

Number of jailed journalists sets global record

A special report by the Committee to Protect Journalists



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Worldwide tally reaches highest point since CPJ began surveys in 1990. Governments use charges of terrorism, other anti-state offenses to silence critical voices. Turkey is the world's worst jailer. **A CPJ special report**



At least 49 journalists remain jailed in Turkey. (AFP)

Published December 11, 2012

Imprisonment of journalists worldwide reached a record high in 2012, driven in part by the widespread use of charges of terrorism and other anti-state offenses against critical reporters and editors, the Committee to Protect Journalists has found. In its annual census of imprisoned journalists, CPJ identified 232 individuals behind bars on December 1, an increase of 53 over its 2011 tally.

Large-scale imprisonments in Turkey, Iran, and China helped lift the global tally to its highest point since CPJ began conducting worldwide surveys in 1990, surpassing the previous record of 185 in 1996. The three nations, the world's worst jailers of the press, each made extensive use of vague anti-state laws to silence dissenting political views, including those expressed by ethnic minorities. Worldwide, anti-state charges such as terrorism, treason, and subversion were the most common allegations brought against journalists in 2012. At least 132 journalists were being held around the world on such charges, CPJ's census found.

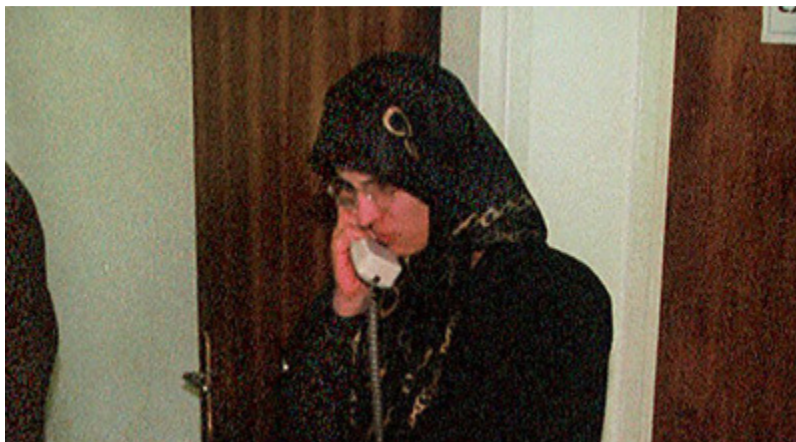
Eritrea and Syria also ranked among the world's worst, each jailing numerous journalists without charge or due

process and holding them in secret prisons without access to lawyers or family members. Worldwide, 63 journalists are being held without any publicly disclosed charge.

Vietnam, Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, Uzbekistan, and Saudi Arabia rounded out the 10 worst jailers. In two of those nations, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, the authorities used retaliatory charges such as hooliganism and drug possession to jail critical reporters and editors. In 19 cases worldwide, governments used a variety of charges unrelated to journalism to silence critical journalists. In the cases included in this census, CPJ determined that the charges were fabricated.

In Turkey, the world's worst jailer with 49 journalists behind bars, the authorities held dozens of Kurdish reporters and editors on terror-related charges and a number of other journalists on charges of involvement in anti-government plots. In 2012, CPJ conducted an extensive review of imprisonments in Turkey, confirming journalism-related reasons in numerous cases previously unlisted on the organization's annual surveys and raising the country's total significantly. CPJ found that broadly worded anti-terror and penal code statutes have allowed Turkish authorities to conflate the coverage of banned groups and the investigation of sensitive topics with outright terrorism or other anti-state activity.

These statutes "make no distinction between journalists exercising freedom of expression and [individuals] aiding terrorism," said Mehmet Ali Birand, a top editor with the Istanbul-based station Kanal D. Calling the use of anti-state laws against journalists a "national disease," Birand said "the government does not differentiate between these two major things: freedom of expression and terrorism." Among the imprisoned is Tayip Temel, editor-in-chief of *Azadiya Welat*, the nation's sole Kurdish-language daily, who faced more than 20 years in prison on charges of being a member of a banned Kurdish organization. As evidence, the government has cited Temel's published work, along with his wiretapped telephone conversations with colleagues and news sources.



Iranian journalist Zhila Bani-Yaghoub began serving her jail term in September. (AP)

Iran, the second-worst jailer with 45 behind bars, has sustained a crackdown that began after the disputed 2009 presidential election. The authorities have followed a pattern of freeing some detainees on six-figure bonds even as they make new arrests. The imprisoned include Zhila Bani-Yaghoub, an award-winning editor of the *Iranian Women's Club*, a news website focusing on women's issues. She began serving a one-year term in September on charges of "propagating against the regime" and "insulting the president" for articles she wrote during the 2009 election. Her husband, journalist Bahman Ahmadi Amouee, is serving a five-year prison term on anti-state

charges.

China, the third-worst jailer, has made extensive use of anti-state charges to jail online writers expressing dissident political views and journalists covering ethnic minority groups. Nineteen of the 32 journalists held in China are Tibetans or Uighurs imprisoned for documenting ethnic tensions that escalated in 2008. The detainees include Dhondup Wangchen, a documentary filmmaker jailed after interviewing Tibetans about their lives under Chinese rule. CPJ honored Wangchen with one of its 2012 International Press Freedom Awards. “Journalists who report on areas deemed ‘most sensitive’ by the state—China’s troubled ethnic regions of Tibet and Xinjiang—are most vulnerable,” said Phelim Kine, deputy director of the Asia division of Human Rights Watch. “Journalists living and working in those areas are not just concerned with the red lines set by the state for all journalists but also the shifting gray lines, where the Chinese government’s security footing is at an ongoing, all-time high.”

The worst abuser of due process is Eritrea, which was holding 28 journalists, the fourth-highest total worldwide. No Eritrean detainee has ever been publicly charged with a crime or brought before a court for trial. President Isaias Afwerki’s government has refused to account for the whereabouts, legal status, or health of the jailed journalists, or even confirm reports that as many as five have died in custody due to inhumane treatment. CPJ continues to list the journalists said to have died as it seeks to verify those reports. Over all, the Eritrean detainees include nine independent journalists jailed in a large-scale 2001-2 crackdown and 19 state media journalists who violated the government’s rigid controls. “If you write anything contrary to what the state says, you end up in prison,” said Bealfan Tesfay, who worked as a reporter and editor for a number of Eritrean state media outlets before fleeing the country. “I left Eritrea one year and three months ago. I walked for three days and three nights. If I was caught, you’d probably never hear from me again. ... No one knows anything about the whereabouts of these imprisoned journalists. No one knows anything, whether they are dead or alive. They’ve never been charged. Their families don’t even have any contact with them.”



U.S. journalist Austin Tice is believed to be held in Syrian state custody. (AFP)

Syrian forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad were holding at least 15 journalists, making the country the fifth-worst jailer. None of the detainees have been charged with a crime, and the authorities have been unwilling to account for the detainees’ whereabouts or well-being. Among those believed to be in custody is Austin Tice, a U.S. freelance reporter who had contributed coverage of the country’s civil war to *The Washington Post*, McClatchy, Al-Jazeera English, and several other news outlets. “Big brother is never too far away—since the revolution it’s all the more difficult. As the uprising became more militarized, there was a greater risk of getting

picked up,” said Rania Abouzeid, a Beirut-based correspondent for *Time* magazine who has traveled to Syria clandestinely to cover the conflict on several occasions. “The regime will often set up sudden checkpoints, and once you’re there it’s difficult to turn around.”

With 14 journalists behind bars, Vietnam was the sixth-worst jailer of the press. In each of the past several years, Vietnamese authorities have ramped up their crackdown on critical journalists, focusing heavily on those who work online. All but one of the reporters imprisoned in 2012 published blogs or contributed to online news publications. And all but one were held on anti-state charges related to articles on politically sensitive topics such as the country’s relations with China and its treatment of the Catholic community.

Worldwide, 118 journalists whose work appeared primarily online were in jail on December 1, constituting a little more than half of the census. The proportion is consistent with those seen in CPJ’s previous three surveys, which had followed several years of significant increases in the numbers of imprisoned online journalists. Print journalists constituted the second-largest professional group, with 77 jailed worldwide. The other detainees were from radio, television, and documentary filmmaking.

Azerbaijan, the world’s seventh-worst jailer, viciously cracked down on domestic dissent as it hosted two major international events, the Eurovision 2012 song contest and the Internet Governance Forum. The authorities imprisoned at least nine critical journalists on a variety of retaliatory charges, including hooliganism, drug possession, and extortion. CPJ concluded that the charges were fabricated in reprisal for the journalists’ work.



Blogger Eskinder Nega is serving his ninth jail term in Ethiopia.
(Lennart Kjørli)

With six journalists in prison, Ethiopia was the eighth-worst jailer in the world. The authorities broadened the scope of the country’s anti-terror law in 2009, criminalizing the coverage of any group the government deems to be terrorist, a list that includes opposition political parties. Among those jailed is Eskinder Nega, an award-winning blogger whose critical commentary on the government’s extensive use of anti-terror laws led to his own conviction on terrorism charges.

“Basically, they are criminalizing journalism,” said Martin Schibbye, a Swedish freelance journalist who was jailed along with a colleague, Johan Persson, for more than 14 months in Ethiopia. The two were convicted of terrorism

charges because they had traveled with a separatist group as part of research for a story. “In our profession, you need to talk to both sides to get the story. They have criminalized talking to one side of the conflict. Just meeting with a member of an organization or communicating with an e-mail” is conflated with terrorism.

Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia, each of which was holding four journalists, fill out the list of the 10 worst jailers. The detainees in Uzbekistan include Muhammad Bekjanov and Yusuf Ruzimuradov, the two longest-imprisoned journalists on CPJ’s survey. They were jailed in 1999 for publishing a banned newspaper. In Saudi Arabia, newspaper columnist Hamza Kashgari faces a potential death penalty on religious insult charges stemming from Twitter postings that described a fanciful conversation with the Prophet Muhammad.

CPJ confirmed the death of one imprisoned journalist, Iranian blogger Sattar Beheshti. Arrested in October on charges of “acting against national security,” Beheshti was dead within days. Fellow prisoners said Beheshti, 35, was beaten during interrogation, repeatedly threatened with death, and hung from his limbs from the ceiling, according to news reports.

Here are other trends and details that emerged in CPJ’s analysis:

- The 29.6 percent worldwide increase over 2011 was the largest percentage jump in a decade and the second consecutive annual increase of more than 20 percent. Imprisonments increased 23.4 percent from 2010 to 2011.
- For the first time since 1996, Burma is not among the nations jailing journalists. As part of the country’s historic transition to civilian rule, the authorities released at least 12 imprisoned journalists in a series of pardons over the past year.
- The number of journalists held on anti-state charges, 132, is the highest CPJ has recorded, although its proportion of the overall tally, about 57 percent, is consistent with surveys in recent years.
- The use of retaliatory charges was the next most common tactic among cases in which charges were publicly disclosed. Nineteen journalists faced such charges worldwide.
- Seven journalists were being held on charges of engaging in ethnic or religious “insult,” and six others were jailed on criminal defamation allegations. Violations of censorship statutes were cited in three cases, while charges of disseminating “false news” were lodged in two instances.
- As part of an extensive yearlong review of imprisonments in Turkey, CPJ conducted an August 1 survey of detainees. CPJ found 61 journalists imprisoned in direct relation to their work at the time, with 15 more being held in less clear circumstances. Since CPJ’s August survey, Turkish authorities have freed a number of journalists who had been held pending trial or verdict.
- Cuba, after a one-year absence from the census, rejoined the nations imprisoning journalists. Security agents arrested Calixto Ramón Martínez Arias, a reporter for the independent news agency Centro de Información Hablemos Press, in September on insult charges. When he was arrested, Martínez Arias was investigating reports that an international shipment of medicine and medical equipment had been damaged.
- The imprisonment in Cuba was the only case documented by CPJ in the Americas, where jailings have become increasingly rare. No cases were recorded in the region in CPJ’s 2011 census.
- The overwhelming majority of the detainees are local journalists being held by their own governments. Three foreign journalists were imprisoned worldwide, CPJ’s survey found.
- Online and print media journalists constituted the two largest professional groups on CPJ’s census. Among other media, 24 television journalists, 12 radio reporters, and one documentary filmmaker were being held.

- Eighty-five freelance journalists were in jail worldwide on December 1, constituting about 37 percent of the census. The proportion of freelance journalists, which had trended upward in recent years, dropped for the first time since 2006.
- Along with Dhondup Wangchen, being held in China, three other winners of CPJ International Press Freedom Awards were being held worldwide. They are Azimjon Askarov in Kyrgyzstan, Shi Tao in China, and Mohammad Davari in Iran.



Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen is serving time in Chinese prison. (Filming for Tibet)

CPJ believes that journalists should not be imprisoned for doing their jobs. The organization has sent letters expressing its serious concerns to each country that has imprisoned a journalist. In the past year, CPJ advocacy led to the early release of at least 58 imprisoned journalists worldwide.

CPJ's list is a snapshot of those incarcerated at 12:01 a.m. on December 1, 2012. It does not include the many journalists imprisoned and released throughout the year; accounts of those cases can be found at www.cpj.org. Journalists remain on CPJ's list until the organization determines with reasonable certainty that they have been released or have died in custody.

Journalists who either disappear or are abducted by nonstate entities such as criminal gangs or militant groups are not included on the prison census. Their cases are classified as "missing" or "abducted."

This report was compiled by CPJ staff with additional reporting by CPJ Steiger Fellow Sumit Galhotra.

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