

WHY PEOPLE SHOULD NOT ~~KILL~~ - JOURNALISTS

Module 1



WHY THIS TOPIC MATTERS

Society always needs to take a [critical look at itself](#), rein in its excesses and address its flaws. We should also recognize when individuals and groups do well. Journalism helps us do all that.

Hundreds of journalists are threatened, and scores killed, every year around the world by people who are unhappy about, or feel threatened by, news coverage. Journalists do make mistakes in their work but nothing justifies physical violence.

Our communities and nations suffer when journalism is devalued and when journalists are attacked. [Strong, sustainable communities support the role of journalism](#) even when it is imperfect or uncomfortable.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



Fig 1.1 Unresolved journalist murders graphic.

Ninety percent of murders of journalists are unresolved.

Many killed journalists were first threatened after reporting on crime and corruption, and then were murdered when they refused to stop doing their jobs but were [unprotected by police, prosecutors, elected officials, their own news organization employers and their communities in general](#).

Regardless of harsh criticisms or even harmful errors by journalists, [nothing justifies physically threatening, harming or killing a journalist](#). Doing so is in violation of international human-rights law standards as well as the national and local [laws in virtually every society](#) against assault and battery, murder and violation of freedom of the press.

To advance their own agendas, political leaders and others verbally attack journalists and [falsely blame them for a variety of problems](#). “Mainstream media”

or just “the media” have become pejorative terms but are too broad and undefined to be helpful. Journalists are scapegoated as “enemies of the people” but it is not true. These kinds of self-serving verbal attacks on journalists by national and local leaders contribute to an undesirable climate of impunity.

Yes, journalists make mistakes just like everyone else. But journalists are not evil. They are regular people who are [committed to making their communities better](#). When they communicate messages critical of government officials and institutions, it is generally because they are at heart reformers who want to see things get better.

There is a definitional problem involving journalism and journalists. Not everyone who appears on [CNN](#), [Fox News](#), [MSNBC](#) or on the website of [The New York Times](#) or [The Wall Street Journal](#) is a journalist doing journalism at that moment. News organizations have not done a sufficiently good job of distinguishing fact-based news reporting from expression of opinion or analysis. Citizens deserve better. For now, though, anyone consuming news and information in the 21st century would benefit from understanding that

[journalism is independent gathering and reporting of news and information in the public interest.](#)

MORE THAN 1,000 JOURNALIST KILLINGS SINCE 2006 ARE UNRESOLVED

The United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has a mandate to [promote the safety of journalists](#) and combat impunity for people who attack journalists. For example, in conjunction with the World Press Freedom Conference 2020, UNESCO produced a [report about violence against women journalists](#). UNESCO also coordinates efforts on the [United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#).

UNESCO maintains a database called the [Observatory of Killed Journalists](#). The database contains information about 1,432 journalists killed since 1993. [A group of BYU students and faculty](#) used the UNESCO Observatory as the basis for their own database of 1,057 unresolved journalist killings since 2006. Here are some initial findings:

There are **1,057** unresolved journalist killings since 2006.

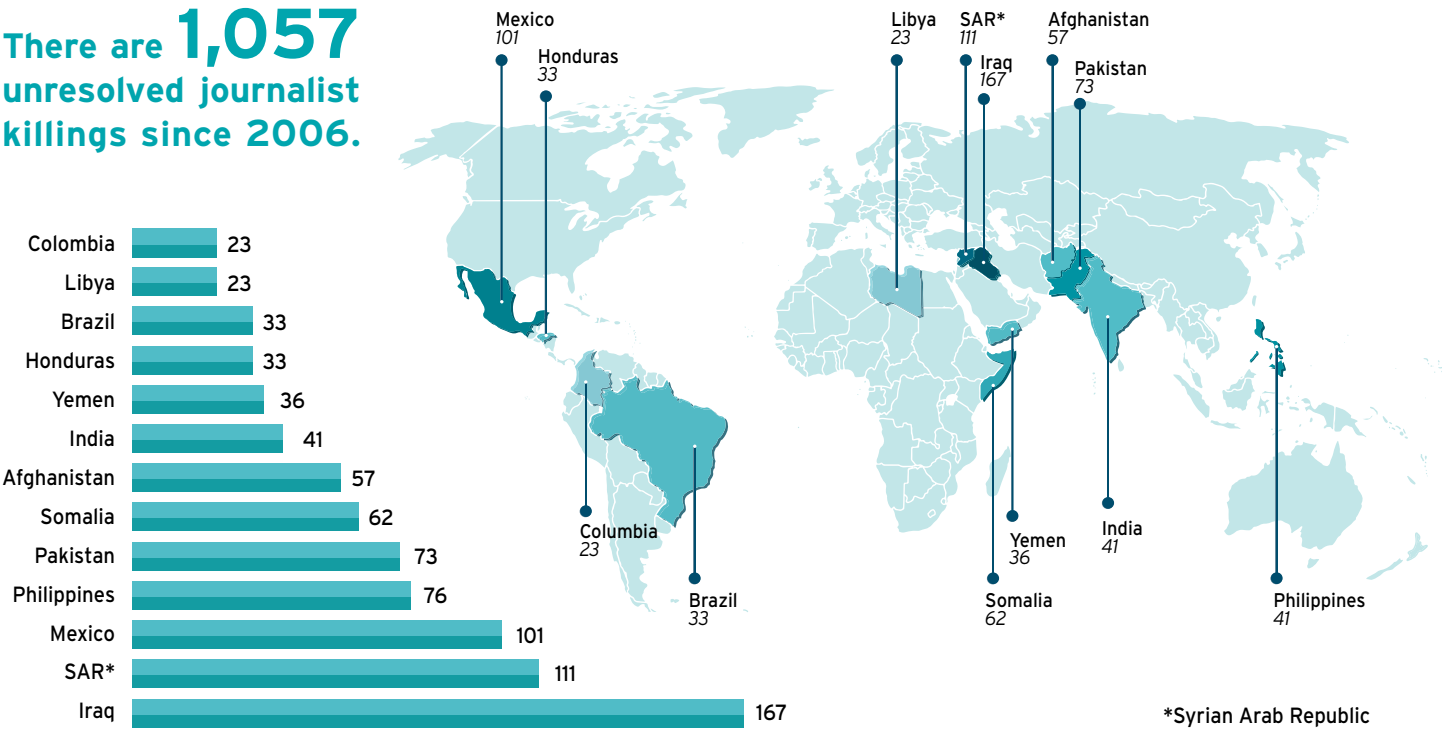
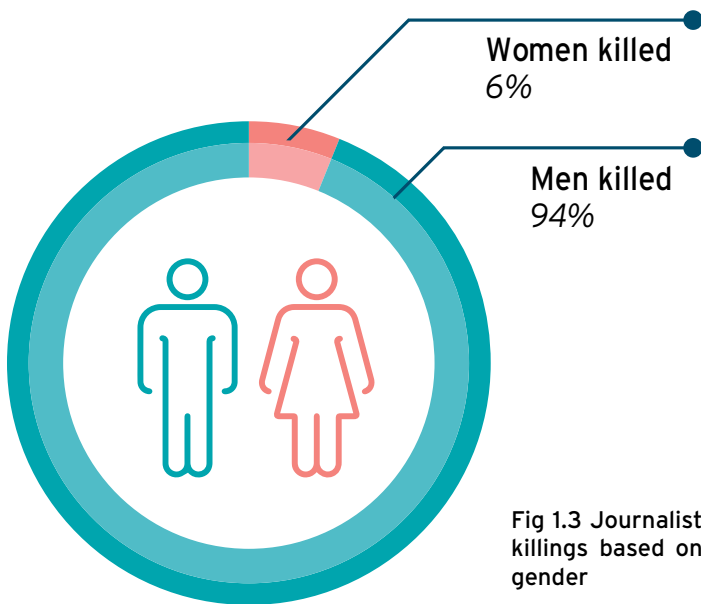


Fig 1.2 Map and histogram of unresolved journalist killings since 2006 around the world. On a per capita basis, the highest number of killings took place in [Libya](#), [Syria](#), [Iraq](#), [Somalia](#) and [Honduras](#). Countries with more than 20 unresolved journalist killings since 2006 are listed in this figure.



About 94 percent of the killed journalists were men and 6 percent were women. There are gender-specific elements to some of the killings that merit particular attention.

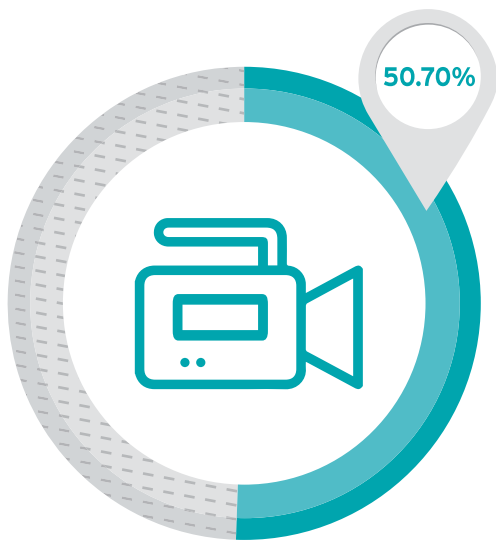


Fig 1.4 Broadcast News related killing (TV, Radio, or camera equipment present) 50.70%

The majority of journalists killed appear to have been working in broadcast media (i.e. radio and television), and oftentimes the presence of broadcast media equipment seems to have played a role in the attacks.

The BYU team recorded facts from publicly available sources about each of the killings since 2006. Many journalists were shot by unidentified assailants on motorcycles. Some were killed at their homes or the offices of their news organizations. Frequently, journalists who are killed were previously involved in covering crime and corruption and then received death threats relating to their news coverage.

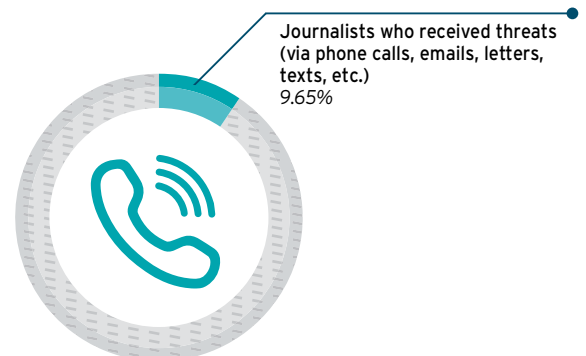
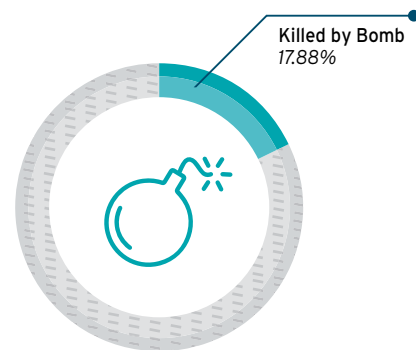
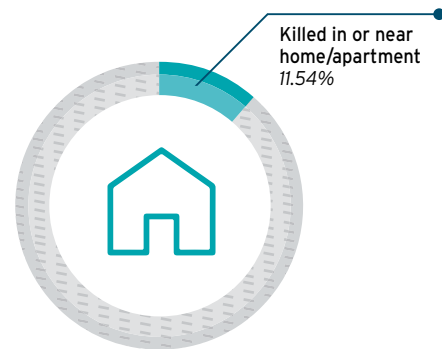
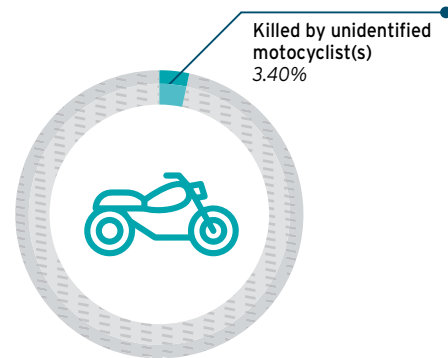


Fig 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, and 1.8 Data visualizations for journalist killings since 2006.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

DON'T

Do not kill journalists. Do not threaten journalists. Do not share messages on Facebook, Twitter or other social media channels that demonize and dehumanize journalists. Do not paint all journalists with a broad negative brush (i.e. “the media” or “mainstream media”).

DO

Do become informed about the nature and role of journalism. One way to do that is by completing all the modules in this project. Help your friends and family members understand that our society needs to support journalism’s role in order to flourish. Also seek to understand the difference between news produced by professionals independently and in the public interest, on the one hand, and political propaganda or disinformation, on the other hand. Again, the modules that follow will help.

Do make your concerns about journalism known in a productive way. Journalists also should be subjected to good-faith critique, correction and feedback. Write a letter to the editor. In the spirit of community collaboration and improvement, call a local journalist and discuss your concerns and questions. Meet with journalism faculty at your local high school, college or university to learn about how future journalists are being trained.

Do support quality independent journalism with your subscription fees. Traditionally, we may be accustomed to receiving news content for free in exchange for our attention to advertisements that accompany the editorial material. That model is changing. Increasingly, any quality news content will cost a subscription. The plus side is that subscription funding decreases the need for news organizations to offer “click bait.”

Do read and watch a variety of news sources. Too many citizens live in “echo chambers” in which they only consume content from their favored outlets or places that confirm their biases. We need to challenge our civic beliefs and conventions in order to improve them. Journalism can help us get out of mistaken impressions and understandings if we are thoughtful about what we read and watch. Be aware that social media algorithms feed you information that might seem pleasing but may be incomplete or inaccurate.

After the gruesome killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi agents inside the Turkish consulate in Istanbul in 2018, the UN Special Rapporteur Agnes Callamard published an [extensive report and proposals](#) for stopping the killing of journalists and fighting impunity. Her proposals included a standing international instrument (i.e. an international agreement or treaty) in which countries would agree on measures to protect journalists. Further, Callamard proposed a rapid-response task force of international experts who would investigate journalist killings. The international human rights law mechanisms proposed by Callamard are still in the discussion stage even as journalists continue to be targeted.

CONCLUSION

It seems that more people than ever want to be informed about happenings in their communities and world. That is a positive thing. Journalists can help. Societies can flourish if individuals will make educated choices about the news and information they consume and choose to put stock in.



**JOURNALISM
RESEARCH AND
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