



ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA WORKERS IN RUSSIA

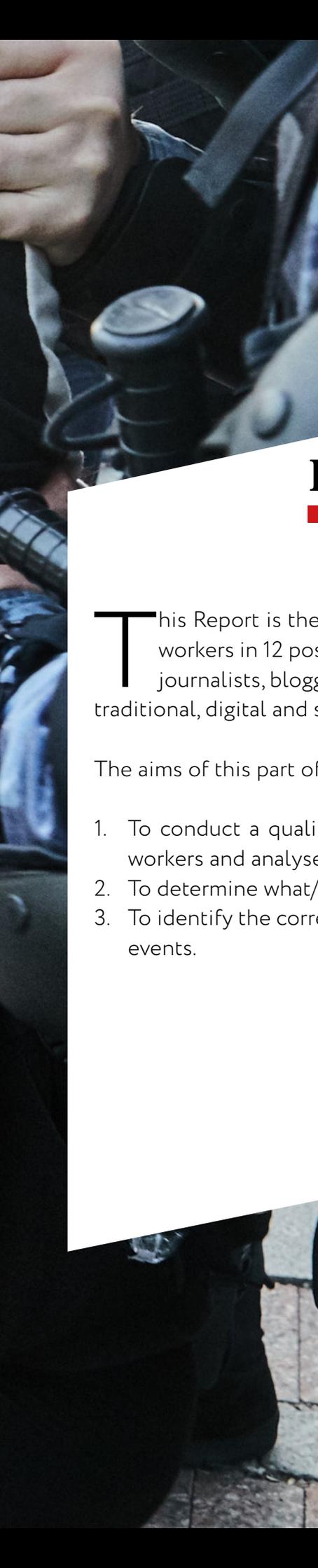
A Report by the Justice for Journalists Foundation (JFJ)
about attacks against media workers in Russia and
Russian journalists abroad that took place between
2017 and September 2019.



Justice for Journalists

Foundation for International
Investigations of Crime against Media

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INTRODUCTION

This Report is the first part of a larger research project that examines attacks against media workers in 12 post-Soviet states from 2017 through 2019. The term ‘media workers’ includes journalists, bloggers, camerapersons, photographers and other managers and employees of traditional, digital and social media.

The aims of this part of the report are:

1. To conduct a qualitative analysis of various types of attacks/threats against Russian media workers and analyse its dynamics within the research period;
2. To determine what/who is the main source of threat to media workers in Russia;
3. To identify the correlation between the number of attacks against media workers and external events.

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data for the study was collected using the content analysis of the Russian and English-language open sources. The key sources are listed in **Appendix 1**.

Content analysis has identified 435 attacks/threats against professional and citizen journalists, editorial offices and online publications. Further in-depth investigation of the incidents reported by traditional, digital and social media has helped to distill three main types of such attacks:

1. Physical attacks and/or threats to life, freedom and health;

2. Non-physical attacks and/or cyber-attacks;
3. Attacks by the authorities and/or via legal and economic mechanisms.

Each of the above categories of attacks/threats were then divided into subcategories, listed in **Appendix 2**.

This categorisation of attacks was tested and verified from May through July 2019 by the means of an online expert survey of over 100 media workers from 12 post-Soviet countries. viet countries.

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MAIN FINDINGS

1. **Attacks by the authorities and/or via legal and economic mechanisms** are the most frequent form of harassment against media workers.
2. During the first nine months of 2019 the number of **attacks by the authorities and/or via legal and economic mechanisms** doubled, exceeding 160 incidents. By comparison, in 2017 the number of such attacks totaled 70.
3. Government officials pose the greatest threat to Russian media workers. Their prevailing methods of attacks against journalists include **arrests, detentions, criminal and civil prosecution, searches, questioning, and incarceration**.
4. There is a direct correlation between **increased civic protest activity** and the number of journalists who are detained. It

is over the course of mass demonstrations in Russia's big cities that the persecution of journalists covering these events escalates.

5. Between 2017 and 2019 the number of published incidents of **physical and non-physical (including cyber-) attacks and/or threats grew by 22 and 48 percent, respectively**.

It should be noted that many types of attacks and threats are not covered by the media. In reality, the majority of journalists working in Russia consider cyber-attacks and non-physical threats to be an inevitable consequence of their jobs and therefore do not report them.

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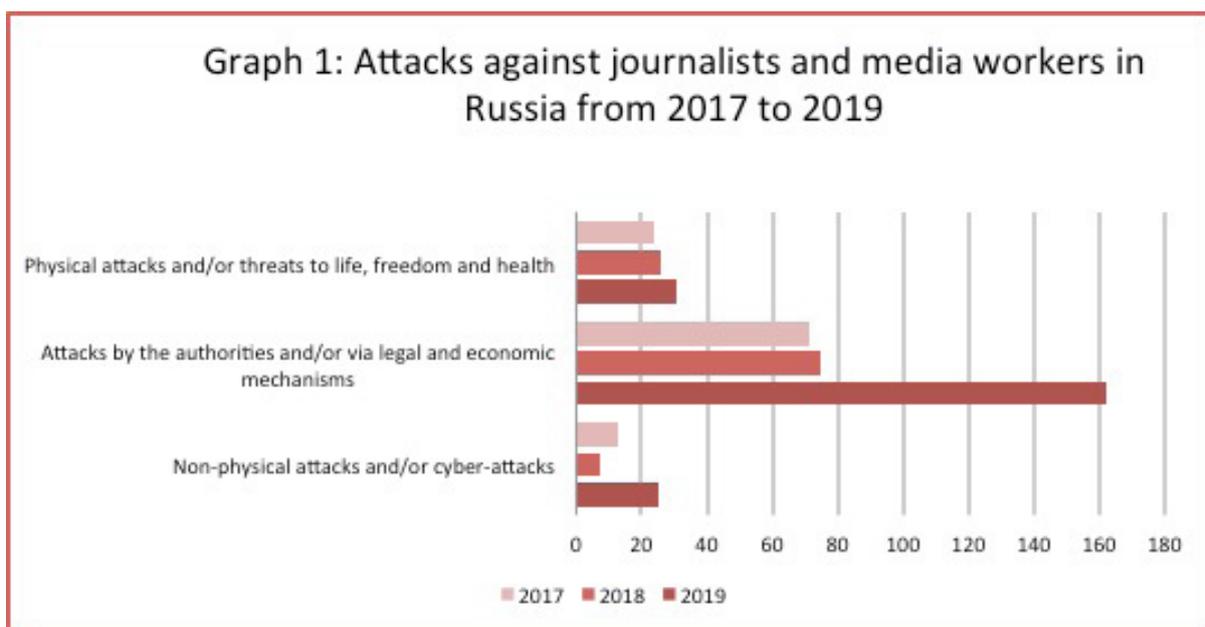
ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

Figure 1 represents a qualitative analysis of the three main types of attacks against media workers in Russia and against Russian journalists abroad between 2017 and September 2019.

In this period the number of attacks against journalists increased in all categories. Over a period of three years, the number of attacks by the authorities and/or via legal and economic mechanisms against media workers has more than doubled. From 2017 to 2019 the number of physical attacks and/or threats to life, freedom and health went up by 22.5 percent. The number of non-physical attacks and/or cyber-attacks rose by 48 per cent.

There is reason to believe that only a small fraction of non-physical and cyber-attacks are reported by the media, because the majority of Russian journalists consider those to be an inevitable part of their job. The most widely reported non-physical and cyber attacks were:

- ▶ The leak of personal data of journalists detained during mass rallies by the Telegram channel **Comrade Major** in August 2019.
- ▶ A phishing attack reportedly by Russian Military Intelligence (GRU) hackers against investigative outlets **The Insider** and **Bellingcat**.
- ▶ The attempted hacking into Telegram accounts of Yekaterinburg journalists who covered the protests against the construction of a Russian Orthodox church in a public park. Hackers tried to access the accounts of journalists working for **Meduza**, **Radio Liberty**, **Ura.ru** and the **Main Channel of Yekaterinburg** were also reported.



4/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS

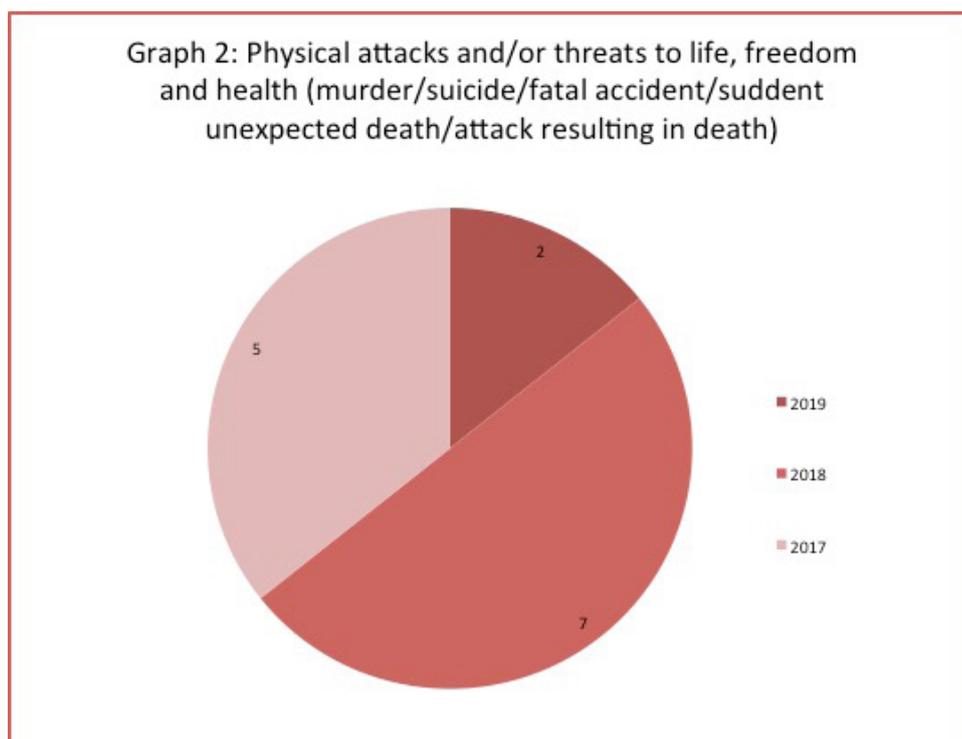
Figure 2 illustrates the fatal physical attacks on media workers. Out of the 14 fatal physical attacks, six were qualified as murder.

In the first nine months of 2019, the deaths of two media workers were reported. First was the death of Mikhail Kurakin, founder of the **The Committee** Telegram-channel that released sensitive news about the authorities and law enforcements agencies. A criminal case on incitement to suicide was opened as a result. And second was the death of a cameraman Peter Mikov whose body was found with a gunshot wound in his head.

Between 2017 and 2019 the following fatal incidents with media workers were reported:

- Murder – 6
- Suicide – 2
- Fatal accident – 1
- Sudden unexpected death – 2
- Attack / beating / injury resulting in death - 3

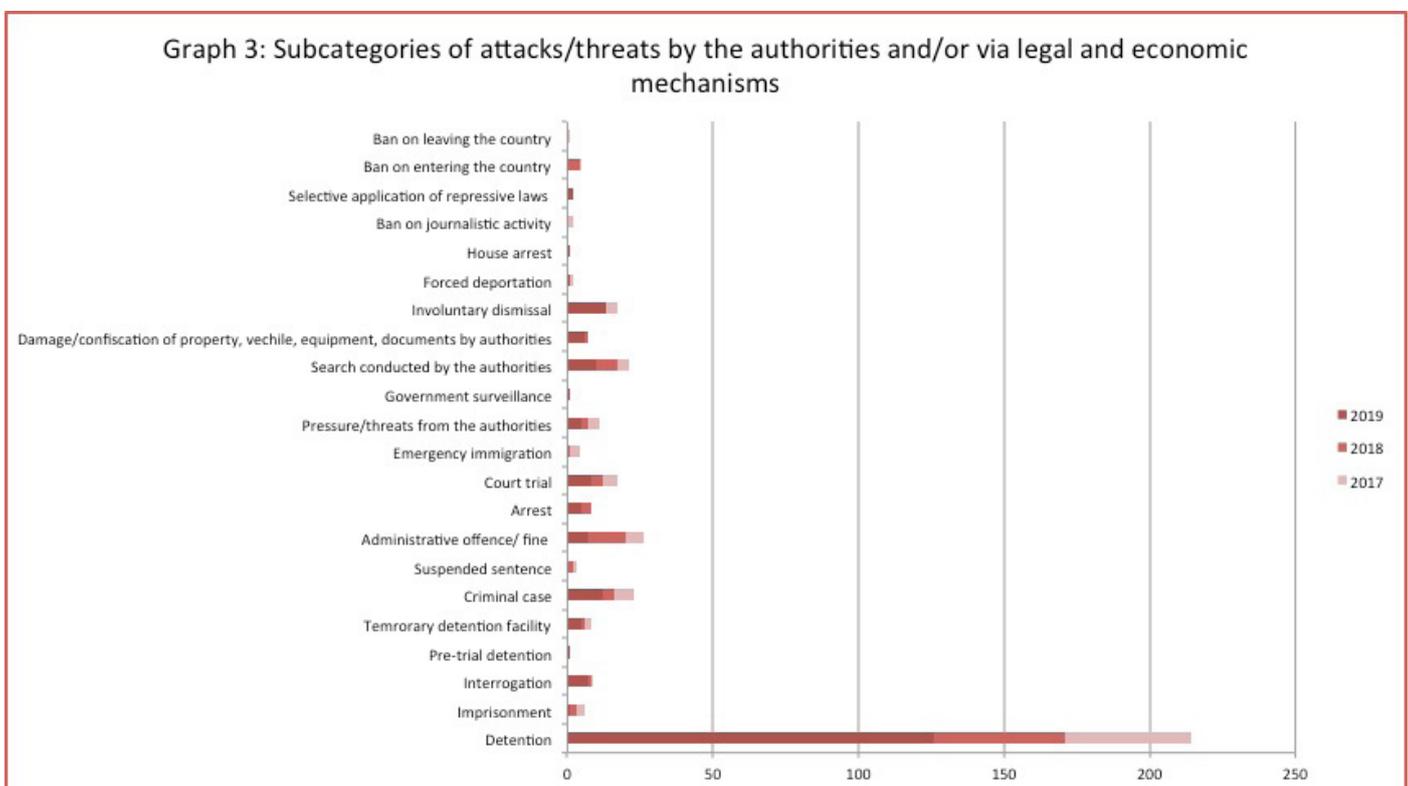
The most resonate case over the past three years were the murders of cameraman Kirill Radchenko, operator Alexander Rastorguev and freelancer Orkhan Dzhemal in the Central African Republic in the summer of 2018. There has been no official investigation into this crime and the perpetrators have not yet been found. The results of the independent investigations by investigative research outlets [The Dossier Centre](#) and [Proekt](#) have so far been ignored by Russian officials responsible for running the investigation.



5/ ATTACKS BY THE AUTHORITIES

Figure 3 presents the various subcategories of the attacks/threats carried out by authorities and/or via legal and economic mechanisms. The top five forms of harassment against media workers include arrests, detentions, criminal and civil prosecution, searches, questioning, and incarceration. It must be noted that the frequency of each type of attack has continued to grow. For example, detention was the most widely used method of harassment in 2017. But by 2019 the number of media workers detained by authorities had tripled.

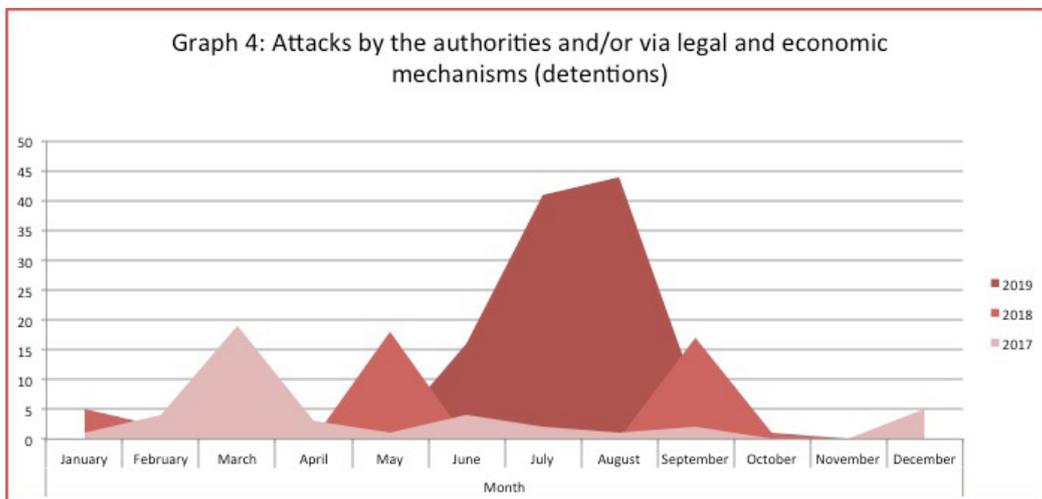
Administrative and criminal cases against media workers have remained a permanent feature in Russia. Since 2017, information about 23 criminal cases against journalists and bloggers became public. While the international media has covered the cases of Ivan Golunov, Abdulmumin Gadzhiev, Svetlana Prokopyeva or Alexander Valov, the majority of less prominent cases are only discussed at the local level, if at all.



6/ DETENTIONS

Figure 4 demonstrates the significant increase in attacks/threats from the authorities in 2019. The figure shows a pattern of correlation between the rise in protest activity throughout the country and the resulting persecution of media workers covering the protests. Figure 4 presents a timeline showing the main detention peaks that occurred in March 2017, May 2018, September 2018 and July-August of 2019.

- **26 March 2017, Moscow, St. Petersburg and Makhachkala:** 14 journalists detained while covering anticorruption rallies in Russia.
- **5 May 2018, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yakutsk, Krasnoyarsk and Chelyabinsk:** 17 journalists detained while covering the “He is not our Tsar” rally.
- **9 September 2018:** many journalists not only detained, but also physically assaulted while covering the rally against the pension age hike.
- **7 June 2019:** 12 journalists detained while on individual vigils of support for arrested Meduza journalist Ivan Golunov.
- **27 July 2019, Moscow:** 17 journalists detained while covering an unauthorised rally for free elections.
- **3 August 2019, Moscow:** 26 journalists detained while covering the rally in support of the independent candidates for the Moscow city дума elections.
- **10 August 2019, Moscow and St. Petersburg:** 14 journalists detained while reporting on rallies across Russia to demand free elections and the release of detained activists.



The unlawful arrest of Ivan Golunov resulted in a great public outcry, unveiled how criminal cases are fabricated by officials, and thus led to the most vivid demonstration of professional solidarity in Russia in recent history, to which Golunov owes his eventual release.

The manifestation of journalists' solidarity also helped **Novaya Gazeta** journalist Ali Feruz (real name is Khudoberdi Nurmatov). Ali Feruz is a journalist from Uzbekistan who was working in Russia. Uzbek authorities wanted bring him back to Uzbekistan. But thanks to an international public advocacy campaign, the European court of Human Rights applied a special rule of urgent measures, restricting his movements until his case was considered in Strasburg. In 2018, Ali Feruz was able to relocate to Germany.

APPENDIX 1: OPEN SOURCES USED FOR DATA COLLECTION

- **OVD-Info**: a Russian non-governmental human rights media project aimed at combating political persecution.
- **Reporters without Borders**: an international non-profit, non-governmental organization that conducts political advocacy on issues relating to freedom of information and freedom of the press.
- **Committee to Protect Journalists**: an American independent non-profit, non-governmental organization. CPJ promotes press freedom and defends the rights of journalists.
- **Novaya Gazeta**: Russian newspaper well-known for its critical and investigative coverage of Russian political and social affairs.
- **Glasnost Defence Foundation**: a non-profit organization with the stated goals of defending journalists, journalism, and freedom of expression in Russia.
- **Index on Censorship**: an organization campaigning for freedom of expression, which produces a quarterly magazine of the same name from London.
- **Journalists' and Media Workers' Union**: an independent organisation dealing with protection of journalists and media workers.
- **MediaZona**: MediaZona focuses on the judicial, law enforcement and penal system in Russia.
- **Council of Europe**: a platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists.
- **Caucasian Knot**: is an online news site that covers the Caucasus region in English and Russian. It has a particular focus on politics and on human rights issues, including freedom of the press.
- **MBK Media**: independent online news outlet that focusses on what is happening in Russia and its regions.

APPENDIX 2: SUBCATEGORIES OF ATTACKS AGAINST MEDIA WORKERS

Physical attacks and/or threats to life, freedom and health

- Murder
- Attempted murder
- Fatal accident
- Sudden unexplained death
- Attack/beating/injury resulting in death
- Suicide
- Suicide attempt
- Non-fatal attack/ beating/ injury
- Non-fatal accident
- Captivity/hostage taking
- Disappearance
- Kidnapping
- Sexual violence
- Sexual harassment
- Personal threats of violence
- Surveillance

Non-physical attacks and/or cyber-attacks

- Cyber-attack
- Trolling
- Doxing
- Hacking
- Theft/dissemination of personal data
- Cyber threats
- Defamation
- Bullying
- Tapping
- Phishing
- Damage/ removing of property, transport, equipment, documents
- Damage to the living space/ work premises
- Robbery
- Closing down the media/ blocking of the resource on the Internet

Attacks by authorities and/or via legal and economic mechanisms

- Detention
- Imprisonment
- Interrogation
- Pre-trial detention
- Temporary detention facility
- Criminal case
- Suspended sentence
- Administrative offence/ fine
- Court trial
- Pressure/threats from the authorities
- Government surveillance
- Search conducted by the authorities
- Damage/confiscation of property, vehicle, equipment, documents by authorities
- Involuntary dismissal
- Forced deportation
- Emergency immigration
- Ban on entering the country
- Ban on leaving the country
- House arrest
- Ban on journalistic activity
- Selective application of repressive laws