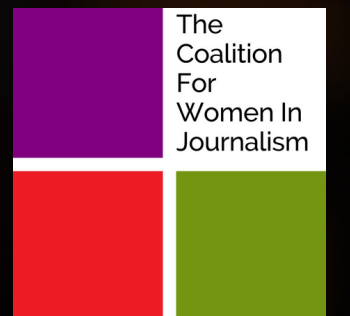




Türkiye: Multi-Pronged Campaign Against Women Journalists Covering Elections Worrying Trend



The Coalition For Women In Journalism continued monitoring election season through the reruns and observed several violations including denial of access to the press, unjustified impediments, and physical assaults on women journalists.

- We observed **different tactics** used to target journalists from diverse backgrounds. Where local women reporters, both Turkish and Kurdish, faced **physical assaults**, foreign correspondents faced **online harassment**.
- CFWIJ finds some of these attacks, particularly those on Kurdish journalists, to be **organized**.
- These violations against women journalists covering the elections show a blatant **disregard for freedom of expression** and journalist safety in Türkiye.
- CFWIJ strongly condemns the violations and urges the Turkish government in its new term to put an end to the **harassment** and **intimidation** of **women journalists**.



“Given the history of press freedom attacks in Türkiye over the last few years, we were anxious as election season began,” says CFWIJ director Kiran Nazish, “but we were not expecting such a multi-pronged campaign against journalists in the country.”

Kiran Nazish
Founding
Director, CFWIJ

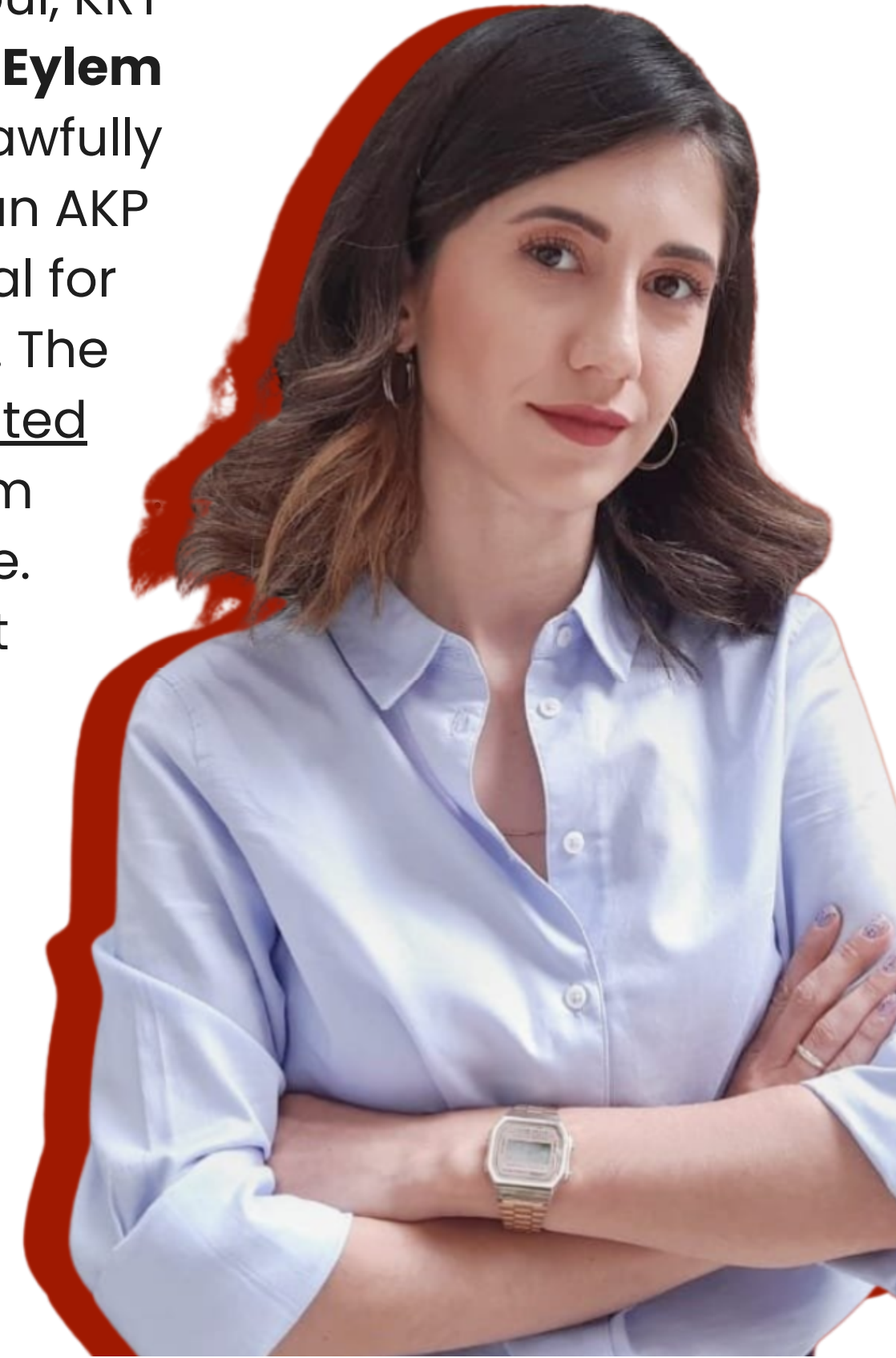


On election day, four Turkish reporters shared they had been assaulted, harassed, and denied access to cover the elections.

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.



While covering the elections in Istanbul, KRT TV reporter **Sultan Eylem Keleş** was unlawfully asked by an AKP school official for her press card. The official also prevented the journalist from capturing footage. Keleş filed a report with the police, which still has to respond to the complaint.



A series of events unfolded for **Öznur Değer** — a reporter for the Kurdish JINNEWS — during her coverage of the elections in Mardin, a city in the southeastern region of Turkey. She was obstructed from doing her job as a journalist by a bodyguard to AKP MP Faruk Kılıç, who hurled verbal assaults, insults, and threats at the reporter. "No one can shoot without our permission here. You can only shoot if we allow it," the bodyguard shouted at the journalist, continuing to insult her with sexist language and threats. Değer attempted to file a police complaint, but police instead asked the prosecutor to investigate the journalist for "insulting a public official on duty." The prosecutor's office subsequently confiscated Değer's phone.




The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) launched an investigation on May 30th into investigative journalist **Çiğdem Toker**. Toker stated in a Fox TV segment on May 28th, a day before the elections, that "democracy extends beyond the ballot box and includes citizen participation in other areas of politics." 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.



Organized Attacks On Kurdish Journalists

Over the past couple of months, CFWIJ has documented organized attacks against Kurdish journalists. In 2022, at least 43 women journalists working with Kurdish news were detained during raids. Lawsuits have been filed against women journalists. Four have been imprisoned for ten months.

Ahead of the elections, Kurdish journalists Elif Üngür, Neşe Toprak, Remziye Temel, and Safiye Alagaş were indicted on April 12 after being detained for ten months. On April 14th, Dilan Akyol, a correspondent for the Mezopotamya News Agency, was detained by police as she left her home and charged with "terrorist propaganda."

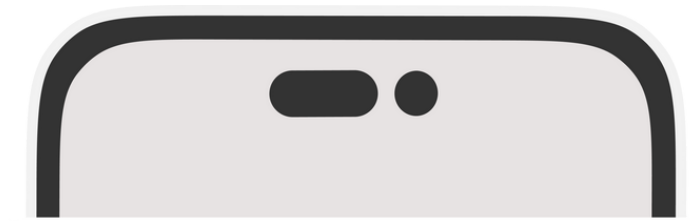
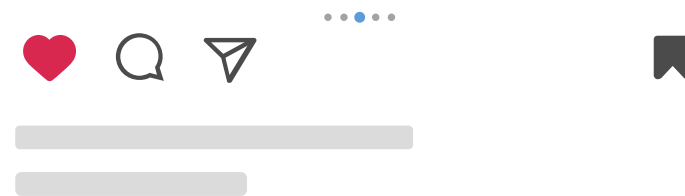
A woman with dark, curly hair is shown from the chest up, speaking into a microphone. She is wearing a black top with a white polka-dot pattern. The background is a blurred purple and blue wall.

"It's been five years, CFWIJ has raised the issue with the crackdown against Kurdish journalists," says Kiran Nazish, CFWIJ's founder. "This particular stifling of Kurdish voices has been ignored in the mainstream, leading to an even greater number of journalists behind bars."

Covering the elections, foreign correspondents **Emily Wither** — a freelancer with BBC and Channel 4 — and freelance journalist **Stefanie Glinski** shared they received a barrage of online harassment and threats. The abuse started after the journalists posted tweets on May 25th highlighting anti-Syrian sentiments in presidential candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's campaign posters.



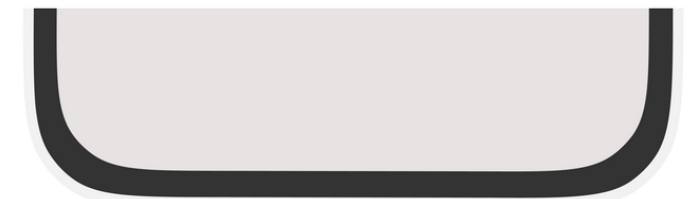
**Click on the image to read the tweet.*



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

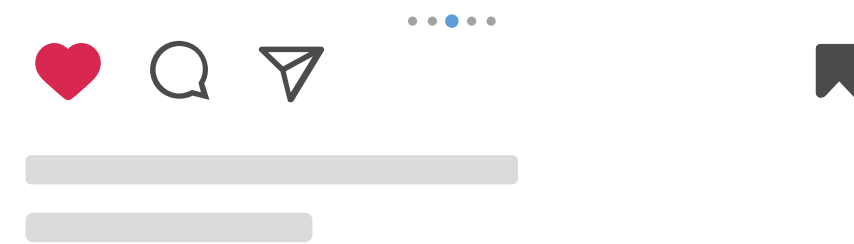


Only a couple of hours after her tweet went up — which thus far has over 7 million views — **Emily Wither** had to close her DMs. It didn't take long before the trolls found her Instagram account filling her chats with vile messages.

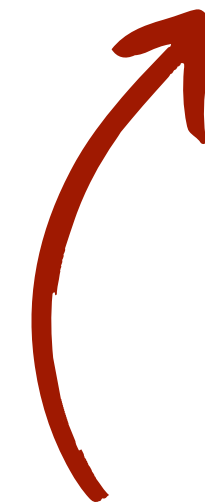
Several of the hundreds of messages Wither received contained death and rape threats. One threatened her family. In the thousands of public replies, several people call the reporter a racist.



“What made me feel the most uncomfortable is people calling me racist,” Wither tells CFWIJ, saying the messages made her feel uncomfortable, as she feels it could affect her reputation.



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



Freelance journalist Stefanie Glinski, shared she received similar harassment online after pointing out the anti-refugee sentiment.

Tip Of The Iceberg

While Turkey leads violations of press freedom documented by CFWIJ over the past couple of years, women journalists reporting on the country tell us they do not often share when they are intimidated, harassed, denied access, or in any other way obstructed from doing their job.

“A few people asked me if I was going to report the messages I received,” Withers tells CFWIJ, “and the answer was no, because I feel, well, this is what happens sometimes.”

Journalists frequently experience violence and hate speech online in connection to their work. Women journalists are particularly exposed to misogynist, sexist, and sexualized online hatred. CFWIJ documented eight organized troll campaigns in 2022.

“Online harassment is a pervasive issue in Turkey. However, documenting every instance is a challenge because women journalists often do not report incidents of online harassment. Due to its frequency, they view it as an unfortunate aspect of their job. While acknowledging its negative impact, many prefer to handle it on their own. Nonetheless, every woman journalist we have spoken with thus far has experienced threatening behavior, abusive comments, and other forms of harassment.”

Damla Tarhan Durmuş
Operations Manager,
CFWIJ



One of the journalists CFWIJ talked to for this report says she subconsciously censors herself sometimes. Another journalist asked us not to mention her name when she described the growing anti-Western sentiments in the country in fear of retaliation.

“Any sentence we write, particularly on Twitter, can prompt investigations and smear campaigns against us”

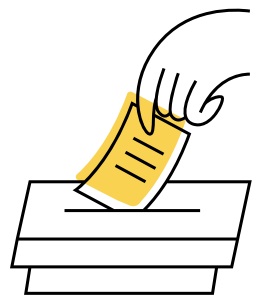
Seran Vreskala

“We all engage in self-censorship to some extent,” journalist Seran Vreskala says. “Any sentence we write, particularly on Twitter, can prompt investigations and smear campaigns against us.”

Vreskala tells us she stays fully dressed for hours after publishing news critical of the authorities. “The police may raid my home until five in the morning,” she explains.

Failures Of Free And Fair Elections

Dissenting voices struggle to be heard in Türkiye covering the elections. The Journalists’ Union of Türkiye (TGS) Istanbul Branch President Banu Tuna tells CFWIJ how especially journalists working with pro-opposition media outlets reported “experiencing varying degrees of harassment and attacks.”



“Every day, we have been notified of new ways journalists across the country have been targeted”

Kiran Nazish



“Under the renewed leadership of President Erdogan, we urge for an effort for a more hopeful and censorship-free era”

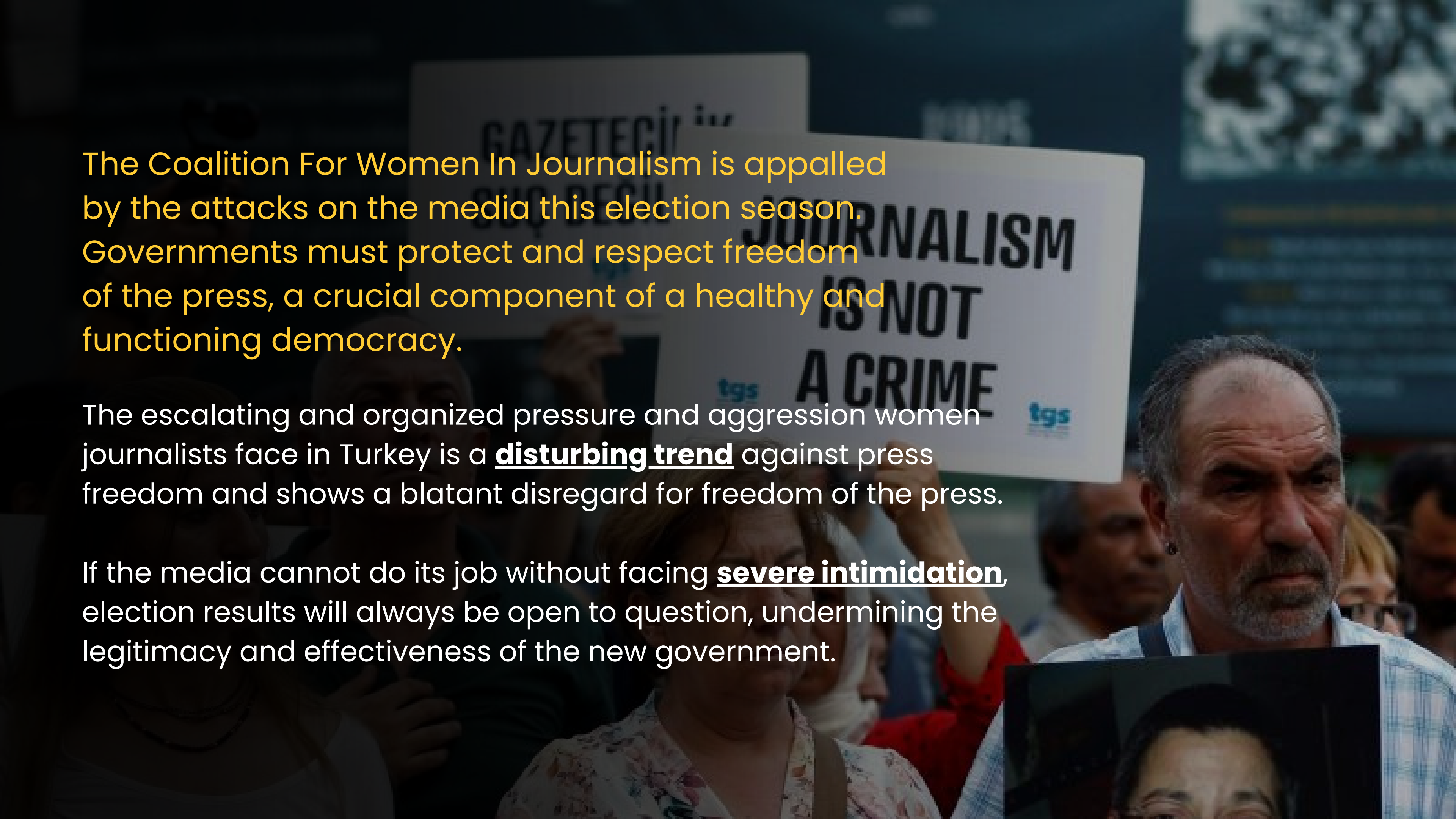
Kiran Nazish

“Every day, we have been notified of new ways journalists across the country have been targeted,” says Kiran Nazish. “Particularly, the attacks on women journalists, including and especially assaults and confiscation of equipment, reflect the failures of a free, fair and safe election.”

The joint election observation mission to Türkiye from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) found that “media bias and ongoing restrictions to freedom of expression created an unlevel playing field.”

According to the RSF’s latest World Press Freedom Index, Türkiye fell 16 places and ranks 165th out of 180 countries.

“Under the renewed leadership of President Erdogan, we urge an effort for a more hopeful and censorship-free era,” says CFWIJ’s Kiran Nazish. “The government should ensure this new term will put an end to the harassment and intimidation against women journalists”



The Coalition For Women In Journalism is appalled by the attacks on the media this election season. Governments must protect and respect freedom of the press, a crucial component of a healthy and functioning democracy.

The escalating and organized pressure and aggression women journalists face in Turkey is a **disturbing trend** against press freedom and shows a blatant disregard for freedom of the press.

If the media cannot do its job without facing **severe intimidation**, election results will always be open to question, undermining the legitimacy and effectiveness of the new government.



The Coalition For Women In Journalism urges the Turkish government to:

**halt legally harassing
opposition-minded
and independent
media.**

**protect women
journalists from online
abuse and physical
assault.**



CFWIJ is working hard to change these circumstances everyday.

Join us in this mission



Contact Email: info@womeninjournalism.org

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