister resigning, while his chief of staff was implicated in Daphne Caruana Galizia's murder.

After years of rampant impunity, a glimpse of comeuppance beckoned, a sense of momentum generated by public outrage about the brazen nature of those killings.

The reality, however, is more nuanced.

Explanations behind the drop in the number of media casualties are multiple but, unfortunately, a reduction of hostility towards the media is not one of them.

Our industry was spared the mass killings that blighted previous years when dozens of media workers lost their lives in targeted attacks. There was also a big reduction in casualties in war zones, where deaths more than halved in 2019 compared to the previous year and were a fraction of the average tally for the previous two decades.

That's not because war reporting got any safer. The decline in casualties was simply because fewer journalists reported from conflict zones in the first place. Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan were deemed simply too dangerous for either local or international media to cover and were dropped from many outlets' news agenda.

Last year also marked the first time in 21 years that no journalist was killed on foreign soil. As international correspondents withdrew from the world's most dangerous places, all casualties that INSI recorded last year were local journalists reporting from their home countries. The majority died in places supposedly at peace, especially Mexico but also Brazil, killed by unknown assailants while reporting on crime, politics and corruption. In 80 percent of the cases, impunity still prevailed.

Yet legal developments, particularly in Daphne Caruana Galizia's case, seemed to provide some hope. As I scrutinised the facts and figures for this 'Killing the Messenger' report, I felt compelled to get in touch with Daphne's family to ask whether accountability for her murder could be within reach.

Her sister Corinne Vella told me progress is being made but full justice for Daphne's murder is still elusive. It has taken two years just to initiate a public inquiry into Daphne's death. And that only came about as a result of the relentless campaign waged by Daphne's family, huge international pressure and intense media scrutiny from all over the world. But this proves that with enough time and pressure even the most powerful could one day be held to account.

However, most of the families of murdered journalists don't have that kind of support nor the same access to institutions. The predicament is particularly stark in the case of local journalists who made up all of last year's victims. Those covering corruption at home are the most vulnerable and have nowhere to turn because the institutions that should protect them are often the greatest sources of danger.

Vella says the rise of collaborative investigative journalism on stories like the Panama Papers could make newsgathering safer. Stories that are squashed in one country pop up in another, offering some protection for journalists digging into controversial subjects.

She believes cross border systems must be developed and legal mechanisms worked out that protect journalists and punish their abusers no matter where they're reporting from or who they work for.

INSI supports this idea. We have successfully worked to promote and strengthen cooperation and the exchange of information and solidarity among competitors, all around the common goal of safety.

As happened in Malta, raising the cost of killing a journalist is the ultimate aim for everyone in the news industry. Despite the progress made in 2019, that still feels like a long way off.

- Elena Cosentino

## Country of death



### Citizen Journalists



1 citizen journalist killed in Afghanistan

1 citizen journalist killed in Syria

“Explanations behind the drop in the number of media casualties are multiple but, unfortunately, a reduction of hostility towards the media is not one of them.”

– Elena Cosentino, INSI director

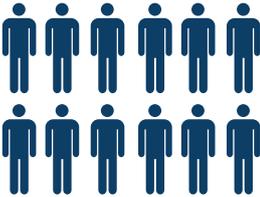
## Country of origin

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 **1 killed from** Chad, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, UK and Yemen

 **5 killed from** Tanzania

 **2 killed from** Brazil, Haiti, Philippines and USA

 **12 killed from** Mexico

 **3 killed from** Honduras and Somalia

 **4 killed from** Afghanistan and Syria

**TOTAL  
KILLED**

**48**

Image below: A fighter loyal to the Libyan government fires a heavy machine gun during clashes against forces loyal to strongman Khalifa Haftar. ©AFP



## JOURNALISTS KILLED: THE NUMBERS

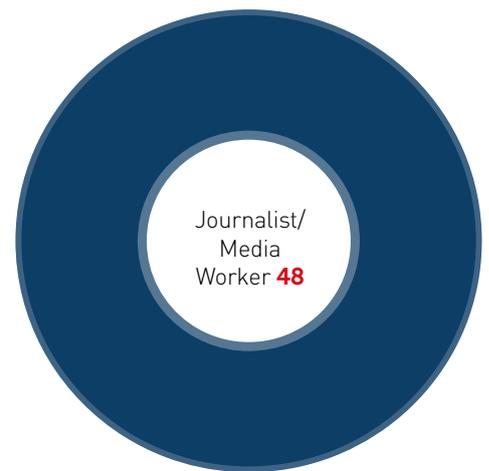
“Raising the cost of killing a journalist is the ultimate aim for everyone in the news industry. Despite the progress made in 2019, that still feels like a long way off.”

– Elena Cosentino, INSI director



## Professional position

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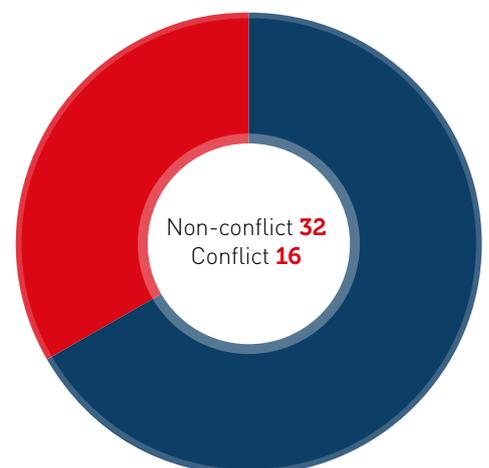
## Status in country of death

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## Context of death

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# JOURNALISTS KILLED: THE NUMBERS

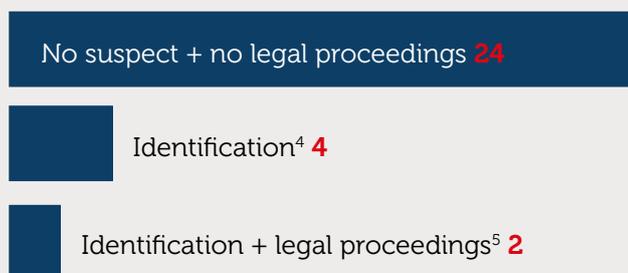
## Cause of death



## Perpetrator



## Legal outcome<sup>3</sup>

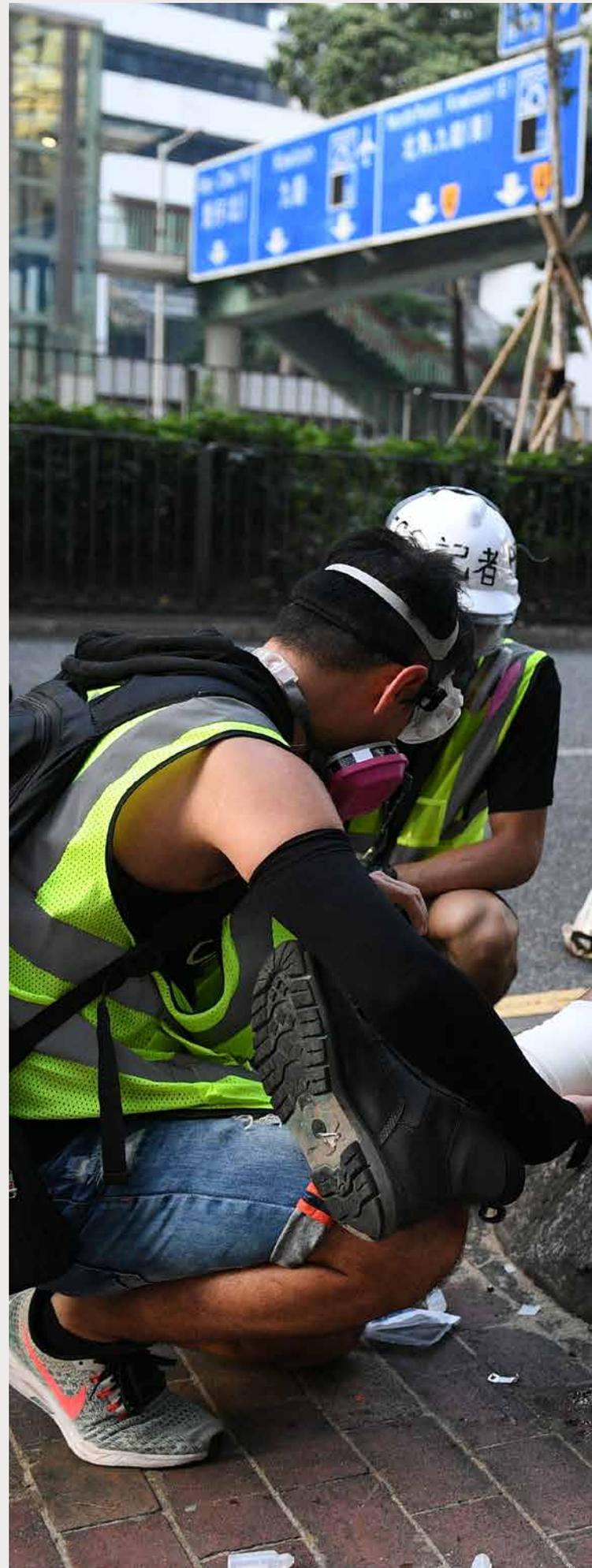


<sup>1</sup> Body found; no details of the cause of death.

<sup>2</sup> Suspects identified or arrests made.

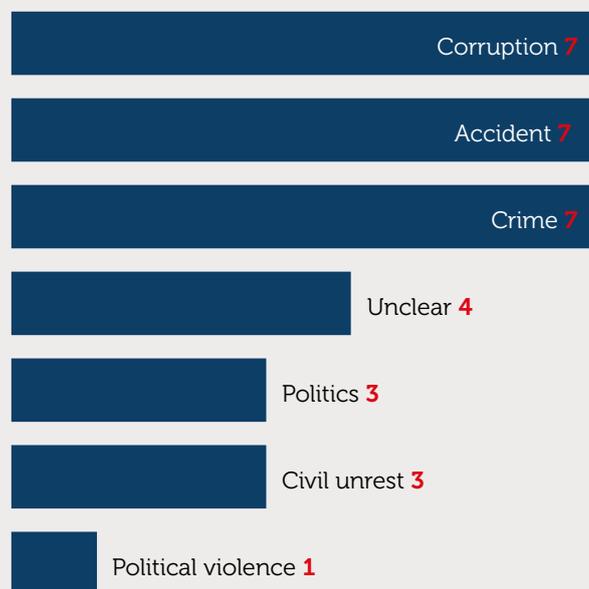
<sup>3</sup> This does not include accidents, indiscriminate bombings or crossfire, except in the case of Lyra McKee where a paramilitary group have admitted responsibility.

<sup>4</sup> Suspects have been identified or arrests made.





## Deaths unrelated to war reporting



## War/conflict zone reporting



Image left: A journalist receives medical attention after being injured while covering a demonstration in Hong Kong. ©AFP

Image back cover: Palestinian paramedics carry an injured protester during clashes with Israeli forces. ©AFP

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