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PRESS FREEDOM VIOLATIONS IN AFRICA: IPI PILOT REPORT

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Introduction

Nearly all countries in sub-Saharan Africa have adopted constitutions that establish democracy as the form of government and guarantee fundamental rights, including press freedom and freedom of expression. However, the gap between these constitutional protections and the reality that journalists experience remains wide. This is particularly problematic given the critical role that journalists and media play in fostering democracy and the rule of law. Continuous efforts to promote press freedom rights and the safety of journalists have become imperative in the face of the fragile gains made in terms of democratic governance on the continent.

As part of its Africa programme, the International Press Institute (IPI), the global network of editors, media executives, and journalists, has embarked on a project to monitor attacks on journalists and carry out advocacy to ensure justice and accountability for those responsible. The project seeks to contribute to sustaining the fragile gains of press freedom and advance progress. Working together with local partners, IPI aims to systematically collect data on press freedom violations and carry out robust advocacy actions to defend press freedom as a backbone of sustained democracy and inclusive and gender-equal societies. An additional element of the project will focus on journalistic capacity-building vis-à-vis investigating and combating a rise in online attacks and disinformation campaigns targeting fact-based independent journalism.

The present report on the monitoring of press freedom violations focuses on IPI's collection of data for a pilot period of April to June 2022. The data analyzed originated from IPI's own monitoring of the press freedom landscape, inputs from local CSOs, with whom IPI works in close cooperation, and IPI members.

This report is part of a series of advocacy materials that IPI will be producing on a regular, monthly, and quarterly basis to raise awareness, hold state actors accountable for press freedom violations, and serve as a reference for evidence-based advocacy to defend press freedom and journalist safety.

The report presents an overview of the monitoring, categories of violations of press freedom recorded, and the source of the violation, if known. In addition to presenting the data, the report aims to draw out significant trends and patterns regarding attacks and restrictions on journalists in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting particular issues or countries of concern as identified in the monitoring period in question.

Overview of findings

A total of 116 press freedom violations were recorded in 29 sub-Saharan African countries in the pilot period of April to June 2022.

Violations were recorded in four main categories: arrests/charges (49); physical, verbal or online attacks (48); censorship and regulation (11); and restrictions on access to information (8).

Out of 15 subcategories of press freedom violations, three accounted for the vast majority of all violations recorded in the period under review:

- Arrest, detention or charges (45)
- Physical attacks on journalists, media infrastructures/offices (28)
- Verbal attack, threats against journalists (11)

The primary sources of these incidents of violations are state actors (89), unknown (16), private non-state actors (7), and armed groups (5).

The violations targeted 125 journalists, of whom 44 were female and 81 were male.

Nigeria recorded the highest number of press freedom violations (27), followed by Ethiopia (12), and Somalia (10).

116 PRESS FREEDOM VIOLATIONS IN 29 SUB-SAHARAN COUNTRIES



Aperçu des violations

Un total de 116 violations de la liberté de la presse a été enregistrées dans 29 pays d'Afrique subsaharienne au cours de la période d'avril à juin 2022.

Les violations ont été enregistrées dans quatre principales catégories: arrestations/accusations (49); attaques physiques, verbales ou en ligne (48); censure et réglementation (11) ; et restrictions d'accès à l'information (8).

Sur les 15 sous-catégories de violations de la liberté de la presse, trois représentent près des trois quarts de toutes les violations enregistrées au cours de la période considérée:

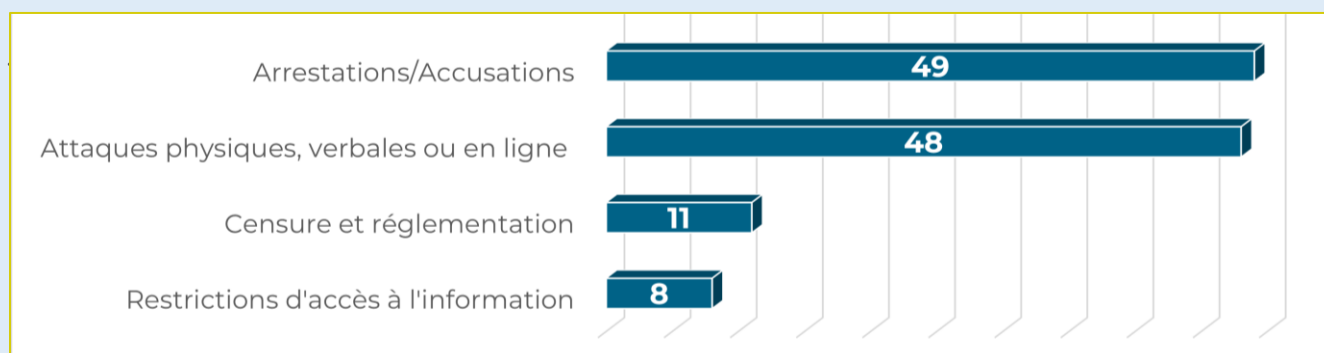
- Arrestation, détention ou inculpation (45)
- Attaques physiques contre des journalistes, des infrastructures ou des bureaux de médias (28)
- Attaques verbales, menaces contre des journalistes (11)

Les auteurs principaux de ces incidents de violations sont des acteurs étatiques (88), inconnus (16), des acteurs privés non étatiques (7), et des groupes armés (5).

Les violations ont visé 125 journalistes, dont 44 femmes et 81 hommes.

Le Nigeria a enregistré le plus grand nombre de violations de la liberté de la presse (27), suivi par l'Éthiopie (12) et la Somalie (10).

DISTRIBUTION DES CATÉGORIES DE VIOLATIONS



Methodology

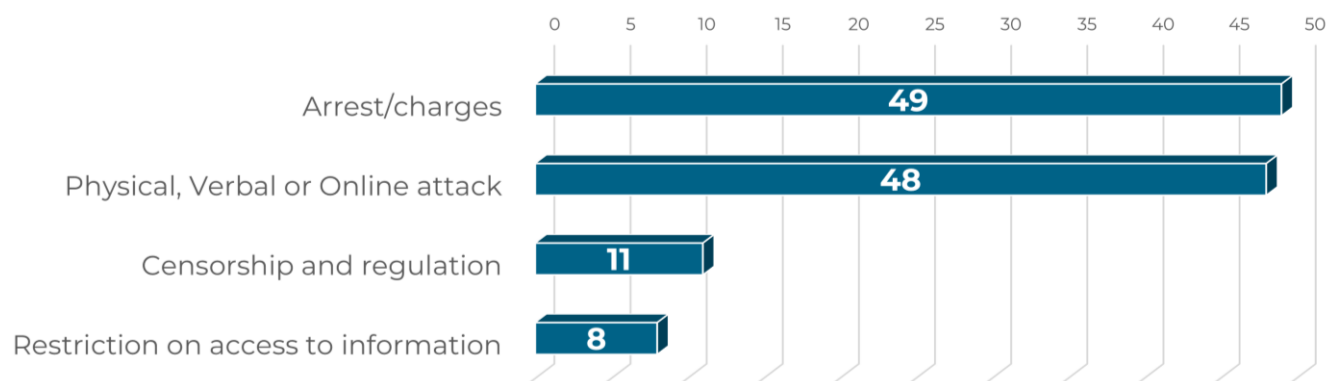
To monitor and document attacks on journalists and other press freedom violations, IPI has leveraged its several decades of experience and expertise in promoting and protecting press freedom to design a monitoring guide. This serves as a reference in scanning the press freedom landscape and coding the different types of violations.

Data is collected by IPI's Africa team through published reports by independent and non-governmental media defence groups, press unions, associations, and credible news outlets in the countries in question. The information collected is fact-checked with media organizations, individual journalists, human rights organizations, and members of IPI's network.

Press freedom violations by category

A total of 116 press freedom violations were recorded in 29 sub-Saharan African countries in the pilot period of April to June 2022. Violations occurred in four main categories: arrests/charges (49); physical, verbal or online attacks (48); censorship and regulation (11); and restrictions on access to information (8).

DISTRIBUTION OF CATEGORIES OF VIOLATIONS



Press freedom violations in sub-Saharan Africa, April to June 2022, by main category

DESCRIPTION OF CATEGORIES:

Physical, verbal, or online attack:	Cases of physical attacks, violence, and threats against a journalist or media outlet.
Arrest/detention:	Cases in which a journalist is detained, arrested, and/or charged in relation to their journalism, or sentenced by a court.
Censorship and regulation:	Cases of censorship of news content, or the use of laws or regulations to restrict the work of the press, as well as the enactment of laws and regulation unduly restricting journalistic work.
Restriction on access to information:	Cases in which journalists' access to information was restricted.

Violations were also recorded in 15 subcategories. The subcategory of arrest, detention, or charges saw the most violations, with 45. This type of violation was recorded in 15 countries. Nigeria recorded the most violations under this category (10), followed by Ethiopia (11), DRC and Somaliland (4) each, and Somalia (3).

The second-most-frequent subcategory of violations was physical attacks on journalists or media offices/infrastructure. Thirty-six (36) journalists suffered such violations, including 21 male journalists and 15 female journalists. This type of violation was recorded in 16 countries. Nigeria recorded the highest number (9) of violations, followed by Somalia (3), Ghana, and Mali (2 each).

Fourteen (14) journalists suffered verbal attacks (the third-most common subcategory), of whom seven were men and seven were women. This type of violation was documented in 10 countries, with two violations in Sierra Leone, and one in nine other countries. State actors in countries such as Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Malawi, Somalia, and Sudan accounted for one each of the recorded verbal attacks, while unknown individuals perpetrated five, one each in Burkina Faso, DRC, Zimbabwe, and Kenya.

Fortunately, contrary to last year's second quarter, which recorded the killing of three journalists in [Burkina Faso](#) and [Ethiopia](#), this period did not see the killing of a journalist.

Press freedom violations by source

Out of the total of 116 violations recorded, state actors – including security forces (police), media regulators, government officials, and courts – were responsible for 89. Other sources of violations were private non-state actors and armed groups. The source of some violations is unknown.

PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

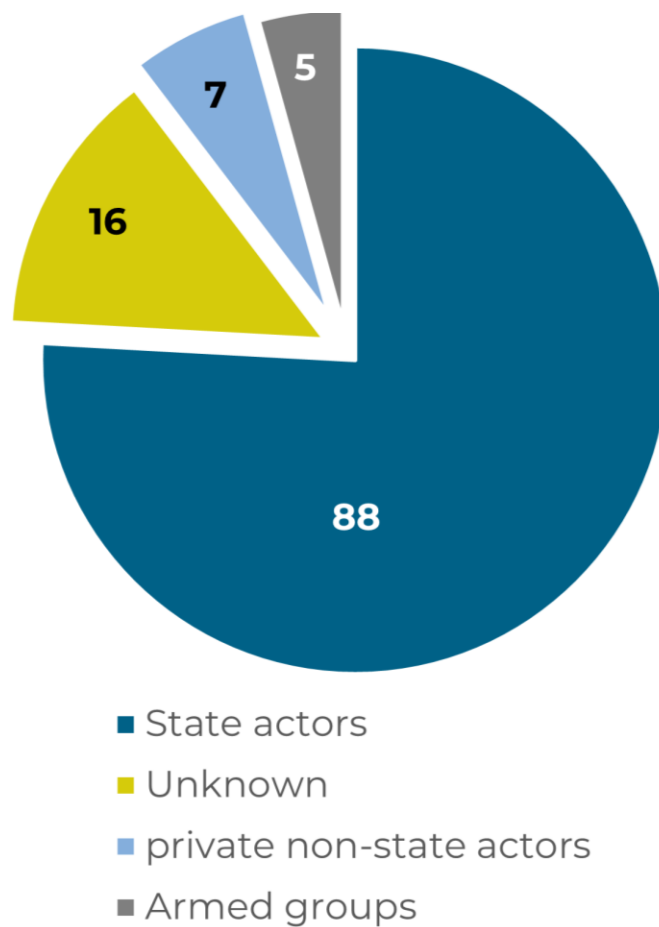


Chart of perpetrators of violations in sub-Saharan Africa, April to June 2022

Press freedom violations by gender

During this period, IPI documented 44 press freedom violations involving female journalists.

It was not always clear to the extent to which gender plays a role in attacks on female journalists. However, one case in Cameroon, in which sports journalist Macdella Eyong Bessong was the victim of [verbal and sexual assaults](#), highlights how women journalists can be targeted both for their profession and for their gender. The recording of attacks on female journalists remains a priority for IPI's Africa monitoring programme given the likelihood that such attacks are underreported.

The table below shows the targets of press freedom violations by gender.

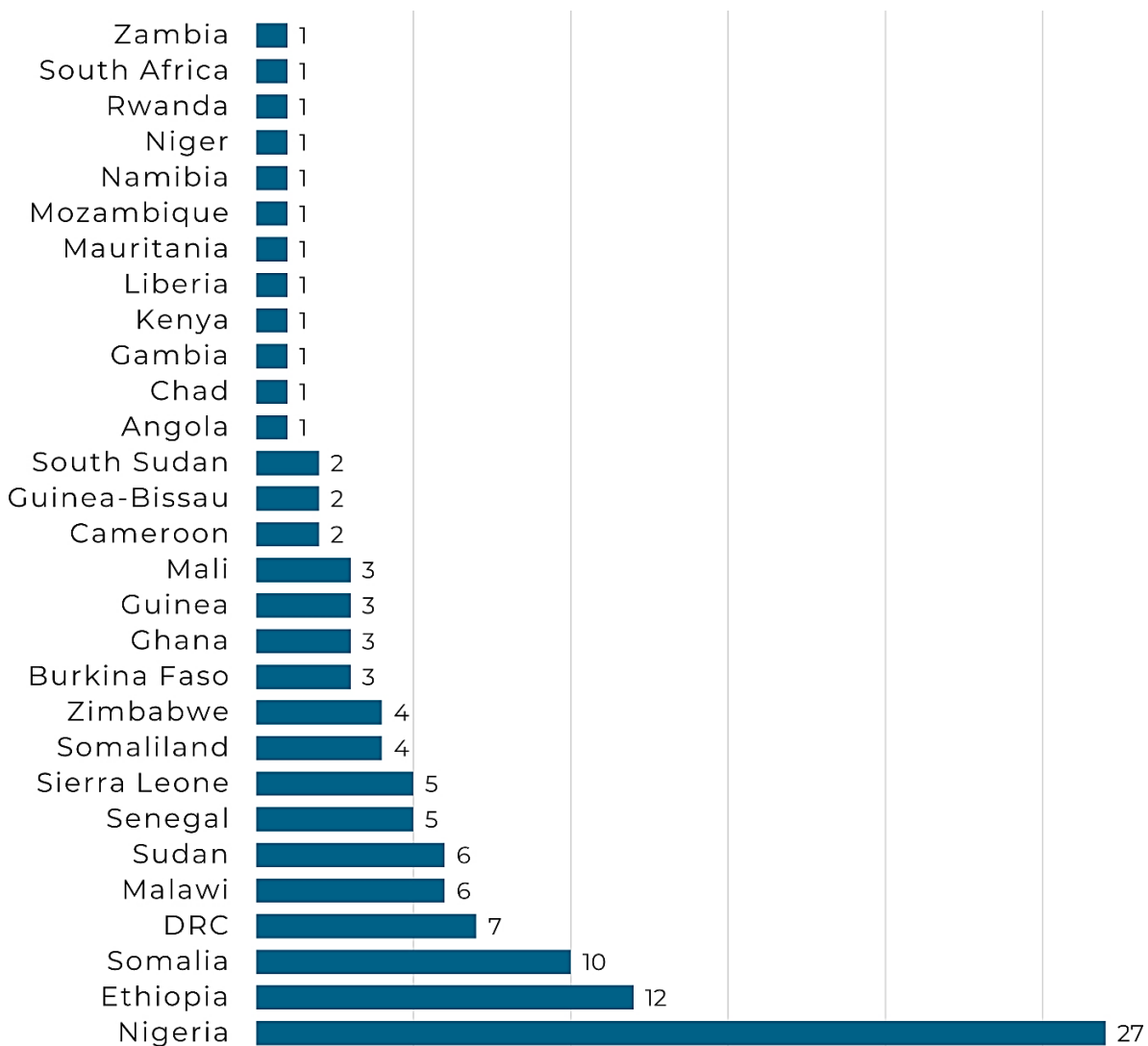
Number of targeted journalists	FEMALE	MALE
Arrest/charges	16	44
Censorship and regulation	2	3
Physical, verbal or online attack	24	32
Restriction of access to information	2	2
TOTAL	44	81

Distribution of victims of violations per gender in sub-Saharan Africa, April to June 2022

Press freedom violations: overview by country

Out of the total of 116 press freedom violations recorded, six countries recorded more than five press freedom violations during this quarter. Nigeria topped the list with 27, followed by Ethiopia (12), Somalia (10, including Somaliland), DRC (7), Malawi (6), and Sudan (6). The table below shows all countries for which violations were recorded.

VIOLATIONS DISTRIBUTION PER COUNTRY



Distribution of violations per country in sub-Saharan Africa, April to June 2022

Selected attacks in the four countries with most recorded violations

NIGERIA: 27

Recently, political activity has intensified in Nigeria as part of political party primary elections ahead of the February 25, 2023, general elections. This had led to a series of attacks on the press related to coverage of election campaigns and public protests, among other issues. On June 27, the police [arrested](#) two journalists, Haruna Mohammed and Idris Kamal of Wikki Times, an online local newspaper in Bauchi, the capital city of Bauchi State in northeast Nigeria. The duo was brought before a court over a report deemed defamatory of Yakubu Abdullahi, a member of the House of Representatives of Bauchi Central Constituency.

On May 31, Toba Adedeji from The Nations newspaper [was hit by a bullet in his thigh fired](#) by a police officer while covering an anti-police-brutality protest in Osogbo, the capital city of Osun state. On May 24, the police [arrested three journalists](#), Deborah Coker of News Agency of Nigeria, Sunny Inarume of African Independent Television, and Osamuyi Ogbomo of Independent Television, while covering a factional primary election of the Peoples Democratic Party, in Benin, the capital city of Edo State. On May 22, a police officer, Ezra Yuguda, commandant at the Government House in Uyo, [slapped journalist Harrison Essien](#) of the state-owned radio station AKBC Radio. Essien was



thrown to the ground by the police officer. This happened when the journalist was covering the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) primaries in the state. Still on the note of violence against journalists related to the elections, on May 17, the police in Port Harcourt, the capital city of Rivers State, [assaulted, harassed, and intimidated seven journalists](#), namely, Anita Ogona, Allwell Ene of Naija FM, Ayo Odungweru of Wave FM, Chiweta Nwagbara of Love FM, Soibi Oruwari of Nigeria Info, and Monica Ogwa and Chuks Nweke of Rhythm FM.

ETHIOPIA: 12

Since November 2020, Ethiopia has been confronted with internal conflict. Authorities have responded with a heavy hand, [disrupting](#) communication means and arresting journalists. This pattern has continued into this year. As an illustration, in the space of just three weeks in the month of May, 19 journalists were [arrested and detained](#) under the country’s vague anti-terrorism law or other laws instrumentalized against journalists. On May 26, police arrested journalist [Temesgen Desalegn](#) on suspicion of “inciting unrest and creating public distrust of the security forces and the government” and since then he has been in jail. However, the Ethiopian federal actors are not the only ones responsible for the abuse of press freedom. The authorities of the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) have [arrested and detained](#) five journalists over 50 days on allegations of “collaboration with the enemy”.



SOMALIA: 10

Journalists in Somalia faced a series of press freedom violations, with physical assault, arrest and detention being the most frequent. Out of the ten (10) violations recorded, security forces/police accounted for more than half of the violations with physical assaults, arrest and detention, and restrictions on access to information. Armed groups committed one violation. Below are some selected incidents of these press violations to illustrate the situation in Somalia, as well as in the self-governing but internationally unrecognized state of Somaliland. On April 6, 15 journalists were [arrested](#) while covering a prison scuffle in Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland. Only 12 were later released. On May 12, the police in the region of Puntland [detained](#) freelance journalist Abdiaziz Haybe Ibrahim working for SBC Somali TV. Police confiscated his laptop and camera after a raid on his office. On May 24, two journalists, Abdikarin Mohamed Siyad and Kjalid Mohamud Osman, travelling alongside a Somali government and military convoy [were injured](#) in a bomb attacks by armed group.



DRC: 7

Journalists in the DRC also face a battery of attacks, both from state actors and armed groups. Out of the seven (7) violations documented, state actors and armed groups were responsible for five. On April 21, Sebastien Mulamba was [arrested](#) by security forces and accused of possession of weapons after criticizing local authorities in a radio commentary. Three journalists, Albert Muhila, Dieu Agba, and Patrick Gbondo, were detained over a criminal complaint before being released after a week. It was not clear who filed the complaint, but the [arrest](#) of the journalists followed a radio programme in which Jean Pierre Lihau, vice prime minister and in charge of public administration was criticized by the guests of the radio programme. On June 13, the military group M23 raided the community radio station La Voix de Mikeno and [destroyed](#) work equipment. In addition, three journalists were reportedly the targets of [verbal attacks and death threats](#) on social media and via telephone calls from unknown individuals.



The table below shows the further breakdown of violations recorded per category and country.

Country	Arrest/ charges	Censorship and regulation	Physical, verbal or online attack	Restriction on access to information	Total
Nigeria	10	1	14	2	27
Ethiopia	11			1	12
Somalia	3		5	2	10
Malawi	2	1	3		6
DRC	4		3		7
Sudan	2	2	2		6
Senegal	2	2	1		5
Sierra Leone	2		3		5
Zimbabwe	2		2		5
Somaliland	4				4
Burkina Faso			2	1	3
Ghana	1		2		3
Guinea	1	1	1		3
Mali			2	1	3
Cameroon		1	1		2
Guinea-Bissau		1	1		2
South Sudan	1	1			2
Angola			1		1
Chad	1				1

Gambia			1		1
Kenya			1		1
Liberia			1		1
Mauritania	1				1
Mozambique		1			1
Namibia			1		1
Niger	1				1
Rwanda				1	1
South Africa			1		1
Zambia	1				1
TOTAL	49	11	48	8	116

Table of distribution of the number of violations per country in sub-Saharan Africa, April to June 2022, by main category

Trend analysis of press freedom violations

Several trends are worth highlighting from this monitoring period.

The first is the high number of violations in the category of arrest, detention or charges of journalists (50). Sixty (60) journalists were arrested or detained in the line of duty, of whom 44 were male and 26 were female. (Note: Some violations included the arrests of multiple journalists). In a number of these cases, journalists were arbitrarily arrested and detained, and released without charges. For instance, three journalists were [arrested](#) and detained while covering a political party election in Nigeria. Three out of four of these arrests took place on vaguely defined arrest warrants. Defamation remains a common ground for abusive arrest procedures (and even though many countries have decriminalized press libel). A journalist can be summoned or invited for interrogation and find him- or herself in a detention cell, particularly when the complaint comes from a public powerful person or a government authority. For instance, in April, the police in Nigeria [arrested](#) journalist Victor Ita over a defamation complaint lodged against him by a former federal lawmaker, Senator Bassey Otu. In some cases, the arrest and detentions are followed by a series of court appearances, which can amount to legal harassment to deter critical reportage. In Zimbabwe, two journalists, Blessed Mhlanga and Chengeto Chidi, were assaulted, arrested, and detained by the police in May for allegedly taking pictures in polling stations while votes were in progress. Since then, they have been forced to [appear](#) in court several times. At the time of writing, their next court appearance is [scheduled](#) for August 4, 2022. In other developments, a court in Somalia sentenced journalists Mohamed Abdi Sheik Mohamed and Abdijabar Mohamed to 16 months' imprisonment for the [publication of false information](#) online.

Anti-terror and security laws remain common tools to intimidate journalists. In Ethiopia, at least 19 journalists and media workers were arrested and detained as part of an “anti-crime operation” because of their journalistic work on the ongoing internal conflicts.

In some cases, journalists are also [tried](#) under laws seemingly unrelated to the practice of journalism, but may still be invoked to pressure journalists because of

their work. An illustration of this was the two-year suspended prison sentence imposed on Jeffrey Moyo, a freelance journalist in Zimbabwe, over an alleged breach of immigration law.

A second trend of press freedom violations relates to physical and verbal attacks. Many of these attacks were linked to coverage of the activities of political parties ahead of elections. The attacks in this category were carried out by multiple perpetrators, however security forces/police were the primary group responsible. During this reporting period, there were a total of 48 physical, verbal and online attacks targeting 56 journalists, 32 male and 24 female. Violence by security forces against journalists reveals the risks journalists face while doing their job. This includes a lack of respect by security forces for the role that journalists play in a democratic society and lack of respect for their rights as guaranteed by the law and constitution. Another challenge identified is the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement against journalists and media.

In some cases of these attacks, perpetrators were non-state actors, although this category includes influential public figures as well as persons considered to be political party sympathizers. Such attacks occurred, for instance, in Nigeria and [Senegal](#), in the context of preliminary electoral activities. Still related to elections, journalists in Somaliland also experienced restrictions on their work. Authorities [blocked](#) journalists' access to information during the May 15 presidential election, while other journalists faced threats from security forces. All together, more than 30 journalists and several media houses were victims of assaults or verbal attacks in the context of elections in three countries (Nigeria, Senegal, and Somalia). Kenya will also head to elections in August. With the electoral campaigns gaining momentum, the Media Council of Kenya has [cautioned](#) politicians to refrain from threatening journalists and media houses ahead of the elections.

Conclusion

Press freedom is a cornerstone of any democratic state. However, in most African countries that have embraced, at least on paper, a democratic form of government, press freedom remains in a dire situation. Journalists continue to be targeted for their work, facing arrests and verbal, physical, or online attacks.

IPI's monitoring work shows that the number of press freedom violations in sub-Saharan Africa continues to be staggering, particularly in countries heading to elections. In countries where insecurity and internal conflicts are persistent, journalists are at a high risk of attack.

Increasingly, states, and especially security forces, are undermining press freedom rights. Journalists are arbitrarily arrested and detained. Legal frameworks are also instrumentalized to prosecute critical journalists. It is expected that the clampdown on press freedom online will also increase under the pretence of fighting "fake news", disinformation, and breach of cybersecurity law. Such issues will be central to IPI's monitoring work going forward.