

The Coalition For  
Women In Journalism



# Press Freedom Status For Women Journalists

*37 Threats, Attacks, And Harms Done To Women Journalists In May*

**May 2023**

# Objective of report

Every day, worldwide, women journalists face severe threats to their safety. These threats exist online and offline, from misinformation and discrediting campaigns rooted in misogyny and sexism to more serious problems such as harassment from the state. The problems women journalists contend with are not broadly recognized. Newsrooms are often tight-lipped about them; governments take little action to counter violations against women journalists.

CFWIJ's monthly reports are drawn from our daily and feature research that offers a landscape view of what press freedom looks like from a gender angle. Each morning CFWIJ team register new violations against them, marshaling ever more evidence of the severity of the threats they face and the urgent need to raise awareness about these issues. Many of these cases are documented internally by The Coalition, to maintain anonymity and ensure the safety of targeted journalists. Our work shows the incredible courage and conviction women journalists work with in spite of the hurdles they face. Our job is to ensure their circumstances are made visible so accurate resources can be directed for their safety and growth.

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- ***US: NYPD arrests photojournalist Stephanie Keith while covering a gathering protesting the violent death of Jordan Neely***
- ***UK: Court rules investigative journalist Carole Cadwalladr must pay £1M to Arron Banks in libel case***
- ***Turkiye: Denial of access to the press, unjustified impediments, and physical assaults on women journalists covering elections***

The Coalition For Women In Journalism documented 37 press freedom violations against women journalists worldwide in May 2023. These included arrests, detentions, attacks on property, threats, intimidations, hacking, legal and online harassment, arbitrary denials of access, and secondary targeting.

Worrying is the increased police violence against women journalists in the US, with the NYPD arresting renowned photojournalist Stephanie Keith. A month earlier, a court convicted LGBTQI journalists Matilda Bliss and Veronica Coit for trespassing while covering the clearing of a homeless camp by police forces.

In a devastating court ruling, British reporter Carole Cadwalladr was ordered to pay £1M to Aaron Banks, a pro-Brexit multimillionaire who had sued the investigative journalist over 24 words she uttered in a TED Talk. The ruling will have a chilling effect on investigative journalism in the UK.

Simultaneously, increasingly worrying is the multitude of attacks against women journalists in Turkey, especially those covering the elections in May, including denial of access to the press, unjustified impediments, and physical assaults. We observed different tactics used to target journalists from diverse backgrounds: local women reporters, both Turkish and Kurdish, faced physical assaults, while foreign correspondents faced online harassment.

The consistent attacks on women journalists are a blatant attack on the public's right to information, gender equality, and democratic values.



**Nicaragua:** On May 5, independent journalist **Hazel Zamora** was arrested and charged with spreading false news while traveling with her children by bus in Nicaragua. She faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted. Zamora was released from police custody under the condition that she reports to the police daily. Police also confiscated her computer during a search of her home

***“The Ortega regime has silenced practically all independent media. Despite being condemned by the United Nations, authorities have ramped up its repression.”***

**— Hazel Zamora**

**India:** Times Now reporter, **Bhavana Kishore**, was arrested by police on May 9 after a traffic accident involving supporters of the ruling party. Kishore is accused of making caste-related hate speech, although her newsroom believes the arrest was politically motivated to silence her after exposing corruption. Kishore's arrest violated India's law on police procedures, as she was taken into custody without the presence of female officers. However, she has since been granted interim bail by the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

**United States:** On May 10, NYPD arrested photojournalist **Stephanie Keith** while covering a protest against the violent death of Jordan Neely. Keith was arrested alongside ten others and charged with "disorderly conduct" and "interfering with arrests."

**Pakistan:** YouTuber **Anum Sheikh** was arrested at her home by police in Pakistan on May 19, accused of membership in a political organization and disruption of public order. The charge allowed authorities to detain her for 15 days, but on May 22, the High Court in Lahore nullified the order. Sheikh, along with several other journalists, was immediately released.



4 women  
journalists arrested

**Turkey:** On May 1, police physically assaulted and detained journalist **Zeynep Kuray** while filming protests in Istanbul. Several journalists following the protests and marches held during Labor Day were prevented from taking pictures.

**Ukraine:** Former journalist **Iryna Shevchenko** and her husband were illegally detained by Russian forces in the occupied Ukrainian city of Melitopol on May 6. The Levchenkos are being held under terrorism charges, and their whereabouts are currently unknown.

**Turkey:** On May 7, border control briefly detained documentary filmmaker **Banu Acun** while returning from Germany. She was released under the condition that she provide a statement within five days. The reason for her detention was an arrest warrant issued by the Turkish government for allegedly "insulting the Turkish nation, the Turkish Republic state, and its institutions." The journalist said she was unaware of the warrant and has yet to be informed of the specifics of the charges.

**India:** On May 4, veteran journalist, **Sakshi Joshi**, was shoved and detained by women police officers while documenting a sit-in protest in New Delhi. The police officers tore her clothes and detained her for several hours. Joshi has filed a complaint contesting her detention with the Delhi police commissioner.

***"I will not be afraid, I will not bow down, I will not sit quietly."***  
— **Sakshi Joshi**

**Somalia:** British-Somali freelance journalist **Busharo Ali Mohamed** was detained by Somaliland authorities at the border while en route to an assignment on May 1. Security forces allegedly tortured Mohamed before being transferred to police custody. She has been remanded in custody pending a police investigation and is being held at Hargesia Central Prison.



5 women journalists  
detained

**Turkey:** On May 1, KRT TV reporter **Sultan Eylem Keleş** and two other journalists were physically assaulted by the police, preventing them from covering Labor Day.

**Ukraine:** On May 9, journalist **Tetyana Tsyulnik** was assaulted while covering a Victory Day event in Ukraine. The editor of Kolo.news was reporting on the event when a man pushed her and slapped her in the face. Police witnessed the incident and have opened a criminal case for “threats or violence against a journalist.”

***“Without warning, a man shoved her from behind, hurled insults at her, and pushed her out of the area. “I will hit you now,” he yelled before slapping her in the face”***

**Democratic Republic of Congo:** Two women journalists were targeted while covering opposition demonstrations in Kinshasa on May 20. **Geonne Djokwa** was slashed and injured with a machete, and **Prisca Yasetonga**, a reporter for Mboka Nde Congo Television, was threatened.

**France:** **Harmony Pondy-Nyaga**, a journalist for La Chanel Info, was forcibly removed by police while covering an environmental protest in Paris on May 26. Security guards and police assaulted her, dragged her away from the rally, and threw her to the ground.

**Turkey:** On May 28, during the second round of presidential elections, Dokuz8haber’s **Fatoş Erdoğan**, who reported on the elections at a school in Istanbul, was attacked by an AKP school official while voting was underway. The assailant pulled the journalist’s hair, tried confiscating her phone, and kicked her, injuring her hand.



6 women journalists  
physically assaulted

**Samoa:** On May 5, Samoa's Minister of Communications and Information Technology used his familial ties with police to pressure Samoa Observer's **Sialai Sarafina Sanerivi** to reveal her sources. After Sanerivi refused, the minister threatened her with detention and called his cousin, a police officer, to further pressure the journalist.

**Russia:** Police raided the home of freelance journalist **Nailia Mullaeva**, seizing two mobile phones, a laptop, and two SIM cards during the search. Mullaeva, who operates the Telegram channel BIRDS, has faced detention and fines for her reporting in the past.

***"I honestly don't understand what they want from me."***  
— Nailia Mullaeva

**Azerbaijan:** Journalist **Sevinj Sadigova** was told to stop filming outside Ganja's courthouse by police and court employees on May 25. The incident occurred while she was reporting on the trial of Osman Rzaev, founder of the news website Demokratik.az, who is falsely charged with extortion.

***"I objected, pointing out that I was recording a car in a public place."***  
— Sevinj Sadigova



6 women journalists  
threatened and  
intimidated

**Turkey:** Jinnew reporter **Öznur Değer** was obstructed from doing her job as a journalist during her coverage of the elections on May 28 by a bodyguard to AKP MP Faruk Kılıç. The bodyguard hurled verbal assaults, insults, and threats at the reporter.

KRT TV reporter **Sultan Eylem Keleş** was covering the elections in Istanbul when an AKP school official unlawfully asked her for her press card. The official also prevented the journalist from capturing footage.

The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) launched an investigation into investigative journalist **Çiğdem Toker** on May 30th regarding a comment she made on Fox TV segment on May 28th. The comment has been interpreted by pro-government pundits, including journalist Cem Küçük, as a call for a coup. If found guilty by RTÜK, punitive action in the form of fines or suspension may be taken against the journalist and FOX TV.



6 women journalists  
threatened and  
intimidated





**Italy:** On May 13, Italian MP Antonio Angelucci threatened journalist **Linda Di Benedetto** with legal action after her investigation into his healthcare company's government contracts. Di Benedetto received a cease-and-desist letter from lawyers representing Angelucci's company after publishing a series of articles highlighting a conflict of interest between Angelucci and the Governor of Lazio.

**Kyrgyzstan:** Kyrgyzstan's State Committee for National Security (SCNS) summoned **Dilbar Alimova**, the editor-in-chief of PolitKlinika, for questioning on May 16 regarding the outlet's reporting on the speaker of Kyrgyzstan's parliament and the prosecutor-general. While waiting for a response from the prosecutor's office to a letter allegedly signed by the parliament speaker, PolitKlinika temporarily removed an article on the subject.

**United Kingdom:** On May 18, award-winning Investigative journalist **Carole Cadwalladr** was ordered to pay legal fees and damages to businessman Arron Banks after partially losing a libel case on appeal. Cadwalladr was sued by Banks over comments she made on Twitter and in a TED Talk and won the initial trial in June 2020. However, Banks partially reversed the victory in February, and Cadwalladr must now pay 60% of his legal costs and issue an apology.

***"A dark day for freedom of the press, for everyone who cares about it and for every journalist & news organization that believes in public interest reporting."***

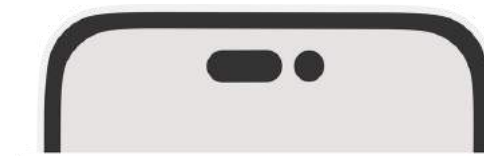
***— Carole Cadwalladr***



3 women journalists  
legally harassed

**Turkey:** Freelance journalists **Emily Wither** and **Stefanie Glinski** were subjected to online harassment and threats after posting tweets highlighting anti-Syrian and anti-refugee sentiments in a presidential candidate's campaign posters during the elections. The messages contained death and rape threats; some called the reporters racist.

*\*Click on the image to read the tweet.*



hope u and your family dies in a horrible way

i will do witchcraft to make sure you will never find peace

stay dead bitch



2 women journalists subjected to online harassment

**Kosovo:** At least six women journalists' vehicles were attacked by violent protesters in Serb-majority towns in Kosovo while covering demonstrations against the installation of new mayors on May 29 and 30.

On May 29, Top Channel reporter **Leonita Barjami**, and journalists from EuroNews Albania were traveling in the vehicle later vandalized by protesters in Zvecan.

BIRN journalist **Adelina Ahmeti** and colleagues from RTV Dukagjini and KALLXO were reporting on protests against the newly-elected mayor in Leposavic when unknown individuals damaged their car.

A reporter for Radio Free Europe, **Doruntina Baliu**, was one of a team of journalists traveling in the vehicle belonging to TV station Tevel before it was set ablaze in Zubin Potok.

On May 30, Cars belonging to media outlets KOHA and T7 were found destroyed in Zvecan. A team of journalists traveled in the vehicles the previous day to report clashes, including **Valbona Bytyqi** and **Saranda Ramaja** of KOHA, and **Marigona Brahim**.



*Tevel car set on fire in Zubin Potok*



6 women journalists'  
vehicles attacked

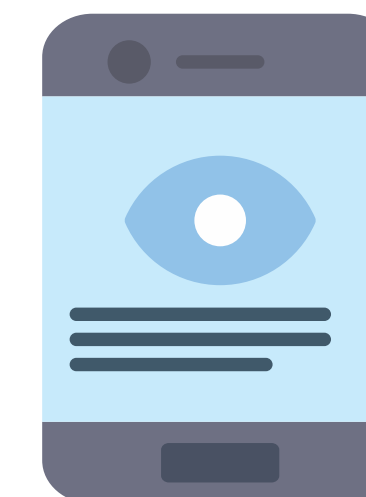


**Dominican Republic:** On May 3, investigative journalist **Nuria Piera** revealed she is the first person in the Dominican Republic to have their phone infected with NSO Group's Pegasus spyware. Piera's phone was hacked three times between 2020 and 2021 while working on an investigation into corruption among senior government officials and their relatives.

***“You have to work hard to not become neurotic because you’re always suspicious that someone may have information about you. It’s like being in quicksand. It really affects your sense of freedom, how free you feel to speak up.”***

— *Nuria Piera*

**Azerbaijan:** Azerbaijan illegally surveilles civil society organizations, public officials, and journalists in Armenia, including senior journalist **Astghik Bedevyan** from RFE/RL's Armenian Service, an investigation by AccessNow uncovered. Bedevyan's device was infected with Pegasus malware on May 11, 2021, the month before parliamentary elections in Armenia, focusing on the aftermath of Armenia's defeat in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan in 2020. This marks the first known case of Pegasus being used in an international conflict.



2 women journalists'  
phones infected with  
Pegasus Spyware

### One woman journalist arbitrarily denied access

**Hungary:** On May 5, the Guardian's **Flora Garamvölgyi** was removed from the US Conservative Political Action Coalition (CPAC) event in Budapest by security while interviewing US Senator Rick Santorum.

*"I think the issue here is that they don't want the free press to be at this event."*


— *Flora Garamvölgyi*

### One woman journalist's family targeted

**Iran:** The brother of exiled editor-in-chief of IranWire's Persian language service **Shima Shahrabi** was arrested on May 3rd after six agents from the Intelligence Ministry raided her parent's home. Relatives have since been summoned for questioning about Shahrabi's work and her relationship with her brother. The Iranian regime has previously targeted the families of journalists living in exile.

*"Because of my activities, which are entirely related to journalism and human rights, my family in Iran is under immense pressure by the security establishment of the Islamic Republic."*

— *Shima Shahrabi*



One woman  
journalist's family  
targeted, one  
arbitrarily denied  
access



5 women journalists  
were released from  
prison



Turkey: The trial against **Diren Yurtsever, Berivan Altan, Ceylan Şahinli, Habibe Eren, Öznur Değer, Zemo Ağgöz**, and five other journalists commenced on May 16, 2023. The five women journalists are charged with "membership in a terrorist organization" and spent seven months in pre-trial detention. All the journalists were released temporarily pending the trial's adjournment until July 5, 2023.



**CFWIJ is working hard to change these  
circumstances everyday.**  
Join us in this mission



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