

RED LINES

Retaliation in the media industry during the war on Gaza

In the months since October 7, Western media workers have faced a wave of retaliation for speaking up against or critically covering Israel's war on Gaza—and in particular, for voicing support for Palestinians. In an effort to better understand the power dynamics and mechanisms behind the phenomenon, the National Writers Union tracked 44 cases of retaliation that impacted more than 100 media workers, who are disproportionately people of color.



NWU NATIONAL
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Since Hamas's attack on October 7 and Israel's subsequent military operations in Gaza, leaders of Western media companies and cultural institutions have acted to suppress the speech of media workers who seek to elevate Palestinian voices or express concern about Israel's human rights violations. The National Writers Union (NWU) has compiled and verified 44 cases of retaliation that occurred between October 7, 2023 and February 1, 2024, which have affected more than 100 people.

The authors of this report define retaliation as any action taken by a venue, outlet, organization, or group that has negatively affected a media worker, and that was triggered by a perception that the worker's speech and/or actions supported the Palestinian cause or criticized the government of Israel. Retaliatory action, as we define it, can come from leaders inside the workplace or from outside individuals or interest groups. These cases are particularly concerning in the context of intensifying retaliation beyond the media industry—whether in the form of [institutionally condoned harassment](#), [mass arrests](#), or [legislative pushes](#) that could [criminalize](#) criticism of Israel.

The data collected by NWU suggests that this retaliation has disproportionately targeted media workers of color, particularly workers of Middle Eastern or North African descent and those who identify as Muslim. Three quarters of the cases where detailed demographic data was available involved people of color or Latinx people. More than a third of the targets of retaliation were Muslims or people of Middle Eastern or North African descent. These findings suggest that newsrooms' grand gestures toward diversity, equity, and inclusion in recent years—especially since the police killing of George Floyd in 2020—have fallen short in this ongoing crisis or were superficial all along.

While this report's findings are not comprehensive, they offer a window into what is likely a much more widespread, systemic phenomenon.

The range of cases compiled in this report were drawn from news reports, social media posts, phone calls, and/or messages exchanged with affected individuals, as well as two surveys administered by NWU. The first survey asked workers to share their experiences of workplace retaliation for their support of Palestinians or view of the war on Gaza; the second asked workers whether and how they have self-censored speech on Israel and Palestine in response to the threat of retaliation. Every case included in the quantitative analysis was fact-checked. Incidents that

could not be verified were left out of that analysis, as were incidents of potential retaliation that occurred or came to light after February 1. (At least one such case has [resulted](#) in a lawsuit.) While the report's findings are not comprehensive, they offer a window into what is likely a much more widespread, systemic phenomenon that did not start in October 2023.

The sample of impacted workers is as diverse as NWU's membership, including freelancers, staffers, two editors-in-chief, early-career journalists, audio workers, a playwright, a Pulitzer-prize winning author, and media workers publishing with corporate, nonprofit, and academic organizations. The majority of cases concern media workers in the United States, yet given NWU's international membership, they also include people from around the world, employed by outlets in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and countries in Europe.

In the West, there is a long history of suppressing Palestinian voices and viewpoints critical of Israel. But since October 7, this suppression has become one of the most urgent issues facing media workers. While Western media workers who have ties to the Middle East and North Africa and offer distinct insight into the war on Gaza are being muzzled and reprimanded—prevented from doing their jobs—Palestinian journalists on the ground are being [killed](#) en masse.

Retaliation is just as much a media ethics issue as it is a labor issue.

As this report goes live, at least 102 Palestinian, four Israeli, and three Lebanese media workers have been [killed](#) in the region since October 7, according to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). The Israeli military has shown a blatant disregard for the lives of media workers in Gaza. In fact, there is clear evidence that the Israeli military has intentionally targeted those wearing press vests. For example, on October 13, Israeli forces targeted and killed a journalist and wounded six others, according to investigations from [Reuters](#), [AFP](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and [Amnesty International](#). As a sister union of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, NWU condemns the deadly [violence](#), [smear campaigns](#), and [deprivation](#) that the Israeli state is currently inflicting on journalists in the entire Occupied Palestinian Territory and the surrounding region.

When management at media organizations keep their employees in the West from critically covering the Israeli government, highlighting extreme violence on social media, or advocating for the protection of their colleagues, they contribute to the escalating violence that is materially affecting the most vulnerable media workers in Gaza. They also risk undermining several core journalistic imperatives—including the imperative to [minimize harm](#). In other words, retaliation is just as much a media ethics issue as it is a labor issue.

BY THE NUMBERS

1 Cancellation of Appearance/Events

Event(s) canceled, including show, awards ceremony, screening, and/or promotional event.

2 Cancellation of Assignment

Commissioned project(s) killed or indefinitely postponed, short-term contract canceled, and/or employer committed not to hire freelancer for future assignments.

3 Assignment Restriction

Worker forbidden from covering a beat or subject, whether temporarily or permanently, worker reassigned, and/or worker suspended from job.

4 Termination

Worker fired or long-term contract cut short or not renewed.

5 Resignation

Worker resigned, or coerced to resign, as a result of retaliation or pressure from management.

6 Social Media Suppression

Worker faced retaliation because of social media post(s); workplace instituted new, intensified, and/or ambiguous social media policy.

What forms does retaliation take?

7 Online Harassment

Worker targeted by harmful online behavior that is pervasive or severe, including but not limited to threats, humiliation, insults, hate speech, doxing, and/or distortion of speech.

8 Award Rescinded

Award and/or residency withdrawn or scaled down, or worker gave up award as a result of retaliation.

BY THE NUMBERS

How many people are impacted by different types of *retaliation*?

Cancellation of Appearance/Events

10 **10**
Cases Individuals

Cancellation of Assignment

9 **9+**
Cases Individuals

Assignment Restriction (Including Reassignment)

6 **67**
Cases Individuals

Termination

7 **7**
Cases Individuals

Resignation

3 **3**
Cases Individuals

Social Media Suppression

16 **21+**
Cases Individuals

Online Harassment

5 **5**
Cases Individuals

Award Rescinded

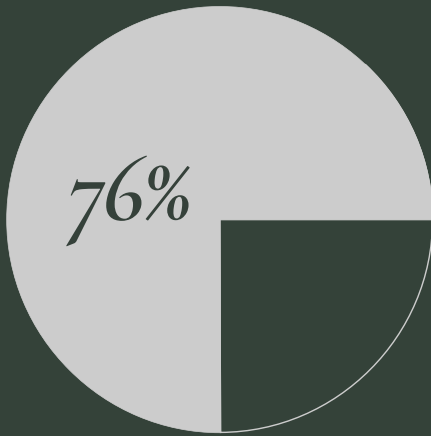
3 **3**
Cases Individuals

Other

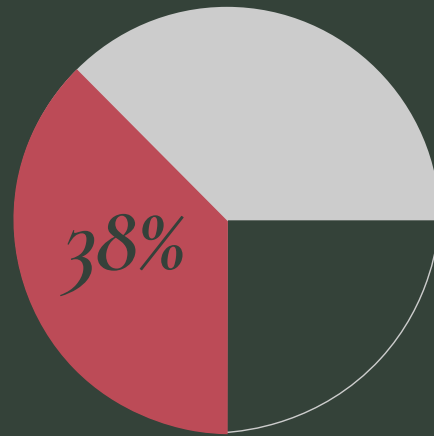
1 **1**
Cases Individuals

BY THE NUMBERS

Who is impacted by *retaliation?*



Number of POC/Latinx
individuals: 62



Number of MENA/Muslim
individuals: 31

Total number of impacted individuals for cases where we had demographic info:
82 people (40 cases)

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

NWU's investigation identified widespread retaliation against media workers in response to the perception that they support the Palestinian cause or are critical of the Israeli government. Our online research, interviews with workers, and surveys did not unearth a similarly pervasive trend for media workers facing retaliation for speech perceived as supportive of Israel. In some cases, retaliation was driven by allegations of antisemitism—often by [organizations](#) and [individuals](#) that conflated expressions of solidarity with Palestinians or anti-Zionist sentiments with antisemitism.

We do not necessarily endorse or condemn the comments or actions of the individuals in our report. NWU undertook this project in response to the needs expressed by media workers in the U.S. We are a worker-led organization, so our report centers workers and their grievances.

At the extreme end of our retaliation findings, NWU identified 10 cases where media companies fired staffers, terminated long-term contracts, or pressured an employee to resign for editorial choices, social media posts, or statements that expressed solidarity with Palestinians or criticized Israeli state action. Eight other cases involved editors canceling the assignments of freelance workers. (A ninth case involved assignments of staff workers being canceled.) Other workers faced canceled appearances or events and/or rescinded awards.

Workers in our sample were most likely to suffer retaliation in the form of social media suppression, including via new, wide-reaching policies affecting dozens of workers at outlets including [The Guardian](#), with its liberal reputation, and [Hearst Magazines](#), with its roster of more than 25 brands. Signing open letters also spurred retaliation: 38 workers at the [Los Angeles Times](#) and 20 workers at the Australia-based [Sydney Morning Herald](#) and The Age were restricted from covering certain topics after signing letters condemning the deaths of Palestinian journalists.

Sometimes, social media backlash escalated into harassment. Multiple cases included in our quantitative analysis are not described in the report, at the request of those impacted, due to online harassment that escalated to threats of violence or death.

Twenty-four of the cases we gathered, impacting more than 60 people, involved U.S. institutions. Twenty of the cases, impacting more than 45 people, involved institutions based in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy.

The result of such retaliation is not merely the deplatforming of a couple dozen media workers. Rather, it encompasses the silencing of countless others, for whom instances of retaliation serve as warnings against speaking out, now and in the future. The majority of the 22 respondents to NWU's self-censorship survey said that they felt more pressure than before October 7 to censor their speech.

Our survey questions were intentionally open-ended, inviting participants to share their experiences of pressure to self-censor speech related in any way to Israel or Palestine. Twenty respondents said they felt that they should avoid public speech showing solidarity with Palestinians, criticizing Israeli state action, and/or characterizing the ongoing bombardment of Gaza as “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide.” Conversely, one respondent described pressure to avoid expressing support for Israel. Survey participants named firing, blacklisting, and marginalization within the industry as among the consequences they expected to face if they voiced their views on the topic.

The following sections discuss the results in greater detail and highlight some central themes, takeaways, and recommendations.

TERMINATION, RESIGNATION, AND CANCELED ASSIGNMENTS

Two editors-in-chief, a longtime contract [cartoonist](#), an [apprentice](#), a [production assistant](#), and a [sports reporter](#) were among those fired over their public statements and editorial choices regarding Israel and Palestine.

Artforum, for instance, fired Editor-in-Chief David Velasco after he oversaw the publication of an [open letter](#) that over 8,000 artists and cultural workers signed in solidarity with Palestinians. The board of eLife, a medical and life sciences journal, [fired](#) Editor-in-Chief Michael Eisen after he [retweeted](#) a satirical article from The Onion that called out many people’s indifference to the lives of Palestinians. Palestinian journalist Zahraa Al-Akhrass was on maternity leave when Canada’s Global News [fired](#) her for social media posts that included the hashtags #freepalestine, #gazaunderattack, and #gazagenocide. Al-Akhrass said that she regularly posts her opinions about a range of current events and that she had never been questioned by an employer until now. “Global was literally asking me to look at these horrific images, this genocide, and detach myself from my identity, my own people, and say nothing,” Al-Akhrass said in a video [posted](#) to Instagram. “Is this ethical or moral, humane or diverse or inclusive?”

Global was literally asking me to look at these horrific images, this genocide, and detach myself from my identity, my own people, and say nothing. Is this ethical or moral, humane or diverse or inclusive?

- ZAHRAA AL-AKHRASS

Some media workers were coerced or pressured by their employers to resign after expressing concern regarding Israeli state violence. A notable example is award-winning journalist Jazmine Hughes, who [resigned](#) as a staff writer from the New York Times Magazine after signing an [open letter](#) put forth by the group [Writers Against the War on Gaza](#), an ad hoc coalition formed after October 7. The magazine determined that signing the letter violated the publication's policy on public protest. Jamie Lauren Keiles, a freelance journalist who maintained an annual contract with the publication, also announced that he would no longer contribute work to the magazine.

Keiles told [Democracy NOW!](#) that, in addition to raising the alarm on a humanitarian issue, his resignation was about pushing back on unfair conditions for contingent workers. "If an institution is not willing to give you a job, then what do you owe them?" Keiles said. "The idea that the magazine or the Times as a whole would have some hold on my speech just seemed ludicrous to me. So, in some way, it was a small amount of protest over the labor conditions in the industry at large."

Additional freelance workers lost work for speech related to Israel and Palestine, at times with less transparency from the organizations that commissioned and then punished them. After October 7, multiple freelancers had individual assignments related and unrelated to Israel and Palestine suddenly canceled and contracts left to expire. For example, the Poetry Foundation indefinitely [postponed](#) a [piece](#) that discussed anti-Zionism, and the Harvard Law Review [killed](#) its first ever commissioned piece by a Palestinian. At least two publishers stated publicly or privately that they would no longer work with certain freelancers because of their speech on Palestine.

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- JAMIE LAUREN KEILES

One U.S. freelancer, who requested anonymity, told NWU that a local outlet she regularly wrote for killed three of her stories after she posted criticism on social media regarding Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Of the three stories, which were lifestyle pieces unrelated to the Middle East, she was compensated for the two she had already filed and given no kill fee for the third. The freelancer's editor told her the pieces were canceled because she had violated the publication's social media policy but did not specify further.

Another case involved Lebanese Australian journalist Antoinette Lattouf, whose one-week contract as a substitute host for the ABC Sydney morning radio show was canceled after she posted a Human Rights Watch report accusing Israel of using starvation as a weapon. A Sydney Morning Herald report later [revealed](#) that a group called Lawyers for Israel had been writing letters to network leadership complaining about Lattouf's role and threatening legal action if she were not fired. Lattouf is now [pursuing](#) legal action against the company.

ASSIGNMENTS RESTRICTED

Restricting the assignments of media workers perceived as biased was another common disciplinary measure. As defined in this report, assignment restrictions can entail forbidding media workers from covering a beat or subject, whether temporarily or permanently, or suspending them from their jobs.

Two large news outlets restricted assignments for dozens of media workers who signed open letters related to Palestine. Management at the Los Angeles Times banned 38 employees from covering any stories related to Israel or Palestine for at least three months after they signed a letter condemning Israel's killing of journalists in Gaza; the company claimed the letter violated its ethics policy. A report by the Los Angeles Public Press [noted](#) that Los Angeles Times reporters have signed open letters in the past without consequence, including [one in 2021](#) demanding better media coverage of Israel's "system of apartheid" and [another in 2020](#) from the Los Angeles Times Guild's Black Caucus critiquing the paper's coverage of Black communities. According to the NewsGuild, which represents Los Angeles Times staff, 28 of the 38 people disciplined in this case were people of color, including seven of Middle Eastern, North African, or Muslim descent. By comparison, the newsroom is about half people of color, half white.

In Australia, 20 journalists at The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, both publications owned by Nine Entertainment, were banned from participating "in any reporting or production relating to the war" because they signed an [open letter](#) critiquing Australian media's coverage of Israel's assault on Gaza. According to leaked Slack messages [posted](#) by the publication Crikey, the publications' executive editor justified the decision by citing concerns about bias: "It is a strong-held tenet that our journalists' personal agendas do not influence our reporting on news events," he said.

APPEARANCES AND EVENTS CANCELED; AWARDS RESCINDED

At least 10 media workers have had public appearances canceled or postponed. Most of the event cancellations appear to be responses to perceived appearance of antisemitism or insensitivity to those in Israel affected by the October 7 attack.

Just hours before a scheduled book talk in October with Pulitzer Prize-winning author Viet Thanh Nguyen, the 92nd Street Y, a New York cultural and community center, “postponed” the event. The institution [referenced](#) “the public comments by the invited author on Israel and this moment.” Nguyen had signed an [open letter](#) criticizing Israel in the London Review of Books two days prior.

Other events were canceled on account of alleged security threats or after [interventions](#) by [public officials](#). The London venue Conway Hall, for example, planned to host the launch of Jewish American journalist Nathan Thrall’s book—a work of nonfiction platforming Palestinian voices—but the venue [called off](#) the event after being contacted by the Metropolitan Police.

Planned televised appearances have also been canceled. In one case, CBS live-streamed an interview with Palestinian American legal scholar and author Noura Erakat about Israeli human rights violations in Gaza. The clip was never posted on CBS’s website, although this would be the company’s typical practice, because it was [viewed](#) as being too combative, according to a report by Jewish Currents.

German institutions have been particularly aggressive in [canceling](#) events and awards. In October, the Palestinian writer Adania Shibli won the German Literaturpreis for her novel Minor Detail, which follows a Palestinian narrator researching a historical incident of violence against a Palestinian woman. The literary association Litprom [canceled](#) the award ceremony “due to the war in Israel.” In another similar incident, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and the city of Bremen canceled an awards ceremony at which author Masha Gessen, who is Jewish, was to receive the Hannah Arendt Prize, after Gessen [published](#) an essay in the New Yorker comparing Gaza to a Nazi ghetto.

I would not want to be part of another institution which not only cancels artists because of their activism, but seems to think silence and censorship is the right answer to genocide.

- LANA BASTAŠIĆ

NWU documented two cases in which awards were rescinded for pro-Palestinian speech. After the Bosnian-Serbian novelist Lana Bastašić [cut ties](#) with her German publisher over its silence regarding “the ongoing genocide,” the Austrian literary organizations Literaturhaus NÖ and Literaturfest Salzburg [revoked](#) her planned residency and reading. “Thank you for uninviting me. I would not want to be part of another institution which not only cancels artists because of their activism, but seems to think silence and censorship is the right answer to genocide,” Bastašić replied.

In a telling twist, French Moroccan journalist Zineb El Rhazoui [received](#) the 2019 Simone Weil prize for her controversial criticism of Islam and defense of French secularism, but the award was [rescinded](#) in December for her public criticism of Israeli attacks on Gaza.

SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPRESSION, ONLINE HARASSMENT, AND DOXXING

Social media suppression was the most common type of retaliation in our sample. Suppression ranged from newly restrictive company policies about online posting and managers suspending workers for posts, to the blocking of posts by social media platforms themselves. NWU documented 16 such cases that impacted dozens of workers. Some escalated to online harassment and doxxing (publishing personal information online with malicious intent). Pro-Israel social media accounts and actors drove several cases of harassment and doxxing, and often accused the affected media workers of antisemitism or supporting terrorism.

In one instance, Heba Macksoud, an Egyptian American Muslim woman working as a digital media consultant for nonprofits, received a torrent of online harassment and intimidation affecting her family’s wellbeing after she posted “I stand with Palestine” on a New Jersey neighborhood Facebook page. Locals posted information about where members of Macksoud’s family worked, spammed the website of her husband’s pharmacy with one-star reviews, and called her daughter’s former employer to claim that her daughter was a Hamas supporter. Macksoud is now hesitant to associate with organizations that support Palestinians, has changed her last name and profile picture online, and feels “terrified” to express herself on social media again—especially after seeing a suspicious car parked outside her house on a dead-end street for hours. Against the backdrop of apparently [escalating](#) hate crimes and harassment against Arabs and Muslims, media workers of these backgrounds have reason to fear for their safety and that of their loved ones.

The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA), a group dedicated to combating what it claims to be anti-Israel bias in the news, targeted the social media activity of six Middle Eastern staff journalists and one freelancer for the BBC. In response, the

BBC [launched](#) an “urgent investigation” into the posts and took the reporters off the air, stating publicly that the freelancer named in CAMERA’s report would not be hired for future projects. (Later, the BBC [concluded](#) that no disciplinary action would be taken.)

*In calling me out they opened me up to a lot of racist abuse as well.
It put a target on my back ... I’m a black girl, I’m a freelancer, so it’s
really easy for you to try to ruin my livelihood.*

- CHANTÉ JOSEPH

In another case, an article by the outlet Jewish News [condemned](#) social media posts by freelancer and Guardian contributor Chanté Joseph that criticized Israel. In the posts, Joseph pointed out that violence has historically been used in liberation struggles, and [called](#) “missing” posters of Israeli hostages “propaganda.” In a comment to Jewish News, Joseph apologized and said she’d deleted the posts. The Guardian called the freelancer’s posts unacceptable and [announced](#) that Joseph’s weekly podcast was “taking a break.”

Joseph told NWU that in the wake of the Jewish News article she faced extensive online harassment and was dropped by the UK magazine Stylist as a speaker on a panel. “In calling me out they opened me up to a lot of racist abuse as well. It put a target on my back,” she said. “We’re low-hanging fruit—I’m a black girl, I’m a freelancer, so it’s really easy for you to try to ruin my livelihood.”

In an effort to avoid allegations of bias, multiple organizations have released new social media policies that typically leave management with significant discretion to decide whom to discipline. For example, The Guardian’s editor-in-chief, along with its senior U.S. and Australian editors, [announced](#) a new policy discouraging journalists from signing open letters or posting statements on social media that “risk compromising our editorial integrity.” According to the editors’ memo, “Senior editors will decide on any appropriate action on a case by case basis.” Some outlets are known to reprimand staffers and contributors for publicly criticizing the organization they work for—or its coverage.

In at least one case, managers reprimanded a media worker for critiquing media coverage of Palestine on a private Instagram account (meaning it could only be viewed by approved followers). The staffer was temporarily barred from working on stories related to Israel or Palestine. They said that they are the only Muslim in their newsroom, and that white coworkers were not initially reprimanded for signing public letters supportive of Palestinians.

BEYOND MEDIA: REPRESSION IN ACADEMIA, ART, AND RELATED WORKPLACES

Many media workers pay their bills by working for academic institutions or arts organizations that have disciplined or cut ties with those who criticize Israel and/or stand up for Palestinians. Over the course of our data collection, we encountered several cases of workers facing retaliation within the arts and academia. We did not include those cases in our quantitative analysis because they took place beyond the boundaries of the media industry. Nevertheless, they follow similar patterns and merit further discussion.

Across the United States, students and academic workers have faced [firing](#), [suspension](#), [event cancellation](#), [doxxing](#), [social media suppression](#), [censorship](#), and [violence](#) from police and counter-protesters. The most high-profile case of academic retaliation may be that of former Harvard University president Claudine Gay, who was [forced to resign](#) due to pressure from powerful donors. There is no question of intent: Conservative activist Christopher F. Rufo, a vocal opponent of “critical race theory,” [instigated](#) investigations by The Washington Free Beacon and others into plagiarism in Gay’s academic publications, per his own [account](#) in the Wall Street Journal. The campaign [began](#) when Gay did not immediately refute a letter written by Palestine solidarity groups at Harvard that blamed Israel for the October 7 Hamas attack. The specious plagiarism findings (i.e. nearly 50 instances of “inadequate citation”) became pretext for her removal.

NWU interviewed multiple workers in academia who described facing retaliation based on their social media posts. Since October, [at least three](#) adjunct academics in New York were told that their appointments would not be renewed after speaking out in solidarity with Palestinians. A U.S. poet and academic reported that a tweet they posted empathizing with Palestinians led to harassing messages and physical threats. After the school they worked for issued a public statement saying the tweet was not in line with the university’s values, the worker resigned from their teaching position and relocated to another part of the country.

Meanwhile, Arnesa Buljušmić-Kustura, an author, genocide researcher, and [survivor](#) of the Bosnian genocide, [wrote](#) on X (formerly known as Twitter) that she was rejected from her dream job following pro-Palestinian posts on social media, even though she had already gone through six rounds of interviews.

In the art world, museums and galleries have [retaliated](#) against workers and [canceled](#) exhibitions. For example, Anishinaabe curator and author Wanda Nanibush left her position at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) after the museum received a letter from the directors of Israel Museums and Arts, Canada (IMAAC), [accusing](#) Nanibush of “posting inflammatory, inaccurate

rants against Israel.” In a comment to Hyperallergic, a spokesperson for AGO [called](#) Nanibush’s departure a “mutual decision.”

German institutions have been particularly aggressive in [canceling](#) events and exhibitions featuring cultural workers who criticize Israel and/or stand up for Palestinians. For example, the Museum Folkwang in Essen canceled an exhibition by Anaïs Duplan, after the trans Haitian American writer and artist expressed support for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) on social media. The museum [stated](#) that it was “solely because the curator personally takes sides with the BDS campaign, which questions Israel’s right to exist.” In response to Germany’s severe climate of censorship, an Instagram account called [Archive of Silence](#) has been [crowdsourcing and compiling](#) cases of repression of pro-Palestinian speech in the country, and more than 4,000 people have signed onto “[Strike Germany](#),” a boycott of German cultural institutions.

VIOLENT REPRESSION

While media workers around the world face retaliation for criticizing the Israeli and U.S. governments and speaking out in support of Palestine, most foreign journalists have not been allowed to enter Gaza. Israel refuses to allow outside press into Gaza unless they embed within the Israeli army, further isolating the media in Gaza from the international community. More than 50 senior broadcast journalists from outlets including CNN, BBC, Sky News, Channel 4, and others [signed](#) an open letter in February 2024, asking the Israeli and Egyptian governments to ensure “free and unfettered access” for foreign press.

Notably, companies outside of the Middle East have also prevented much-needed aid from reaching Palestinian journalists, who are the world’s main eyes on the war. For example, GoFundMe [shut down](#) a fundraiser held to benefit the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate.

As this report goes live, at least 102 Palestinian, four Israeli, and three Lebanese media workers have been [killed](#) since the conflict began on October 7, according to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). As of February 2024, the number of journalists killed per week by Israeli attacks far [exceeds](#) any other war in the last two decades, according to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists. In addition to the staggering number of Palestinian journalists killed while reporting, there are numerous [reports](#) of journalists being assaulted, arrested, and threatened. The repression and assaults are not limited to Gaza: Over 60 journalists in the West Bank have been [detained](#) by Israeli forces since October 7, according to the Palestinian Prisoners’ Society.

Many Palestinian journalists continue to do their work even as they bury their family members and colleagues. They have been performing their jobs with rigor and professionalism under immense duress—in constant fear of death or injury and with limited access to food, shelter, and basic protective equipment like helmets and safety vests.

We are going to proceed as long as we are alive and breathing, as long as we are able to do this duty and deliver this message.

- WAEL AL-DAHDOUNH

Many Palestinian journalists fear that their reporting makes them and their families targets for physical harm. It is easy to see why. In October, Wael al-Dahdouh, Gaza Bureau Chief for Al Jazeera, [lost](#) his wife, son, daughter, and grandson when an Israeli missile struck their house. Undaunted, he continued reporting in Gaza until a December bombing [killed](#) his cameraperson, Samer Abudaqa, and left Al-Dahdouh seriously injured. Compounding Al-Dahdouh's suffering was news that his oldest son, Hamza, who was also a journalist, [died](#) in an Israeli airstrike on January 7. Even after Al-Dahdouh's injuries [forced](#) him to seek medical treatment in Qatar, he vowed to continue reporting. "We are going to proceed as long as we are alive and breathing," Al-Dahdouh [told](#) NBC News. "As long as we are able to do this duty and deliver this message."

In recent months, news and rights' groups have dug into some of these incidents. A [U.N. investigation](#) was the latest [among many recent](#) reviews of an October 13 incident in which Reuters journalist Issam Abdallah was killed and several others were injured, concluding that Israeli tanks fired twice at a group of "clearly identifiable journalists," in violation of international law. A recent Washington Post [investigation](#) also raised serious doubts about the Israeli government's justification behind the targeted strike in January that killed Al-Dahdouh's eldest son and two other journalists in Khan Younis.

The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate filed an [amicus brief](#) in a [legal case](#) accusing President Biden and other officials of failing to prevent and "knowingly continuing to provide assistance" to the Israeli government's "unfolding genocide," in violation of both federal and international law. The group reported that between October 7 and December 19, 84 journalists killed in Gaza were targets of "surgical" air strikes or sniper fire, meaning that either their homes or reporting locations were directly targeted. In at least three cases [documented](#) by the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, Israel sent journalists death threats the day before they were killed in surgical strikes. Targeting journalists is a crime against humanity under [international humanitarian law](#).

The rate at which journalists have been killed in Gaza is staggering, but the killing of Palestinian journalists with impunity is not new. Against the backdrop of its long-standing military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, known altogether as the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Israeli state has [killed](#) at least 20 reporters in the two decades before October 7. The most high-profile incident occurred in 2022, when lauded Palestinian American reporter Shireen Abu Akleh was [shot dead](#) by a bullet during an Israeli West Bank raid, despite wearing a helmet and vest clearly marked PRESS. It took [independent investigations](#) from international press outlets to pressure the Israeli government to make a [rare public admission](#) that there was a “high possibility” that a member of the Israeli army fired the lethal round that slayed Abu Akleh. The U.S. government, meanwhile, did not [indict](#) Akleh’s killers or [hold](#) its Israeli allies accountable in any way for the death of one of its own citizens.

We stand in solidarity with our colleagues in the region, who continue to document the truth under the imminent risk of death and amid unimaginable suffering.

DISCUSSION

THE OBJECTIVITY DOUBLE STANDARD

Media industry employers readily invoke “objectivity” as a professional responsibility. However, our analysis suggests that what counts as “objective” and what is deemed biased depends on factors including the background and identity of the worker; the prejudices of management; and external pro-Israel individuals and advocacy groups [exerting](#) pressure on any given media organization. As a result, the concept of objectivity has been used to reinforce dominant narratives as normal, reasonable, and neutral, while the perspectives of marginalized groups are more likely to be seen as fringe or biased. Newsrooms then often fail to publish stories that challenge the status quo or hold power to account.

As our findings demonstrate, Palestinian, Middle Eastern, North African, and Muslim media workers are disproportionately scrutinized and discredited for alleged partiality when it comes to coverage of Israel-Palestine affairs. Those with clearly demonstrated bias or conflicts of interest that favor Israel frequently go unchecked.

Perhaps the most high-profile lapse in the pretense of “objective” journalism unfolded at the New York Times, after the outlet published [an investigation](#) alleging systematic use of sexual violence by Hamas on October 7. Questions about the strength of the reporting [derailed](#) an episode of one of the publication’s podcasts, The Daily, according to The Intercept. The Times responded to The Intercept’s report by [launching](#) an internal leak investigation, which [targeted](#) Middle Eastern and North African employees, leading the New York Times Guild to [file](#) a grievance. Meanwhile, reporting [uncovered](#) that one of the reporters on the New York Times story was an Israeli filmmaker with no prior investigative journalism experience, who had [liked](#) a social media post calling for Israel to turn the Gaza strip “into a slaughterhouse.” Times management publicly condemned the reporter’s behavior but has [continued](#) to stand by her reporting, even as [more evidence surfaced](#) that key details were inaccurate.

At multiple publications, reporters with clear institutional ties to Israel have played prominent roles in covering Gaza. The [Wall Street Journal](#), [The Atlantic](#), and [CNN](#) are among the outlets that have allowed reporters who served in the Israeli military to cover the war without clear disclosure. In fact, several news reports have found internal pro-Israel bias at organizations like the [New York Times](#) and [Upday](#), the largest news aggregator in Europe. At CNN, veteran news anchor and correspondent Christiane Amanpour [challenged](#) the news channel’s top brass over the [practice](#) of

sending stories about Israel and Palestine to the Jerusalem bureau, which is subject to rules of the IDF's censor, for review.

Outside the newsroom, some publications have shown inconsistency in how they address different kinds of political speech. As NWU has documented, media workers have faced workplace retaliation and suffered attacks on their professional credibility after signing letters in support of journalists who are risking their lives to cover Gaza under bombardment. In contrast, past [campaigns decrying](#) the targeting of journalists by other hostile governments have enjoyed widespread support, with media workers often using hashtags, online petitions, vigils, and other means of drumming up awareness and support—without receiving pushback from newsroom leaders.

Several cases included in this report involve organizations like Canary Mission, StopAntisemitism.Org, HonestReporting, and the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA). Such groups pressure media employers, often by labeling workers' social media posts criticizing Israel as antisemitic. Data [suggest](#) that incidents of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Arab bias have all risen since October 7. At the same time, the conflation between antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment has allowed the former to be weaponized to stifle Palestinian voices and coverage critical of the Israeli government. It has also muddled data on antisemitism. For example, the Anti-Defamation League reported a 361-percent increase in antisemitic incidents between October and January, compared to the previous year. However 1,307 of 3,291 incidents were rallies “including antisemitic rhetoric, expressions of support for terrorism against the state of Israel and/or anti-Zionism.” Reporting by [The Intercept](#) pointed out that, alongside clear examples of antisemitism, the ADL has included anti-Zionist protests led by Jews in its lists of antisemitic incidents.

When presented with allegations of antisemitism, publishers are forced to choose between accepting a reputational risk by standing up for their workers or complying with a pro-Israel narrative and silencing critical voices. At a number of workplaces, employers have chosen suppression. A Washington Post [exposé](#) reported that StopAntisemitism.org boasted about its social media posts, which often identify targeted individuals' workplaces and social media profiles, leading to the firing or suspension of nearly three dozen people.

Nevertheless, some media organizations have resisted pressure from external organizations and stood by media workers amidst attempted character assassinations. For example, when CAMERA accused Los Angeles Times Managing Editor Sara Yasin of harboring “pro-Hamas” sentiments for sharing posts that were critical of Israeli state actions, the publication's management mounted a full-throated [defense](#) of Yasin. Unfortunately, examples like this are few and far between.

ATMOSPHERE OF FEAR

We left several cases of potential retaliation out of our quantitative analysis, either due to their opacity or because we were unable to independently verify them. Still, many of these cases are worth highlighting here precisely because of their apparent ambiguity—and the atmosphere of fear they engender.

Reporter Mehdi Hasan, formerly MSNBC's highest-profile Muslim host, is known for his critical coverage of Israel and tenacious interviewing style. In November, Hasan pushed back against various false claims by a senior advisor to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, including the advisor's suggestion that Israel had not killed children in Gaza. Within two weeks of that interview, MSNBC announced that Hasan's show was being [canceled](#). MSNBC has claimed that this decision was unrelated to his coverage of Israel. But a source familiar with the programming changes [told](#) The Cut that Hasan became a "sacrificial lamb" in the aftermath of October 7, amid mounting internal and external pressure to reign in critiques of Israel. Hasan has since [left](#) MSNBC and [started](#) his own media company, Zeteo. However, the secrecy around his show's cancellation contributes to a sense that even high-profile journalists may not be safe from retaliatory dismissal if they cross invisible red lines drawn by management.

We also encountered cases in which media workers reported editors killing commissioned pieces that expressed pro-Palestinian sentiments; other workers faced layoffs, canceled appearances, or missed out on anticipated job offers after criticizing Israel online. Although these workers were not directly informed that these opportunities had been withdrawn due to their views on Palestine and Israel, they suspect that this was the cause.

Since receiving the most distinguished award in our profession, I have been almost entirely without work. My experience over the past six months has shown that the board, as well as the country's most powerful media institutions, are refusing to engage in a dialogue about the crisis in journalism. The silence is loud and frightening.

- MONA CHALABI

For example, when freelance data journalist and illustrator Mona Chalabi was [awarded](#) a 2023 Pulitzer Prize for a data story published in the New York Times, she used her platform at the October ceremony to rebuke journalists for avoiding the word "Palestine" in their Gaza coverage.

Chalabi [donated](#) her \$15,000 award money to the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, and self-published a [graphic](#) highlighting bias in the New York Times' Gaza coverage. Since the Pulitzer ceremony, "I have been almost entirely without work," Chalabi wrote in a March 2 email to Columbia University's president and the head of its journalism school, Jelani Cobb, who is also a member of the Pulitzer Prize board. Chalabi added, "My experience over the past six months has shown that the board, as well as the country's most powerful media institutions, are refusing to engage in a dialogue about the crisis in journalism. The silence is loud and frightening." As of April 19, when she [posted](#) an excerpt of this email on Instagram amid Columbia University's crackdown on peaceful pro-Palestinian student protests, Chalabi had received no response.

The findings of NWU's self-censorship survey illustrate the silencing effect experienced by media workers, in both confirmed and suspected cases of retaliation. The 22 responses received between December 13 and February 1 are best viewed as a snapshot of workers' firsthand experiences with self-censorship across the media industry. Although the demographics and professional experience of respondents were diverse, nearly all of them reported pressure to self-censor for fear of professional consequences.

One respondent said that showing any support for Israel had become a "nonstarter" and that expressing Jewish identity felt risky. "I fear that even showing support for the concept of 'Zionism' would be twisted, as it has been all over the world, to mean something sinister and evil. It is this anti-Jewish sentiment that I greatly fear has taken hold among my colleagues and would leave me stigmatized in my field." The respondent added, "I fear I would lose out on assignments in the short term."

However, the vast majority of respondents expressed concerns about expressing support for Palestinians or speaking critically about Israel. Twenty people, including three Jewish respondents, named views related to Palestine (including expression of solidarity with Palestinians, criticism of Israeli state actions, and the characterization of the Israeli military assault on Gaza as "ethnic cleansing" or "genocide") as ones they felt pressure to withhold.

I'm much more scrutinized because I'm Arab and Muslim ... they will continuously try to strip away my credibility as a journalist.

- SURVEY RESPONDENT

A staff writer from Philadelphia said their identity shaped managers' responses to their speech. "I'm much more scrutinized because I'm Arab and Muslim," they wrote. "They will continuously try to strip away my credibility as a journalist." Eighteen respondents reported that these pressures had increased since October 2023, with 11 people reporting "much more" pressure than before. Fifteen respondents explicitly named firing, blacklisting, and marginalization within the industry as among the consequences they expected would follow if they were to voice their views on the war on Gaza.

If I don't censor my own speech about Israel/Palestine, I'm afraid it'll get me blacklisted.

- SURVEY RESPONDENT

Nine of the respondents described new or newly enforced social media policies and/or contract provisions from companies where they worked or contributed. More than half reported that they had changed or limited the way they used social media for fear of professional consequences. About half of the survey respondents described staying home from public events and protests, and nine said they had not signed onto open letters or public statements expressing their views, which they might have otherwise signed under less hostile workplace conditions.

"If I don't censor my own speech about Israel/Palestine, I'm afraid it'll get me blacklisted," wrote one respondent, a Black, queer freelance writer based in California. An absence of explicit prohibitions was no comfort. "On the one hand, my current employer hasn't told anyone outright to avoid writing about Israel's illegal occupation and genocide of Palestinian people. On the other hand, there are hardly any published articles that focus on Israel/Palestine. That silent disconnect scares me," the respondent continued.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Engagement with social media platforms is a professional requirement for many media workers, yet these platforms also represent important outlets for personal expression and community formation. In addition to expecting media workers to use social media to promote their work, newsrooms often seek to reach new audiences by capitalizing on their workers' engagement with identity groups and niche communities. This dynamic creates problems in the context of selectively applied objectivity standards.

For example, a writer lauded for skillfully engaging with “Black Twitter” during the hiring process may be subsequently penalized for urging critical coverage of police shootings. And where there are clear guidelines, freelancers are less likely than staffers to be privy to them.

There is a lack of consensus around how media workers’ social media activity should be monitored, if at all. This means that censorship is often up to individual discretion and is unevenly applied. NWU’s data suggests that marginalized workers are disproportionately penalized for allegedly violating policies regarding social media usage and political speech, while others enjoy wide latitude.

Social media companies have themselves systematically [suppressed criticism](#) of Israel. This censorship not only undemocratically constrains public discourse, but also interferes with media workers’ access to information and ability to support their livelihoods by sharing their work. On October 15, Instagram notified the journalist and illustrator Molly Crabapple that her account would be hidden from non-followers, and she would be temporarily unable to go “live,” because she reposted a Democracy Now! article about Israeli violence in the West Bank. In response, she [posted](#), “As an artist I rely on Instagram as a major way to sell my work, and this clearly hurts my ability to do that.”

Finally, social media provides a powerful tool for individuals and organizations seeking to punish media workers for coverage that amplifies Palestinian perspectives. Doxxing, online harassment, and threats of violence transmitted over social media are favored tools for followers of groups like StopAntisemitism.org and Canary Mission.

THE POWER OF UNIONS

A silver lining to the widespread repression of speech is the power unions have demonstrated in their efforts to protect workers from actual or potential retaliation. One telling example occurred among a group of Hearst Magazine employees. On October 10, Samira Nasr, editor-in-chief of Harper’s Bazaar, used her personal Instagram to decry Israel’s communications blackout in Gaza. Her post [resulted](#) in [public backlash](#) from online commentators. Not only did Hearst corporate management condemn Nasr’s comments, management subsequently [introduced](#) a new social media policy to prohibit employees from posting about “politically charged” events, including on their personal social media accounts. The policy encouraged employees to report one another for social media activity that could “impact the reputation or objectivity of Hearst Magazines” and mandated that posts must be “consistent” with the views expressed in the company’s publications.

[Hearst Magazines Media Union](#), a unit under Writers Guild of America, East, organized [pushback](#) against the policy. Union members filed an unfair labor practices complaint with the National Labor Relations Board and encouraged workers to refuse to sign the egregious policy. In the end, the company stopped pressuring workers to sign the policy, but the complaint process is ongoing.

“Hearst’s claim that personal social media accounts are not to be used for posting personal opinions would be laughable if it weren’t so concerning. We will not let these scare tactics work,” said Hearst union shop steward Zach Lennon-Simon. “The only good thing about this policy is that it has united all of us, union members and editorial managers, in their outrage at Hearst’s attempts at authoritarianism. We remain committed to each other and to our fight against corporate censorship.”

The New York Times Guild similarly pushed back against divisive management tactics, using a labor rights framework. The publication’s leaders launched a leak investigation after unidentified staff provided information to The Intercept about internal concerns regarding the paper’s handling of the October 7 sexual violence [story](#). As part of the investigation, Times management conducted a “targeted interrogation” of members of an employee resource group (ERG) consisting of Middle Eastern and North African workers. According to [the NewsGuild](#), which represents the New York Times Guild, “Members faced extensive questions about their involvement in MENA ERG events and discussions, and about their views of the Times’s Middle East coverage.” They were also asked to turn over the group’s membership list. New York Times Guild members [filed a grievance](#) declaring management’s tactics to be a violation of the Guild’s labor contract.

Workers without the protection of a union lack a key resource for pushing back; freelancers, who largely lack the legal protections of full-time employees, are especially vulnerable. Our analysis underscores the importance of ongoing labor organizing—and solidarity between full-time staff and freelance workers—across the media industry. Media organizations that do not already protect their workers from retaliation are unlikely to start on their own. Workers must use their collective power to push employers to respect their workplace rights and uphold fair labor practices.

The only good thing about this policy is that it has united all of us, union members and editorial managers, in outrage at Hearst’s attempts at authoritarianism. We remain committed to each other and to our fight against corporate censorship.

- ZACH LENNON-SIMON

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were drafted by members of NWU organizing with the Freelance Solidarity Project (FSP). We believe in the power of unions to counter retaliation within newsrooms and workplaces and to defend workers' and citizens' rights to dissent at local, national, and international levels. While these recommendations involve changes in policy and practice by political leaders and media organizations, organized workers play a key role in making these demands a reality.

FOR POLITICAL LEADERS

Institute an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, release all political prisoners, halt U.S. military funding for Israel, and guarantee access and protection for journalists in the region.

Media workers in Gaza and the surrounding region will not be safe until Israel's devastating military campaign ends. UN human rights experts have been [raising](#) the alarm since October that Palestinians are at "a risk for genocide." In recent months, these experts have repeatedly [cautioned](#) that Israel's blockade on aid to Gaza leaves Palestinians at risk for or already experiencing famine. Children have already [died](#) of starvation, in addition to the thousands who have died as a result of Israeli bombings and ground operations. As we go to press, more than 34,000 people have been killed in Gaza.

A ceasefire, release of hostages and political prisoners, and unfettered access to food and medical aid for Palestinians are baseline conditions for media workers in Gaza and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In addition, Israeli and U.S. leaders must guarantee that journalists covering Israel and Palestine are protected from military attacks, as [mandated](#) under international human rights law. As the [largest supplier](#) of military support to Israel, the United States must use its leverage by halting financial aid and weapons shipments that are used to [kill](#) Palestinians. Further, all incidents in which Israeli military actions have resulted in the deaths or injuries of journalists and their families need to be independently investigated. Finally, Israel must [end](#) its blockade on international journalists entering the Gaza Strip.

FOR WESTERN MEDIA OUTLETS

Proactively hire, retain, and listen to media workers impacted by the war on Gaza.

There is a long history of retaliation against Middle Eastern, North African, and Muslim people for [expressing](#) solidarity with the Palestinian people or [criticizing](#) Israeli state action. It does not happen in a vacuum. Research [suggests](#) that Muslims and Arabs are among the most dehumanized groups in the United States and that hatred towards these groups tends to [rise](#) following certain types of terrorist attacks, as it [did](#) after 9/11 and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiment also corresponds with support for foreign policy actions, such as drone strikes in the Middle East or the torture of Arab and Muslim detainees. In the first three months of the war on Gaza, complaints to the Council on American-Islamic Relations of anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian hate and discrimination [rose](#) by 178 percent.

Amid this pressure, those with ties to the region and its cultures—to Gaza in particular—have a distinct vantage point on the war on Gaza and can [contribute](#) immense value to media organizations striving to [build](#) trust and [engage](#) with communities on the ground that are experiencing disproportionate and ongoing harm.

Media organizations must take proactive steps to protect such workers from retaliation, harassment, and harm. They should also track the diversity of their workforces—including details about which workers are receiving high-profile, high-reward opportunities—and make that data public.

Further, publications should invite Middle Eastern, North African, and Muslim workers to provide input on their coverage of Israel and Palestine. For information about how newsrooms can more accurately cover the war on Gaza, see the media resource guide [compiled](#) by members of the Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists Association.

Stand up to efforts by interest groups to label criticism of Zionism or Israel as antisemitism.

Media organizations and cultural institutions should anticipate and resist pressure from pro-Israeli interest groups like Canary Mission, StopAntisemitism.Org, HonestReporting, and CAMERA. Such groups routinely label speech critical of Israel or supportive of Palestinians as antisemitic and seek to influence employers to discipline or dismiss crucial media workers. When employers bow to such pressure, it is often Middle Eastern, North African, and Muslim workers, particularly workers of color, who pay the price. We call on all media organizations to stand by their employees and freelancers in the face of attempted character assassinations and smear campaigns.

Media organizations must make a public commitment to resisting pressure from interest groups. Organizations should publicly and transparently document attempted pressure, as part of their commitment to journalistic ethics. Media industry employers can work together, in collaboration with media unions, to resist these pressure groups.

Re-examine policies related to political speech and the disproportionate impact of such policies on marginalized workers.

NWU's data suggest that, in the case of Israel and Palestine, policies and practices designed to limit political speech are disproportionately impacting workers from marginalized backgrounds and identities. In light of this, newsrooms must critically re-examine their policies regarding political speech and social media. Achieving true diversity and inclusion will require identifying disparities and double standards in company attitudes and procedures.

Policy changes should be made with input from rank-and-file workers, particularly staffers and freelancers who are most likely to be impacted, and clearly communicated to those workers. Policies that cannot be enforced equitably, or that reflect built-in bias, should be discontinued.

Finally, freelancers should not be subject to the same restrictions on political speech as staffers; it is inequitable to enforce the same restrictions on workers who lack the same benefits and security as staff.

Rethink “objectivity.”

In an era when newsroom leaders [claim](#) to be striving for increased diversity, media organizations must [rethink](#) what objectivity actually looks like—instead of [penalizing](#) marginalized workers for speaking truth to power. At the same time that Middle Eastern, North African, and Muslim workers are facing discipline for perceived bias in their perspectives on Gaza, reporters who have [worked](#) for Israeli state institutions, including the military, have been invited to [cover](#) sensitive stories repeatedly. In some cases, bias is [institutionalized](#), as in the use of style guides that [favor](#) Israeli perspectives, or in allowing the IDF’s military censor to [review](#) and perhaps even shape coverage.

Media organizations should [undertake](#) transparent reviews of their policies and practices pertaining to objectivity and bias, with input from workers, and make public the results of those reviews. In addition, where feasible, media organizations should employ a public editor to advocate for fair and balanced reporting. All this amounts to an overdue reckoning that many journalists, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, have been demanding for a long time.

Support and protect freelancers.

Freelancers are uniquely vulnerable to retaliation for their political speech, due to their already precarious working conditions. At the very least, any policies that freelancers are expected to adhere to should be clearly outlined when their contracts are established. Contracts should provide strong protections against financial harm resulting from the cancellation of an assignment due to external circumstances. They should also clearly outline pathways to file grievances if a freelancer suspects retaliation for political speech or other unfair practices. Media organizations should [follow](#) the Freelance Solidarity Project’s [Principles for Working With Freelancers](#) and collaborate with NWU and freelancers to [outline](#) agreed-upon working conditions, via unilateral announcements.

Support unions.

Media organizations should voluntarily recognize union elections and bargain contracts in good faith.

FOR MEDIA WORKERS AND MEDIA UNIONS

Organize a union at your workplace.

Multiple cases in our analysis demonstrate the power of unions to protect workers from retaliation and arbitrary discipline. We encourage all media workers to continue the urgent business of organizing in order to fight the current wave of retaliation and prevent those targeted on the basis of their identity from being further isolated. Media workers in non-unionized workplaces can reach out to the NewsGuild at organize@newsguild.org or the Writers Guild via Justin Molito at jmolito@wgaeast.org to discuss confidentially.

Already have a union? Demand protection against retaliation.

First: [Know](#) your [rights](#).

Then: Use the power of your union to expand those rights. Use contract negotiations to demand specific protections against retaliation. “Just Cause” contract provisions, for example, can [protect workers](#) from politically motivated or arbitrary firings in retaliation for speech. Organize strong internal support networks or affiliation groups so that workers of marginalized identities are not easily isolated. Advocate for greater transparency and distributed power over editorial guidelines and decisions.

Unions should also be dogged and relentless about filing grievances on behalf of workers who have been disciplined for their speech. If the costs of retaliation begin to outweigh employers’ desire to control their workers, retaliation will become less common.

Workers can also use the power of their unions to demand transparency about the external forces that result in retaliation against their colleagues, such as editors’ or management’s ties to political advocacy, or pressures editors have faced from outside groups. Overall, workers should examine the recommendations in this report and consider how they can use their knowledge of their workplace and the collective power of their union to push for change.

Organize across the industry to fight retaliation and build solidarity.

Media unions should forge alliances with other unions and labor groups to resist retaliation against political speech as a workplace justice issue. Legislation to end “at will” employment even for non-union workers could [radically change](#) the power dynamics of Western media workplaces. Unions can play a central role in bringing those [highly popular](#) reforms to bear and broadening their reach, including at the [local](#) level. Staff unions should reach out to non-unionized and freelance media workers, including those organizing with NWU, to build industry-wide support systems that protect the most vulnerable workers against retaliation.

Finally, we encourage media unions to [answer](#) calls for solidarity from unions [representing](#) Palestinian workers, and from unions throughout the United States and Europe that are [organizing](#) strategically to [interrupt](#) the war machine and end the violence that threatens the lives of our union siblings in Palestine. For example, unions should [support](#) the legal [efforts](#) by the International Federation of Journalists and the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate for the International Criminal Court to [investigate](#) Israel’s pattern of killing journalists. Workers can also [donate](#) to the International Federation of Journalists’ [Safety Fund](#).

Freelancers: Join the National Writers Union.

Freelancers are largely left out of the protections afforded to staff members under union contracts. The increasing precarity and volatility of media industry employment is a background condition throughout this report, as hundreds of media workers have been [laid off](#) since October 2023. The decline of unionized staff jobs means that journalists in general will be increasingly vulnerable to retaliation and targeting, unless freelancers organize to protect themselves and one another. Freelance media workers should get in touch with the Freelance Solidarity Project, organized under the Digital Media Division of the National Writers Union, at freelance.solidarity.project@gmail.com and [join](#) the union.

MORE INFORMATION AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

For updates on the Freelance Solidarity Project’s organizing around retaliation and violence against media workers, sign up [here](#). To report an incident of retaliation, fill out this [survey](#). Or to organize with us, [join](#) the National Writers Union.

METHODOLOGY

This report draws on public records of retaliation described in news articles and posted on social media, as well as interviews with directly impacted media workers and responses to two surveys distributed by the National Writers Union.

Six of the cases included in our quantitative data analysis came via a [survey](#) that NWU began circulating publicly in October 2023, soliciting reports of retaliation against media workers for their speech in support of Palestinians or their views on the war on Gaza. For each case drawn from the survey, an NWU member interviewed the affected worker and confirmed that they wanted to be a part of the report.

NWU members also monitored social media and Google alerts for instances of retaliation against media workers reported online. Cases found this way make up more than half of those included in our analysis.

NWU circulated a [second survey](#) in December 2023 that invited media workers to share their experiences of pressure to self-censor, actions taken by management to dissuade and preempt speech about Israel/Palestine, and what consequences they thought they might face for such speech. NWU member-organizers drew two additional cases of retaliation from those survey results, interviewing each worker.

DATA ANALYSIS

To determine whether a case should be included in our data analysis, we first considered whether the case could be categorized as retaliation. We defined retaliation as any action taken by a venue, outlet, organization, or group that negatively affects a media worker, that was triggered by a perception that the worker's actions supported the Palestinian cause or criticized the government of Israel.

We also considered whether the affected person should be considered a media worker, which we defined as anyone who could be a member of the National Writers Union. NWU has a broad membership that includes people who work primarily in academia or the art world. Although this report does include a section discussing media workers in academia and art, we did not include cases of retaliation by academic institutions, like universities, or fine arts institutions, like museums, because of the specific nature of those contexts. In many of the cases left out,

the impacted workers held positions that fell outside the types of labor covered by NWU, such as teachers, curators, or administrators. Instead, we focused primarily on the actions of media companies and cultural institutions that support or feature media workers. We did include cases where academic publishers were the drivers of retaliation.

Most of the cases we reviewed fit into one of the following categories of retaliation: cancellation of appearance/event, cancellation of assignment, assignment restriction, termination, resignation, social media suppression, online harassment, or rescinding of award. One case fell under “other,” and involved a worker who pushed back on an attempt to restrict their assignments. Our definitions can be found in the Data section of this report.

Most of the individuals did work that fits into one of the following media categories: literature, print journalism, video journalism, visual journalism, audio, communications, social media, academia, or law. Over half of the cases involved journalists. In cases where the information was publicly available or where we interviewed a source directly, we also tracked impacted workers’ self-identified race, ethnicity, and nationality.

NWU was unable to verify every collected case of retaliation, and we left a number of suspected retaliation cases out of our tally due to ambiguity. In an environment of intense precarity, where employers can take away work with no explanation, it wasn’t always possible to confirm that work was lost directly due to Israel/Palestine-related speech. We additionally left out a few survey respondents whom we were unable to reach to confirm details directly.

In the discussion section, we have highlighted public anecdotes that were not included in our tally, in order to further explore the themes revealed by our quantitative data. We also included an analysis of responses to the self-censorship survey.

In some cases, employers have said publicly or privately that an act of retaliation was not solely a result of speech related to Palestine, for example, arguing that a worker’s previous behavior shaped a decision. Our analysis is not limited to cases where Palestine-related speech was the sole possible reason for a company’s action.

Finally, it’s worth noting that there are undoubtedly many cases of retaliation and self-censorship missing from our data given the climate of fear that currently permeates the media industry, particularly surrounding any discussion of Israel and Palestine.

FACT CHECKING

All entries, including those drawn from NWU surveys, were reviewed by a team of professional fact-checkers. In cases drawn from interviews with an affected worker, a fact-checker reviewed the source's documentation of retaliation or spoke to witnesses to the retaliation whenever possible. In two cases, the worker was verbally reprimanded or otherwise could not provide documented evidence of retaliation. We chose to keep those cases in the report. Since we are a worker-led organization, our report centers workers' experiences.

In several cases drawn from social media, a fact-checker contacted the subject to learn more about the incident. When the person could not be reached, we did not include the case in our data analysis. We did include cases where a social media post included clear evidence of retaliation, for example, if it included [screenshots](#) or if the retaliation consisted of verifiable online harassment.

A similar process applied for news reports. We considered reported news stories to be sufficient evidence of retaliation. However, where news stories speculated about potential retaliation based on timing, we attempted to contact the impacted person. If they could not be reached or declined to comment, we did not include the case in our data analysis.

In some cases, we anonymized individuals upon request so that they do not face further retaliation or harassment.

We did not exhaustively audit the cases in our tally, nor do we have the capacity to do so. We are neither social scientists nor statisticians, and we do not purport that the findings of this report are comprehensive or representative. Nevertheless, they do raise important questions about the state of journalism in the West, both at the industry and the workplace level. We hope that this report prompts collective introspection, further organizing, and course correction wherever needed.

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