

# JOURNALIST SAFETY OUTLOOK

# 2022

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# Introduction

For a second year running, we publish our 2022 Journalist Safety Outlook under the clouds of the pandemic and continually evolving hazards for journalists worldwide. With Omicron cases surging, newsrooms, like many other businesses, are now facing major operational challenges amid staff shortages and disrupted travel. Newsgathering and content making continues to adapt in these unprecedented circumstances. As well as the Covid pandemic, this Outlook examines the long-term impact of some of the other major international stories of the past year. Taliban rule and the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan; the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia; and the potential for further instability across the Sahel, in Nigeria, Bosnia and eastern Ukraine all merit concern.

With the need for free and impartial journalism never higher, the security threats to journalists continue to evolve. On the world stage, geopolitical shifts and the rise in autocratic and authoritarian leadership in many countries have contributed to what we term the normalisation of repression. Despite the end of the Trump presidency, autocrats and dictators globally continue to be emboldened by the former US president's stance against the media. His vitriolic assaults and efforts to delegitimise the media are now all too commonplace, even among some democratic states. The Chinese government's approach to the media features heavily in the Outlook and is also serving as a model to imitate for some governments.

The authoritarian playbook for silencing critics is increasingly more sophisticated but can be broadly grouped into four categories: Violence and Arrest; Intimidation and Surveillance; Access Barriers; and Litigation and Legislative acts. Based on our experience helping clients mitigate these threats, we assess some of the favoured tactics and those we see increasing.



The Outlook also looks at the editorial and commercial tightropes that newsrooms and content makers experience whilst providing international news coverage. States are increasingly prepared to economically punish the platforms that host “offending” content, creating a tension between the content/news makers and their paymasters. In China and India, for example, media organisations and streaming services, just like sports teams and fashion brands before them, are experiencing a backlash from authorities and the domestic consumer market for hosting politically or religiously contentious content. Production teams are now routinely reviewing “content risk” amid fears that provocative content could see staff threatened, have programming taken off air or damage their employer’s bottom line.

Brazil, the Philippines, Kenya and France all face elections this year that could either stoke violence, present difficulties for reporting or have important political reverberations outside their own borders. The US mid-terms in November will dominate American news agendas from the summer, while it remains to be seen if the May parliamentary elections in Lebanon will do anything to ease the country’s tragic economic decay. Failure to hold Libya’s recently postponed elections threaten to reverse security gains made under a fragile ceasefire achieved last year.

We continue to believe that effective risk management can help mitigate the majority (of course not all) of the threats that journalists face. Despite the negative projection of this year’s Outlook, we take great encouragement from the work that news organisations, journalist bodies and a range of other freedom of speech advocates are collectively working towards to expose abuses and enable safer media activity. The 2021 award of the Nobel Peace prize to journalists Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov is symbolic, both serving as recognition of the importance of press freedoms while also illustrating the hazardous environment that journalists all too often must overcome.

## Omicron Blues

Newsrooms and content makers have continued to adapt in the face of the covid pandemic with mixed outcomes, but the resulting industry trends are clear. Subscription based digital platforms have benefited from a locked down audience - demanding entertainment and information about Covid-19 - while social media has also grown in popularity. On the other hand, local and print news has been devastated by reduced advertising and subsequent redundancies. In the US for example, the [Tow Centre for Digital Journalism](#) has reported that at least 128 news outlets have ceased operations with over 6,000 layoffs since the start of the pandemic.

Thanks to the Omicron variant, plans to return to the office for many journalists have largely been shelved. Likewise, many entertainment productions have now ceased once again. In the last month, Omicron has seen media organisations across the world struggling to get the news on air or published because of staff shortages. In television production, pressures on teams due to shortages of trained crew have raised the prospect of burn out of staff in early 2022.

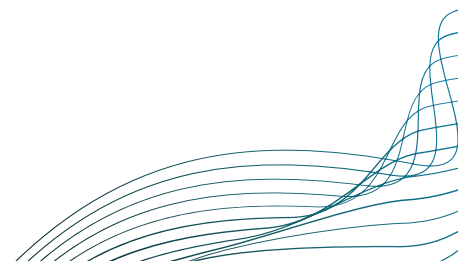
With restrictions to international travel, many news operations find themselves once more heavily reliant on locally based journalists. Local journalists, however, are the most vulnerable to retaliation from unscrupulous regimes intent on stifling any criticism. Many states claim journalists are peddling disinformation and have used the pandemic as an excuse to restrict media freedoms rather than embrace transparency. Countries that have passed oppressive legislation used to silence critical voices include Tanzania, Thailand, Russia, Liberia, Honduras and Nicaragua.

[Examination of news content during the pandemic](#) has revealed that travel restrictions have compelled major news outlets to also rely more on political and official health sources. Many governments have used this to their advantage to shape the narrative, conceal incompetence, corruption or even deny Covid is an issue. Those seeking to highlight the abuses must do so under fear of retaliation.

Perhaps the most aggressive response has been in China, which throughout the pandemic has silenced anyone contradicting the official narrative. Amnesty International reported that the government had launched [5511 criminal investigations](#) by February 2020 against individuals for “fabricating and deliberately disseminating false and harmful information.” This has resulted in the continued detention of four journalists reporting from Wuhan, thought to be the original epicentre of Covid.

Across the world, silencing of the messenger has become an easy option. In Europe, the Hungarian media have accused the government of [blocking journalist access to hospitals](#), surmounting to censorship. In Bangladesh, Rozina Islam, a reporter for the largest daily newspaper [was arrested under the official secrets act](#) for highlighting official corruption that ignited protests.

Media workers have also become victims of the virus. In India, [local journalists discovered](#) that many states were under reporting death tolls so many bravely visited hospitals, morgues and crematoria to obtain independent counts that often outraged officials. Journalists, however, were not considered frontline workers and not prioritised for vaccination. According to the [Network of Women in Media](#) in India, 622 journalists have lost their lives to Covid across the country.



At the same time, the anti-vaccination movement has made the so-called mainstream news its bête noire. Journalists have been assaulted at protests and media offices stormed. Journalists are having to prepare for and expect verbal and even physical attack when covering protests. Anti-lockdown demonstrations are likely to continue in several European countries in the next quarter as governments plan new measures to try and reduce the spread of Omicron.

## The Normalisation of Repression

This Outlook is set in the context of rising geopolitical tensions, the erosion of US hegemony and a weakening influence of international institutions. For the fifteenth consecutive year, in 2021 Freedom House reported a decline in global freedoms. Democratic backsliding has eroded accountability on governments while the proliferation of technology across societies has served to further enable repression; technology has served as a mechanism for surveillance and intimidation of journalists, as well as serving as a mouthpiece for anti-media narratives and misinformation to delegitimise the press in the eyes of the audience.

The library of methods to restrict journalists' work continues to expand. Many journalistic safety and media advocacy groups have dedicated considerable work to highlighting these practises, well beyond the scope of this Outlook. Here we provide just an overview and focus on some of those methods we expect to increase in the year ahead. As always it is local journalists that bear the brunt of the threats and suffer from a comparative lack of protections.

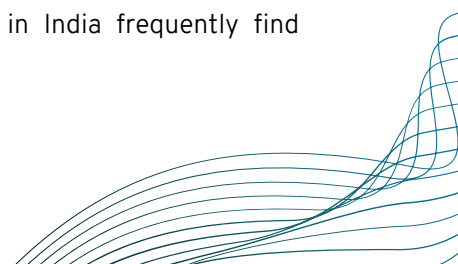
- **Violence and Arrest**

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) recorded 42 journalists killed in 2021, with 24 of the victims confirmed to have been targeted because of their work. Although lower than previous years, the year also saw highs, with some 488 cases of journalists being held in detention, with China the leading country worldwide for incarcerating journalists. The overall increase in cases has been driven by a surge in arrests in Hong Kong, Myanmar and Belarus in 2021; the overall figure will actually now have risen following the detention of Stand News staff in late December in Hong Kong. Repressive regimes will no doubt continue to detain journalists, often holding them without due process, to silence media freedom.

- **Intimidation and Surveillance**

Revelations about Pegasus software in 2021 vindicated warnings made in our past three consecutive Outlook reports about the threat that spyware poses to journalists. While last year's public revelations highlighted the modus operandi of certain governments and Pegasus owner, NSO group, it also illustrates the wider threat from digital surveillance beyond this technology itself. Governments will continue to evaluate methods of digital intrusion to monitor certain media activities, including via other future forms of zero-click malware. China is spending a large amount to systematically muzzle all criticism on social media and has begun conducting digital manhunts to identify those posting any negative commentary, both domestically and abroad.

Private individuals and non-state actors are also deploying sophisticated malware and conducting online abuse as technology becomes more accessible and omnipresent. Journalists in India frequently find themselves targeted.



Already this year, the authorities have had to take down a purpose-built app that curated profiles with lewd imagery of over a hundred Muslim women (including many journalists), listing them for sale via auction. The sexual, derogative content and selection of Muslims feeds into the sectarian culture war currently in play in the country.

- **Access Barriers**

States such as Myanmar, India, Sudan and Ethiopia persistently use internet and telecommunication shutdowns. We have seen this used most recently by authorities in Kazakhstan to interfere with mobilisation of opposition groups and control news leaving the country. Throttling, when internet service providers slow down bandwidth or speed (often at the request of authorities) has also been used by regimes to limit access at sensitive times. 2021 also saw Nigeria temporarily ban Twitter over a dispute about reporting on the national security situation and multiple governments have taken down websites, or forced newspapers to suspend operations for an array of often dubious charges. Such direct interventions sit alongside more traditional methods of restricting journalists such as limits to visas, revocation of press passes or blanket bans on reporting.

- **Legislation and Legal Threats**

States will continue to introduce or enforce legislation around defamation, sedition, libel or national security to limit reporting and silence the media. Legal challenges have increasingly become a common tactic of repressive regimes to simultaneously intimidate journalists and newsrooms while also reinforcing efforts to delegitimise the media in the eyes of the general population. We have seen multiple examples of governments trying to portray the media as biased, foreign sponsored or a threat to national security to suppress journalism. In an age where governments are rewriting the narrative, questioning journalist integrity is an easy, effective tactic. Another emerging tactic has been to lure journalists with “trojan horse” whistle-blowers and leaks that when revealed to be false, question the credibility of the journalist. Source verification will become even more important in this scenario; this is a battle that technology companies face every day in monitoring and moderating content.

## Return of the Red Notice?

Interpol red notices are defined as “a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action”. They have been used to great effect to coordinate the arrest of international fugitives, but have also been criticised for becoming a tool of authoritarian regimes to pursue dissidents or opponents abroad. Interpol’s red notice review and vetting process has been criticised and the impartiality of the organisation and adequacy of checks questioned, despite reforms in recent years. Even in cases where the red notice is rejected or under review, they are a powerful tool of intimidation against critics and they are regarded as difficult to challenge. In 2021, Ahmed Naser al-Raisi, a former senior official in the UAE’s Interior Ministry was selected as president of Interpol. He has been accused of presiding over torture in the past, leading to concern of the direction of the organisation’s work and commitment to upholding principle of due process.



## Editorial Tightropes

Newsrooms have always had to consider the effect of political risk to their operations, balancing impartiality and continued access to a story whilst avoiding reprisals from host governments. We see these challenges expanding and becoming more complex, with the media increasingly unable to avoid being affected by larger geopolitical spats.

Driven by state competition and accelerated by the pandemic, the decoupling of global supply chains could also have longer-term impacts on security afforded to journalists and operational decision-making. Reduced economic interdependency alongside rising political tensions could perceptibly weaken the deterrents on repressive regimes to arrest or intimidate foreign nationals, including journalists. Indeed, journalists can easily become pawns in the game of political posturing. In the last two years, China and America have engaged in tit-for-tat expulsions of each other's journalists as part of their wider diplomatic dispute.

China sets the standard in terms of restrictions. Major streaming services, multinational corporations and international sporting teams have all faced political pressure to revoke content or have faced consumer backlash for airing content or making statements on subjects deemed sensitive. Recently, Disney+ has been forced to remove an episode of The Simpsons depicting a reference to the 1989 Tiananmen Square violence, and we will see productions increasingly screened for sensitive "content risk" prior to release in new markets. China is certainly not alone and coverage of religious, historic, political or other culturally sensitive subjects has already proven contentious in several parts of the world. As well as increased vetting by programme providers, this trend could also see growing influence of politicised national bodies responsible for screening broadcasting content prior to release.

Government efforts to influence technology companies will also impact the methods journalists use to communicate with their audiences and engage sources. In 2021, Russian authorities pressured both Google and Apple to withdraw an app being used by opposition supporters to coordinate tactical voting, with regulators threatening fines or even to jail some in-country staff members if they failed to comply. The Kremlin continues to use foreign agent designation against NGOs and media organisations to curtail their operations and stifle dissent. Nigeria's ban on Twitter in June also served to pressure social media organisations to register in country and reapply for new licences.

Amid growing competition for data, more countries could also revive data localisation regulations, which will present operational and legal headaches for news organisations with international bureaus. While some countries, such as India, have reneged on earlier proposals to force the storage of data within national data clusters, authorities could conceivably use intentionally loose interpretations of data protection and subject rights to interrogate journalists' electronic devices or copy materials.

## Covering Migration

Business travel may have remained severely disrupted in the last two years, but humanity has been on the move in numbers never witnessed before. [UNHCR reported](#) that between January and June 2021, the global number of forcibly displaced persons exceeded 84 million people, fleeing from violence, insecurity and the effects of climate change.

Migrant routes that will continue to see increased numbers include Central America through to the US-Mexico border, the Mediterranean and the English Channel. Western nations will continue to try to restrict access and grant asylum, enabling malicious opportunities for countries such as Belarus to leverage migrants as political tools. With geopolitical tensions high on several fronts, the unconventional strategy of refugee weaponization offers some states a chance to destabilise and distract without repercussion. Refugee flows from Afghanistan, Venezuela and Myanmar into neighbouring states will continue, presenting major humanitarian and resource pressures on recipient countries.

Previous migration crises have affected those covering the story both physically and mentally. Terrible conditions for the refugees, harrowing personal tales of suffering and witnessing the large-scale deaths resulting from failed sea crossings or smuggling in vehicles take a mental toll on those involved. Furthermore, investigations into the criminal networks that support the transit and illegal crossing of peoples makes journalists particularly vulnerable to physical assault. Newsrooms should mitigate against the physical risks and have peer-to-peer and counselling support available. Ensuring editorial sensitivity around the issue also remains vital and the common lexicon on migration-related stories could start to change amid long-aired concerns that coverage can often dehumanise those affected.

## Geopolitical Events

Here we highlight a snippet of the events and countries that we expect to be in the news in the year ahead while recognising - as Afghanistan in 2021 and Kazakhstan this month have already shown - that many of the most significant stories will again take us by surprise.

The potential escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine will remain one of the major international news stories in the months ahead. Bilateral US-Russian talks have thus far failed to reduce hostilities in the region and while a large scale Russian military presence is within striking distance of the Ukrainian border, the potential for miscalculation and unintended escalation remains. Russia has often used external tensions to bolster domestic support and has also proved adept at [using private military contractors](#) in previous conflicts allowing plausible deniability of direct involvement. However, the unknown consequences of an escalation and prospect of Russian fatalities, alongside the current distractions from instability in Kazakhstan, could temper the Kremlin's ambition for wider conflict.

Taiwan will remain one of the most potent sources of tension between the US and China in the year ahead, with political and military posturing on both sides expected to continue. Bellicose statements from both parties on their contrasting vision for the island nation will persist and remain the most likely flashpoint for wider military engagement between world's biggest superpowers. The international tension is set against an important domestic political backdrop with the Communist Party 20th Party Congress in the autumn, at which General Secretary Xi Jinping will be keen to set out his vision for a China that includes Taiwan. Newsroom coverage of the situation is precarious, with Beijing quick to retaliate against perceived criticism.



The dramatic regime change in Afghanistan surprised all; governments, the international community and the Afghan population are still coming to terms with the new reality. How the Taliban deal with the impending humanitarian crisis will dominate the headlines in the next year. According to the UN, nearly 23 million people are facing extreme levels of hunger and 9 million, a famine. Economic freefall and frozen international budgetary aid point to a bleak future.

Local journalists who did not flee the country have been cowed by fear. New media rules introduced by the Taliban are vague and open to interpretation that could easily be used against any journalist. For example, under the existing legislation, journalists are forbidden from broadcasting or publishing anything contrary to Islam, insulting a national figure or violating privacy. More importantly the Taliban have introduced rules that state, “any matters that have not been confirmed by officials at the time of broadcast” should be treated with care and reports must be prepared “in coordination with the Government Media Centre.” This effectively means any critical content can be censored and could easily result in retaliation. Although since the seizure of power, the Taliban have been more benign than originally feared, the warning signs are there. Journalists have been beaten, shot, detained and have disappeared and more than 100 media outlets have shut down.

When compared to local journalists, the Taliban’s approach to international journalists has been much more tolerant. International journalists are allowed to travel around the country in a much safer environment. It is unclear, however, how much longer the détente between the international media and the Taliban will continue. One possible cause of friction could be the reporting of the humanitarian crisis as it worsens; the Taliban will become intolerant of perceived criticism. Many international organisations have reassessed their permanent operations in-country and have found affordable and adequate insurance hard to come by. An uptick in bomb attacks in Kabul (albeit still lower than in previous years) and a threat of terrorist actions from Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK) is an ever-present threat. There is growing potential for the Taliban to factionalise as they struggle to motivate young fighters in their new responsibilities of governing rather than fighting and revolution.

Instability in Ethiopia will persist into 2022 despite the TPLF’s fall back to the Tigray region in December. Unless a new front of aligned fighters from other separatist groups were to open, it seems likely the conflict will now be concentrated in the Tigray region for the next few months, as characterised by the earlier phase of the conflict. Prospects for any ceasefire are fragile and continued military air offensives in Tigray, the targeted killing of Tigrayan leadership or refusal to permit food and medical convoys into the embattled region will prolong the conflict and undermine prospects for peace. The humanitarian situation will remain bleak, with the UN Global Humanitarian Overview estimating as many as 22.3 million people nationwide could require humanitarian assistance throughout 2022 because of conflict, displacement, drought, flooding and locust infestation.

The central government will continue to tightly control media access to Ethiopia, especially in Tigray province. Moreover, detention of journalists and severe restrictions on movement will likely persist. Physical and digital surveillance will remain commonplace while the promotion of anti-media narratives has created hostility towards international journalists among the general population. The government’s use of emergency powers and pretence of national security will be used to crackdown on reporting, especially against local networks and journalists. Investigations into human rights atrocities by any side of the conflict will remain sensitive and hazardous.

Worryingly, it is hard to predict a reversal in Nigeria's deteriorating security situation in the year ahead. While the military will celebrate periodic successes in battles against militant groups in the Northeast, security forces have demonstrated their inability to sustain any anti-insurgency gains elsewhere. Large swathes of the Northwest and Middle Belt have suffered from rising levels of kidnapping, banditry, inter-ethnic clashes and a general decline in law and order, making travel in these regions much more perilous. Independent journalism is hazardous, with media outlets forced to close for political purposes in 2021, and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) increasingly becoming a politicised arm of the government. The government banned Twitter in June after the platform deleted a tweet from President Muhammadu Buhari; the ban was seen as an effort by government to control reporting on the deteriorating nationwide security situation. In addition, journalists have suffered multiple attacks for reporting on corruption and abuse of power by security forces.

The Media Foundation for West Africa and the Nigeria Union of Journalists have documented some 300 press freedom violations against journalists since Buhari assumed office in 2015.

Instability in Nigeria will weaken regional cooperation in tackling militancy across the Sahel. Islamist groups will continue to operate across large ungoverned areas in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, conducting fatal attacks on military convoys and civilian populations. We may also witness more incidents in northern regions of Benin, Togo and Ivory Coast as Sahelian militant groups probe further south and attempt to take advantage of long running discontent and poverty in these less developed regions.

Burkina Faso is particularly exposed to political instability in 2022. Since the fall of Compaoré in 2014, successive governments have failed to control much of its northern border region and the instability and poor economic situation saw popular unrest increase in the last quarter of 2021. The military suffered its largest loss of life in an attack in November, eroding already low morale among troops. President Roch Kabore assumed the head of defence role in July, replacing several top military generals in the past six months and the entire government resigned in early December. Although the foreign military presence is publicly contentious, French troop withdrawal from Mali later in 2022 could see regional security deteriorate even further and potentially reduce another deterrent to a coup. Both Mali and Chad witnessed unscheduled power shifts in 2021 without any major regional reprisals; unlike the Burkinabe coup in 2015, regional cooperation or intervention to reverse any coup seems unlikely.

Elsewhere in Africa: Mali, Guinea and Sudan also experienced coups in 2021 and the year's Afrobarometer has shown declining overall support for democracy in the region. Although not a standalone indicator for the likelihood of military intervention, public sentiment can be a key factor in upholding democratic regimes and public accountability. Sudan is set to experience continued unrest following the political takeover by the military last year, with episodes of violent unrest expected to continue in Khartoum for at least the first quarter of the year.

“Perceptions of limited democratic dividends will undermine government authority and state legitimacy, feeding popular protests and rebellions, and providing ostensible justification for military takeovers.”

**Oxford Analytica**

Intensified security crackdowns against protest movements and local media covering the political situation are likely, with the military reluctant to relinquish power. In Mali, the diplomatic tensions with ECOWAS member states and temporary closure of borders following the introduction of sanctions in January this year could see growing challenges visiting the country, including for journalists.

In Uganda and eastern DRC, the rise in suicide bomb attacks attributed to the now Islamic State affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) marks an alarming security trend and has prompted the Ugandan military to conduct operations in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. Access to the operations will be hazardous, even with military escort, and any prolonged operations or allegations of atrocities by Ugandan troops will further destabilise an already perilously insecure region.

## Living Through a Coup

Coups typically occur with little warning, at speed, and usually late at night or early in the morning.

Any sudden burst of activity from military forces indicates that something may be about to happen. Sporadic gunfire is the norm, sometimes with shelling and smoke seen above certain locations. Military personnel and equipment will quickly deploy around key infrastructure and sites such as a presidential palace, parliament building, radio and television stations, bridges and intersections in the capital and possibly around the barracks of rival military or police forces (e.g. Presidential Guard). In some countries, coups have become a well-rehearsed and almost routine occurrence; here they can be over in a matter of hours with little indication that anything much has changed.

Though foreign nationals are not routinely targeted during coups, there is a real risk of getting caught in the trouble and evacuation can be difficult with the closure of airports or national borders.

### Common characteristics:

- Imposition of roadblocks and checkpoints;
- Temporary closure of air, land and maritime borders;
- Communication blackouts: state TV and radio may put out pro-coup and ‘patriotic’ broadcasts;
- Curfews and restrictions on freedom of movement as part of emergency legislation;
- Public transport disrupted or suspended;
- Arrests and rounding up of individuals who may oppose the coup (e.g. activists, politicians etc.)
- Human rights abuses and atrocities against opposition groups and/or civilians;
- Media clampdown with restrictions on reporting;
- Counter coups and/or violent protests;
- Potential breakdown in law and order with looting and an increase in crime;

In the hours or days following a coup, you may experience:

- Public protests and a heavy response from the authorities;
- A clampdown on civil liberties including against the media;
- Supply shortages, including cash, common foods and fuel;
- Hostility towards foreign nationals if suspected of intervening in domestic affairs;
- Increase in insecurity and crime amid uncertainty and power vacuum, especially if police forces are disbanded;
- Counter-coup attempts from ex-regime loyalists or hired mercenaries;
- Large crowds for returning former exiled leaders/activists associated with the coup;
- Disruption to essential services as people leave the country or go on strike;

## Planning:

- Identify where you can safely lay low and shelter in place until the situation stabilises;
- Ensure you have a supply of emergency provisions, including food, drinking water, warm clothes, matches and candles, a head torch, some cash, and if possible access to a small generator with spare fuel;
- Maintain a check-in procedure with your employer. Consider taking a satellite phone if legal to bring and use;
- Stay connected with trusted contacts on the ground for the latest information;
- Monitor social media and local news sources for updates;
- Record your embassy contact details and what assistance they can offer;
- Review any sensitive information or footage on your devices that might cause issues with coup leaders;
- Ensure access to PPE when operating in locations likely to experience unrest or disorder.

The **Brazilian elections in October** could provide one of the biggest political news stories of the year. Coverage of the campaign and the aftermath of the vote will see mass popular gatherings and are likely to present challenges for journalists. Throughout his presidency, Jair Bolsonaro, has often resorted to the Trumpian playbook, and the election itself will be no different. Bolsonaro has already questioned the legitimacy of the vote and the integrity of the electoral court in an effort to cast doubt on the election result. Remarks that his electoral defeat would threaten Brazilian democracy are as worrying as they are contradictory, and he will continue to vilify the media on the campaign trail if public sentiment against his re-election grows. Bolsonaro will continue to discredit the vote and seek to mobilise popular support as the election approaches. His loyalists are known to be hostile towards the mainstream media, and journalists in Brazil should avoid attending political rallies alone and anticipate hostility from crowds. Assaults on the institutions of power, including Congress or the Supreme Court should not be discounted following the vote, as witnessed on the streets of Washington DC on 6 January last year.

The **Philippines** will also go to the polls in May with the knowledge that incumbent president Rodrigo Duterte cannot be re-elected due to constitutional term limits. There is optimism that Duterte's departure from office will see media freedoms improve after years of vitriolic attacks, threats and legal cases against journalists and news organisations in the country.

This is not certain, however, with the son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Junior among a busy pool of presidential candidates.

**Elections in France in April and US mid-terms in November** will generate great news interest. Both set in highly polarised political climates, journalists should prepare for hostility from crowds on the campaign trail. Extremes of both left and right, as well as opponents of Covid-related lockdowns, are common critics of the mainstream media. Journalists covering political rallies, interviews with the public and coverage of the aftermath of results should be prepared for unprovoked hostility in their work.

**Hungary holds elections in April** that have great significance for the country and its regional relations. For the first time since taking office 11 years ago, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the governing Fidesz party face a united broad church opposition coalition led by Peter Marki-Zay. During his time in power, Orbán has strengthened the Executive's grip on the Judiciary and Independent media and attempts to allow some loyalist Hungarians living abroad to vote in the election has aroused suspicion of attempted electoral manipulation. Polls currently predict that both camps are extremely close; a contested outcome could see Hungary's democratic credentials further stretched.

**Parliamentary elections are planned in Lebanon in May**, but the results are unlikely to usher in the more fundamental political and economic reforms required to break the cycle of decline the country is suffering.

Economic ruin has made cash and basic good shortages commonplace. Successive elections, governments, planned reforms and international pressures have done little to alleviate the malaise. It appears unlikely these elections will break political alliances and dynastic systems that are at the heart of Lebanon's decades of ineffective governance. It is more realistic to look at how long Lebanon can continue in its current demise without an internal breaking point forcing a change rather than look to the elections with renewed hope.

Other areas we expect to make headlines in 2022 include:

- Myanmar's civil conflict could escalate in 2022 and coverage of the conflict or human rights abuses by the military could result in arrest. The military will continue to use air strikes and raids in rural areas to try and counter the various separatist groups, but is unlikely to have the ability to control the entire country and tackle insurgency groups. A protracted civil conflict is the most likely scenario that the military junta will use as justification for use of emergency powers and tight controls on any political opposition.
- Libya's fragile ceasefire is on a knife edge and militant groups continue to possess capability to take over their own respective areas of operation at short notice, as witnessed in parts of Tripoli in December 2021. Failure to hold delayed elections or contested results could see the country return to the division and instability that characterised the 2015-2020 period. Journalism around the election will remain hazardous; militias have targeted and intimidated local journalists for political reporting.
- Persistent tensions and mistrust between the president and prime minister in Somalia threaten elections with the political impasse a boon to militant group Al-Shabaab, which will continue to capitalise on the instability, controlling swathes of the country and able to conduct periodic high-impact attacks in Mogadishu. The general instability and direct targeting by militant and political actors make journalism extremely high risk in Somalia. The outlook for Central African Republic is equally bleak, with the civil conflict enhanced by competing foreign interests and weak governance, especially outside Bangui.
- Bosnia faces a testing year ahead that could threaten the unity of the country and the principles established in the Dayton Accords. Serb nationalist leader Milorad Dodik is testing political unity and has threatened to break up institutional collaboration between Bosnia's different ethnic groups, including in the military. He claims to have outside support, thought to mean Serbia and potentially Russia. Given its history and the make-up of the country, rising ethno-nationalism will test Bosnia's stability and will be closely monitored by regional neighbours and the EU.
- Kenya will hold general elections in August, marking the end of the two-term presidency of Uhuru Kenyatta. Two familiar political figures in Raila Odinga and William Ruto look likely to lead the presidential candidates in what will mark Kenya's third election since the fateful, disputed vote of 2007 that saw more than one thousand people killed in ethnic and tribal violence. While voting patterns remain heavily influenced by ethnicity and some localised electoral violence has occurred in more recent elections, a peaceful passage of government will mark a key milestone for Kenyan democracy and a boon to the East Africa region. Any rejuvenated attempts to fast track amendments to the constitution ahead of the vote, following the High Court's rejection of proposed "handshake principles" last year could intensify political tensions and serve as an indicator for unrest in the build-up to the vote.
- Last year's outlook assessed how Turkey would balance its varied and growing international commitments. The focus for President Recep Erdogan in the year ahead will be dominated by domestic economic events, namely controlling spiralling inflation which rose by 36% in 2021 and has seen the cost of living rise drastically for the Turkish population. Having taken a series of unconventional and unsuccessful economic measures to manage the situation, Erdogan is facing growing opposition to his support and could take on more drastic measures, including tighter restrictions on dissent to manage the threat of unrest.



- **Tunisia**, the last of the Arab Spring democracies, could transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system in the year ahead. President Kais Saied seized governing powers from parliament in July and a senior member of the former governing Ennahda party was arrested in late December, indicating a potential crackdown on political opponents. Although Tunisia's past decade has been fraught with governing instability and economic difficulty, the past six months' developments mark a concerning turn. Efforts by Saied to amend the constitution via public referendum could usher in a period of more autocratic rule in the country.
- 2022 will be a key bellwether for the direction of El Salvador under President Nayib Bukele. Bukele holds considerable popular support and has used his legislative majority to increase the government's reach over the judicial branch of government. Bukele could, however, struggle to maintain popularity if economic circumstances deteriorate, corruption is exposed in government or the Executive adopts a more authoritarian stance. Diplomatic relations with the US are poor and several El Salvadorian officials were sanctioned last year; regionally isolated, El Salvador could increasingly cosy up to other populist states such as Nicaragua and Venezuela, while also seeking closer financial and diplomatic ties with Beijing or Moscow. The country's experimentation with Bitcoin as legal tender alongside the US Dollar will be closely watched as it is the first country in the world to adopt cryptocurrency in this way.
- Could Haiti become a failed state in 2022? The murder of President Jovenel Moïse in July followed by another suspected assassination attempt of incumbent Ariel Henry in January this year is symbolic of Haiti's persistent instability and lack of state power. Rampant gang violence combined with weak state institutions and security forces have left areas of the country beyond the control of the state and extremely hazardous for journalists. Further shocks such another major earthquake or dissolution of the government could see the spiral of violence worsen further.
- **Northern Ireland** is likely to experience increased unrest and potential episodes of political violence because of the political and economic limbo caused by Brexit. National Assembly Elections on 5 May could exacerbate political divisions. Past periods of unrest have corresponded with cycles of intimidation of the media and teams should have adequate safety training when covering protests, localised rioting or other divisive political subjects.
- Several major sporting events will occur throughout the year, starting with the **African Cup of Nations** which is underway in Cameroon, the **Beijing Olympics** in February, and the **Qatar World Cup** in November/December. Covid travel restrictions and sensitivities around human rights issues for both Chinese and Qatari authorities are noteworthy considerations for journalists covering the events. Meanwhile separatists in Cameroon have vowed to disrupt Africa's major football tournament, having already demonstrated the ability to engage security forces and conduct small bomb attacks beyond their regional strongholds. Three journalists were robbed at knifepoint and two were injured outside their hotel in Doula on 9 January, illustrating persistent threats of violent crime in urban areas. The Commonwealth Games and Women's European Championships are two noteworthy summer events for UK-based broadcasters.

