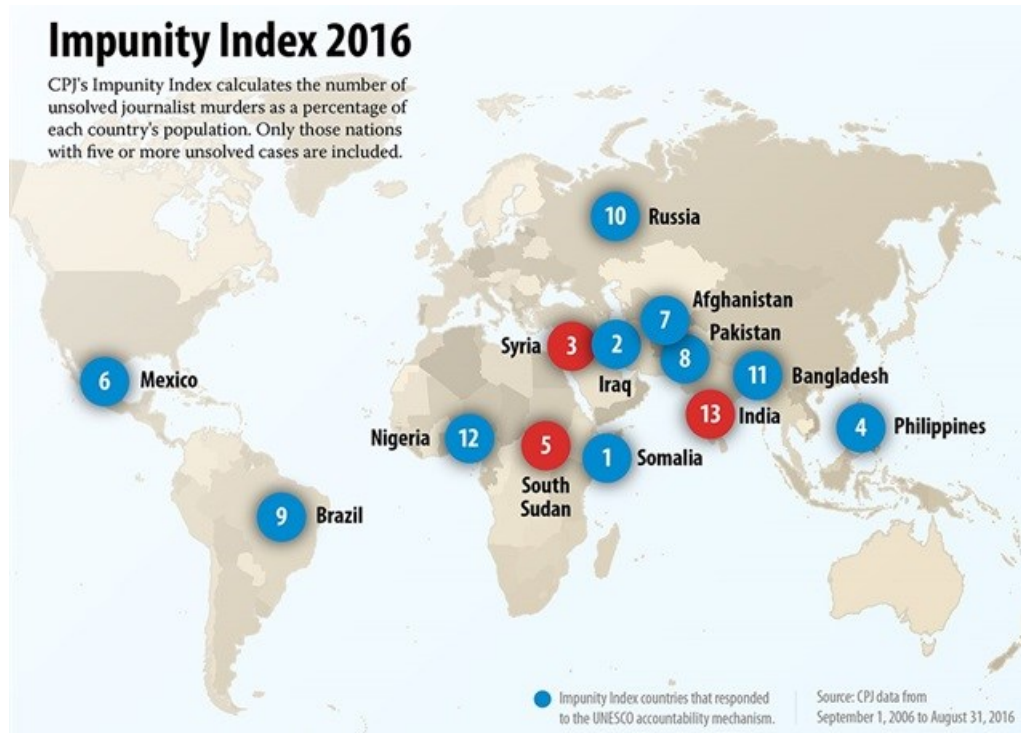


Where journalists are murdered and killers go free

By [Elisabeth Wtchel](#)

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Some of the highest rates of impunity in the murders of journalists can be attributed to killings by Islamist militant groups, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) found in its latest Global Impunity Index, which spotlights countries where journalists are murdered and their killers go free. The worst country for the second year in a row is Somalia.



CPJ Global Impunity Index

In Somalia, the militant group al-Shabaab is suspected in the majority of media murders. Somalia is followed by Iraq and Syria, where members of the militant group Islamic State murdered at least six journalists in the past year.

Extremist groups have also repeatedly targeted journalists with impunity in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and Pakistan, which all appear on the index for at least the second consecutive year. In Africa, in addition to Somalia, countries that appear on the list include South Sudan (5th on the list) and Nigeria (12th).

At the same time, violence perpetrated against journalists by criminal groups and local officials allowed impunity to tighten its grip in Latin America, with Brazil and Mexico each moving two spots higher on the index this year.

Sri Lanka, where violence against journalists has receded since the end of a decades-long civil war, dropped off the list for the first time since CPJ began calculating the index in 2008.

The Impunity Index, published annually to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on November 2, calculates the number of unsolved murders over a 10-year period as a percentage of each country's population.

For this edition, CPJ analysed journalist murders in every nation that took place between September 1, 2006 and August 31, 2016. Only those nations with five or more unsolved cases for this period are included on the index—a threshold that 13 countries met this year, compared with 14 last year. Cases are considered unsolved when no convictions have been obtained; cases in which some but not all perpetrators are held to justice are classified as partial impunity and are not included in the tally. Cases in which the murder suspects are killed during apprehension are also classified as partial impunity.

Getting away with murder

While militant extremists are responsible for the greatest numbers of attacks against journalists in recent years, they are not the only ones getting away with murder, nor are conflict zones the only place where impunity thrives.

The Philippines is No. 4 on the index, its place cemented by a failure to prosecute any perpetrators behind the 2009 [massacre](#) in Maguindanao, in which 32 journalists and media workers were slain. Aside from the Philippines, Mexico, and Brazil, criminal groups and government officials are also leading suspects in murders of journalists in Russia and India. Each of those countries except Brazil has appeared on the index since its inception.

CPJ recorded only [four unsolved murders](#) in Sri Lanka for the latest 10-year period, leading to its elimination from the index. Amid the country's becalmed political climate, no journalist there has been murdered in direct connection to journalism since editor [Lasantha Wickramatunga](#) was killed in 2009. Justice has not been achieved in any murder—despite a [pledge](#) from President Maithripala Sirisena to re-investigate old killings—but Wickramatunga's case inched forward this year with one arrest and the [exhumation](#) of the editor's body for a new post-mortem examination.

Impunity is widely recognised as one of the greatest threats to press freedom, and international [pressure](#) to address it has mounted in recent years, with states, including some of the repeat offenders on this list, beginning to respond. Six countries on the index—Bangladesh, Brazil, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia, and Somalia—convicted perpetrators of journalist killings in the past year, up from three countries in the previous year's report.

Taking accountability

In another positive development, more countries on this year's index participated in UNESCO's impunity accountability mechanism, which requests information on the status of investigations into killed journalists for the UN agency's biennial report on journalist safety. In previous years, half of the countries on the index [ignored](#) this process. This year, only three states among the 13 index countries—India, South Sudan, and Syria—failed to respond.

Among the other findings from CPJ's data on murdered journalists:

- The combined data from the 13 countries on the index account for 80% of the unsolved murders that took place worldwide during the 10-year period ending August 31, 2016.
- Eight of the 13 countries on the Impunity Index have been listed each year since CPJ began the annual analysis in 2008, an indication of how entrenched impunity is in some nations.
- Despite their poor records in achieving justice, four countries on the Impunity Index—India, Mexico, Nigeria, and the Philippines—are on the governing council of the [Community of Democracies](#), a coalition dedicated to upholding and strengthening democratic norms.
- In the past decade political groups, including Islamic State and other extremist organisations, are the suspected

perpetrators in more than 40% of murder cases. Government and military officials are considered the leading suspects in nearly a quarter of the cases in the same period.

- Around 95% of victims were local reporters. More of them covered politics and corruption in their home countries than any other beat.
- In at least 40% of cases, the victims reported receiving threats before they were killed. Threats are rarely investigated by authorities and in only a handful of cases is adequate protection provided.
- In the past 10 years, around 30% of murdered journalists were first taken captive, the majority of whom were tortured, amplifying the killers' message of intimidation to the media community.
- In only 3% of total murder cases over the decade has full justice, including the prosecution of the masterminds, been achieved.

For a detailed explanation of CPJ's methodology, [click here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Elisabeth Witel is Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) Impunity Campaign Consultant.

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