

Reporting Safely Under Threat & Harassment

Findings from two talks on press safety with the Journalism Initiative on Gender, Peace, and Security, the Committee to Protect Journalists, and journalists experienced working in Bulgaria, Turkey, Pakistan, and China. Produced by the Journalism Initiative on Gender, Peace, and Security in collaboration with photojournalist [Jodi Hilton](#).

1. Stand in solidarity

Support each other through local and international networks. Show solidarity and engage in fundraising campaigns for colleagues harassed or taken to court because of their work. Resist media compliance. Pressure is often applied through lack of work. Maria Cheresheva, journalist in Bulgaria, said: "Don't feel alone. Have someone to reach to and don't let them marginalize you." Journalist Ayla Jean Yackley said "a lot of harassment happens via social media. You might get a phone call warning you, or be chastised for a headline."

2. Focus on digital security

Take a course in digital safety and security. Follow CPJ tips [here](#). Complete a digital security checklist and risk assessment. Be careful with social media. Make accounts private if possible. Use two factor authentication and encryption. Log out of apps and accounts, check search, contact and messaging history. Turn off biometric access to devices, and turn off devices and store them away when crossing the border. Back-up key information and store any information about sources properly. Try not to carry sensitive information across borders. Travel with the number of a lawyer to call in an emergency. The CPJ [writes](#): "Journalists who are at high risk of being detained at the border should consider leaving their personal and/or work devices at home and instead carry separate devices and a new SIM card. These devices should only have the information needed for your trip and not be linked to your personal or work accounts. Be prepared for border guards' questions about why you are crossing a border without your personal or work devices."

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3. Covering protests, border violence, and public events

Use a press vest, helmet, and gas mask, if needed. Attend a hostile environment safety course. Carry out a risk assessment. Don't attend alone. Protests can change quickly. Share locations with colleagues ahead of time. Avoid getting caught in tear gas and stay away from the police. Explain the risks of exposure and allow sources anonymity at politically sensitive events. Think about physical safety. Research the location ahead of time and know the exit routes. Carry the number of a lawyer. Wear appropriate clothes. Start with full phone reception. Plan for psychological readiness; covering upheaval abroad is different to working in your home country.

4. Safety at the border

The US Customs and Border protection Agency can search your device and request passwords. [According to the CPJ](#), "Complying means sensitive data could be copied and stored, risking the exposure of contacts, sourcing, and reporting material." Assess your risk based on your status and country of origin. Know your rights. Visa restrictions may change. Dual citizens may face further questioning and delays. US citizens cannot be denied [entry](#), but devices may be seized and you may be held for questioning. When covering migrants at the border, remember that they may also require anonymity and may have experienced trauma. Read our [guide](#) on trauma reporting. Don't put migrants or their relatives at risk.

5. Protect your sources and yourself

"Protect your sources to protect yourself. Talk to sources and check they understand what the risks are. Keep people safe at all times. Source safety has to be first and then everything else can come from there." said journalist Kathleen McLaughlin. Avoid using social media to find or contact sensitive sources, or for politically sensitive stories, she added. Build offline networks and meet in person.

Avoid putting sources in harm's way. Explain the risks of exposure with them before the interview. Make sure any [consent](#) given is informed. Protect [whistleblowers](#). Be aware of which stories may be politically sensitive in the country and region you are in and make decisions accordingly.

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6. Plan for all risks

Catalina Cortés, Interim Emergencies Director with the CPJ said that threats need to be planned holistically as any potential impact will always be experienced together. "You can't think about digital threats alone if you don't think about legal threats, etc." Safety is linked to a journalist's profile. Different levels of visibility mean different levels of threat.

Be aware of legal threats, for instance, new foreign agent laws in some countries. Journalist Osama Ahmed said "In Pakistan you cannot report on human rights, security, workers' rights, hundreds of topics. The political elites don't want you to report on these topics." Make security decisions on a case-by-case basis. Research laws and customs. Don't put anyone at risk for a story.

7. Why we report

A lack of media freedom leads to social mistrust and a lack of information that can be deadly for the public. The press is a warning system. Threats against journalists are a threat to democracy. Stick to facts and report on real life. Write about the people suffering as a result of the decisions made by the powerful.

Take breaks, speak to a therapist, and take care. Maria said: "Stick to principles. It will end. They may not try to harm you physically, but they will try to make you give up." Don't let them.

Panellists:

Maria Cheresheva, Bulgarian journalist, and founding member of the Association of European Journalists - Bulgaria, Kathleen McLaughlin, journalist and author formerly covering China, Ayla - Jean Yackley, journalist working in Turkey, Osama Ahmed, journalist covering Pakistan, and Catalina Cortés, Interim Emergencies Director with the Committee to Protect Journalists. Talks hosted by Jodi Hilton, photojournalist, and Cathy Otten, journalist and director of the Journalism Initiative on Gender Peace and Security at Rutgers.

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Further information:

Committee to Protect Journalists safety advisory: Traveling to the US <https://cpj.org/2025/04/cpj-safety-advisory-traveling-to-the-us/>

Silence and Omissions: A Media Guide for Covering Gender-Based Violence (and guide for trauma-informed reporting) <https://gbvjournalism.org/book/table-of-contents>

How to leak to a journalist - Nieman Lab <https://www.niemanlab.org/2025/04/how-to-leak-to-a-journalist/>

Freedom of Press and Journalism support resources

Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press (RCFP) - Provides legal assistance to journalists and promotes press freedom in the U.S. Website: <https://www.rcfp.org>

Freedom of the Press Foundation (FPF) - Focuses on protecting journalists and whistleblowers, developing security tools, and advocating for transparency. Website: <https://freedom.press>

PEN America - Defends freedom of expression for writers and journalists while fighting against press censorship and disinformation. Website: <https://pen.org>

First Amendment Coalition (FAC) - Advocates for free speech, government transparency, and the public's right to access information. Website: <https://firstamendmentcoalition.org>

National Press Club Journalism Institute (NPCJI) - Supports press freedom through training, advocacy, and legal assistance for journalists. Website: <https://www.press.org/institute>

The Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University - Focuses on legal and policy issues surrounding free speech and press rights. Website: <https://knightcolumbia.org>

Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) - Advocates for digital rights, including press freedom and protection of online journalism. Website: <https://www.eff.org>

Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) - Promotes ethical journalism, defends press freedom, and provides resources for journalists. Website: <https://www.spj.org>

Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society (Harvard University) - Researches digital media, free speech, and online press freedom. Website: <https://cyber.harvard.edu>