



# EXCLUSIVE GLOBAL SURVEY

Journalists Under Attack  
Share How to Fight Back



**forbidden** stories

# Introduction |

Despite decades of relentless efforts to protect journalists from the threats they face – driven by the remarkable and indispensable work of countless organizations – investigating has never been more dangerous. In numerous regions of the world, millions of people’s access to information depends on the courage of a handful of reporters.

We still lack an antidote to the poison wielded by enemies of the press. One that could deter them before they attempt to silence journalists. To understand these attackers, we must step into their shoes. What do they fear most? To find out, we must turn to those who know them best: journalists who have been kidnapped, arrested, attacked, harassed, or intimidated by these people – or on their orders.

This is why we at Forbidden Stories conducted an unprecedented survey of more than 200 threatened journalists across 53 countries and four continents. These are women and men who risk their lives every day to keep people informed: 37% have already been physically attacked, abducted, and/or arrested, while nearly one in three report receiving threats at least once a month.

This unique survey provides rare insight into the nature of threats journalists face, the profiles of those behind them and the topics that make reporters the most vulnerable.

The most threatening actors are not criminal or armed groups (responsible for threats against 36% of respondents), as one might assume, but representatives of public authorities (77%). The most dangerous topics? Corruption (63%), human rights violations (59%), organized crime (34%) and environmental crimes (30%).

## When people try to silence a story, make it louder

Above all, the survey’s most important finding is that 68% of the journalists we consulted say their attackers “dread” global journalistic investigations far more than NGO statements (15%) or legal action (17%).

This is a clear signal. Many have lost trust in their country’s justice systems to protect journalists from threats: 88% of respondents did not file a complaint following the threat, or did so, but the complaint was unsuccessful. According to some of the most threatened journalists, the most effective response after threats or attacks lies in a collective, coordinated journalistic response. When people try to silence a story, make it louder.

This is a call for journalists worldwide to join forces. It is the only way to stand up to the enemies of the press – and ultimately to deter them in a systemic way. 83% of the journalists surveyed say those targeting them could be concerned about international investigations into their assets and activities abroad, such as real estate, bank accounts, supply chains or political links.

In a globalized world, press freedom can only be defended globally.

## Key findings

# 77%

of respondents have been threatened by representatives of public authorities.

# 88%

of respondents did not file a complaint following the threat, or did so, but the complaint was unsuccessful.

# 68%

of respondents say their attackers “dread” global journalistic investigations far more than NGO statements (15%) or legal action (17%).

# 75%

of SafeBox Network members report feeling “more protected” and/or “less isolated” since securing their ongoing investigations with Forbidden Stories.

**“Several politicians in Ecuador told me that they now think twice before trying to silence us.”**

For several years, Forbidden Stories has been developing a system to secure threatened journalists' sensitive information. If they are arrested, kidnapped, or killed, their work will be carried forward by dozens of media outlets around the world.

Known as the SafeBox Network, this mechanism is currently used by over 250 reporters. Local press freedom organizations referred these journalists to Forbidden Stories in response to the attacks they have endured – one survived a targeted shooting, another was kidnapped on the street, another is the subject of an international arrest warrant, and a majority (59%) have received threatening messages because of their reporting.

Forbidden Stories mobilized this unique network of highly threatened journalists to respond to the survey (78% of respondents). For the first time at this scale, we concretely measured the effectiveness of the SafeBox Network: 75% of its members report feeling “more protected” and/or “less isolated” since securing their ongoing investigations with Forbidden Stories.

Most importantly, two-thirds report a change after publicly disclosing their membership – particularly a decrease in threats or a less aggressive attitude from those they investigate.

“When we publish a new investigation, we publicly state that the information is protected by SafeBox. Several politicians in Ecuador told me that they now think twice before trying to silence us,” says journalist and SafeBox Network member Leonardo G. Ponce.

The survey revealed a very tangible effect: 70 journalists in the SafeBox Network report they were able to conduct investigations that they would have otherwise deemed “too dangerous,” thanks to feeling supported by peers around the world who are ready to take over if anything happens to them. This is the power of deterrence: An international solidarity network of journalists enables hundreds of investigations that challenge powerful interests to emerge at the local level.

The findings of this survey shed light on the most effective ways to shift the balance of power. Through threats, public officials, criminal groups and corporations influence the free flow of information. Deterrence, rather than reacting too late, is a path to empower journalists. At Forbidden Stories, we will work in the coming months and years to scale up the SafeBox Network, which has proven effective, so that it becomes a widely known mechanism.

There is an urgent need to implement these concrete solutions, as threats continue to take a toll on journalists worldwide. Without journalists, there can be no reliable information, and humanity cannot confront the greatest challenges of our time.

**“When investigations become collective, intimidation loses part of its power. If we want to protect journalists, we must stop thinking only in terms of defense after the fact. We must build systems that make attacks less effective in the first place.**

**That means investing in collaborative networks. Supporting cross-border investigations. And recognizing that, in today's environment, sharing information is not a weakness – it is a form of protection. ”**

**Laurent Richard**

– Journalist, Executive Director and founder of Forbidden Stories



# Exclusive Global Survey: Journalists Under Attack Share How to Fight Back

## Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank all the journalists who took the time to share their experiences by responding to this survey. Their contributions are invaluable.

We also thank our local partners who helped circulate the survey.

Directed by **Laurent Richard** and **Clément Le Merlus**.

Coordinated by **Sophie Stuber**, with **Emmanuel Colombié**, **Hélène Garreta**, **Elisa Kirkland**, and Forbidden Stories' **local correspondents**.

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# Methodology

Forbidden Stories fielded this survey from Feb. 28 to April 7, 2026. The 10-question (or 13-question for Safebox Network members) survey was conducted via an online end-to-end-encrypted form available in 6 languages (Arabic, English, French, Hindi, Portuguese and Spanish).

The survey targeted only journalists who have been threatened because of their work, using purposive sampling. To collect authentic responses it was distributed via trusted local partner organizations in the field of defending press freedom, as well as via Forbidden Stories' SafeBox Network – which exclusively brings together journalists who are exposed to threats – and using snowball techniques.

Efforts were made to ensure geographic diversity, although the most severe threats to journalists' lives and freedoms are more prevalent in certain regions. It should be noted that, in the MENA context during the survey period, collecting responses proved more difficult.

To ensure the validity of the responses, the first survey question was intended to confirm whether respondents had previously been threatened or subjected to violence because of their work – those who answered in the negative were excluded. In total, 204 journalists in 53 countries submitted complete responses to the survey. Some questions offered multiple responses: This is why the proportions do not necessarily add up to 100 percent.

# 204

**threatened journalists**  
from 53 countries  
responded to this survey



- Latin America (38% / 78 respondents)
- Africa (32% / 65)
- Asia (16% / 32)
- MENA (7% / 15)
- Europe (7% / 14)

# About Forbidden Stories

Forbidden Stories is an Emmy award-winning global network of investigative journalists with a unique mission: **to continue the work of reporters who have been killed, imprisoned, or abducted.**

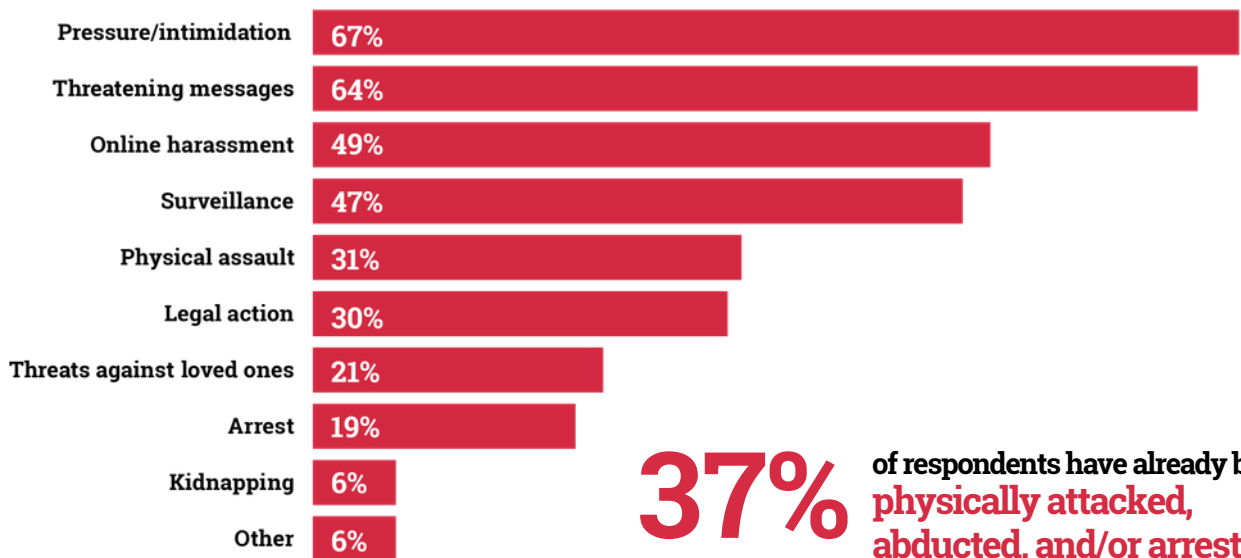
When one journalist is attacked, dozens of others continue their investigation and publish it worldwide through our global network of over **130 media outlets** (including The Guardian, The Washington Post, Le Monde). 2021 Nobel Peace Prize laureate **Maria Ressa** sums up Forbidden Stories in a metaphor: "Think about it like a many-headed hydra: You stop the story today, it will come back again tomorrow."

Since its creation in 2017, Forbidden Stories has coordinated **over 30 international, cross-border investigations** (Pegasus Project, Daphne Project, Story Killers, Viktoria Project, Propaganda Machine), publishing major revelations on cybersurveillance, corruption, disinformation, environmental crimes.

# When Threats Become Routine: How Journalists Are Targeted

## What type(s) of threats, violence or violations? \*

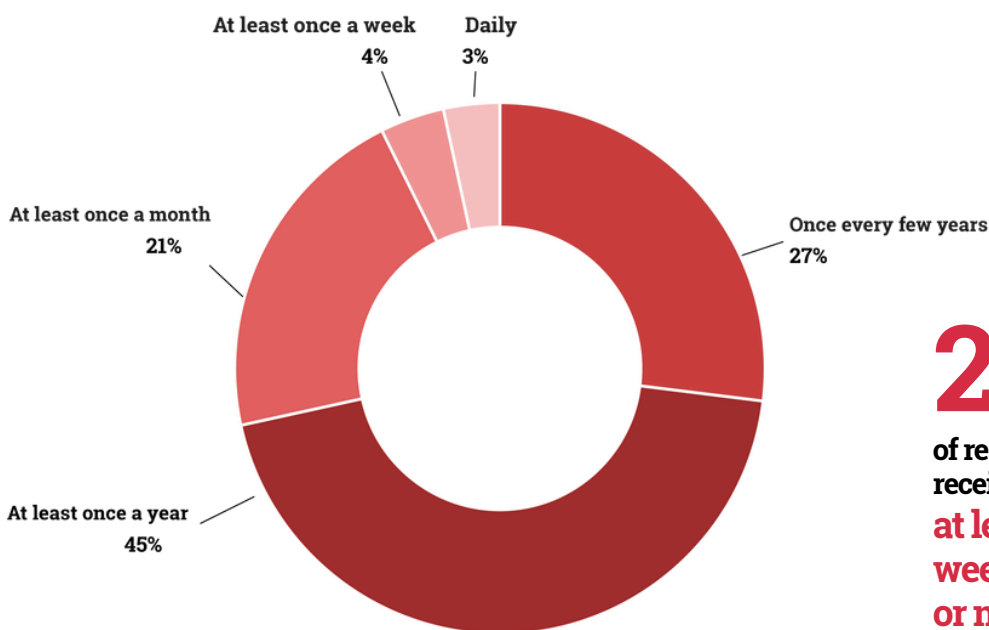
Multiple-choice question



**37%** of respondents have already been physically attacked, abducted, and/or arrested\*\*

## How often do you receive threats related to your work as a journalist?

Single-choice question



**28%** of respondents report receiving threats at least daily, weekly or monthly

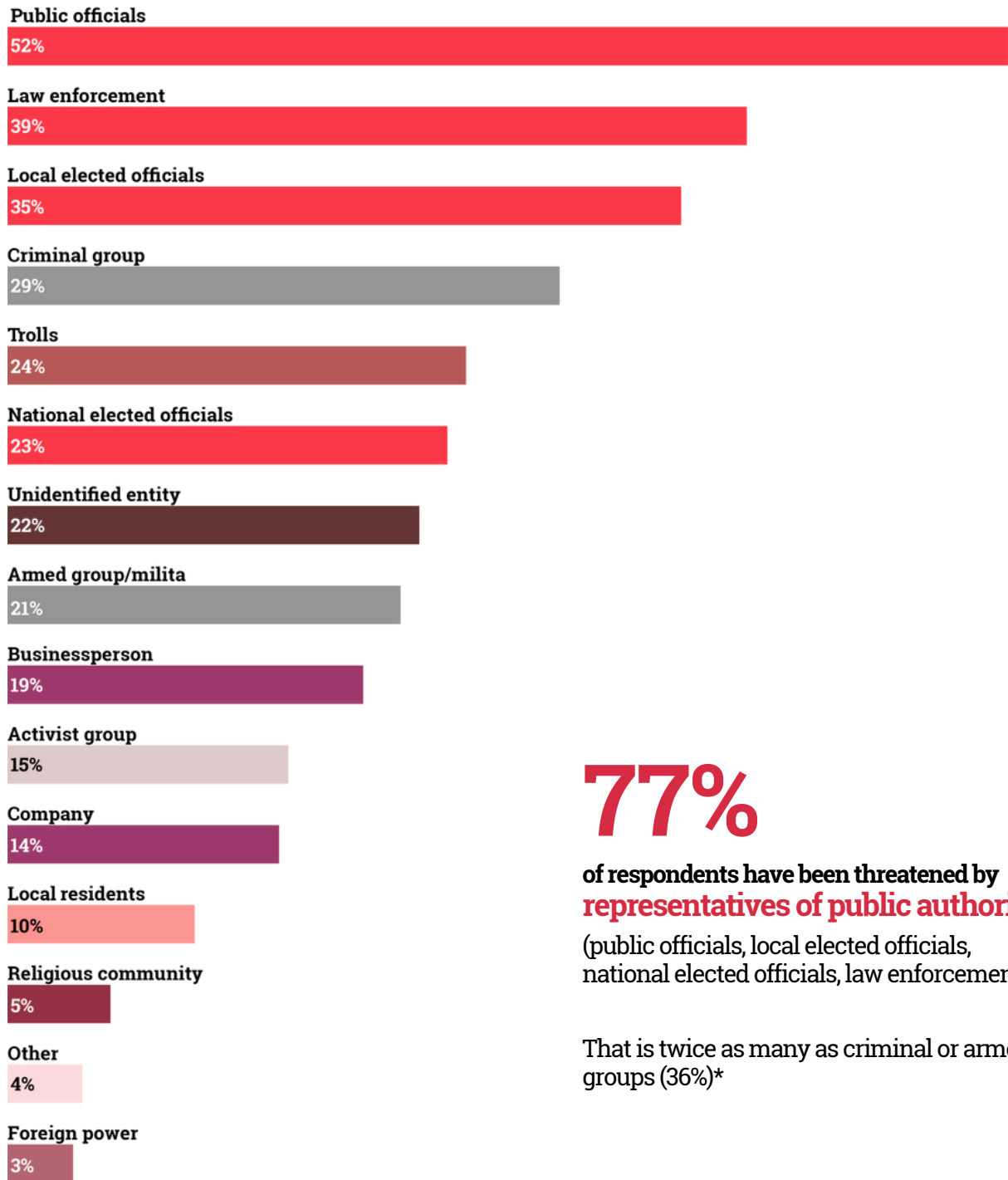
\*Question as asked in the questionnaire.

\*\*This specific percentage is based on aggregated multiple responses, with each respondent counted only once overall.

# Who Threatens Journalists |

## Who do you think is behind these threats?

Multiple-choice question



**77%**

**of respondents have been threatened by representatives of public authorities** (public officials, local elected officials, national elected officials, law enforcement)\*

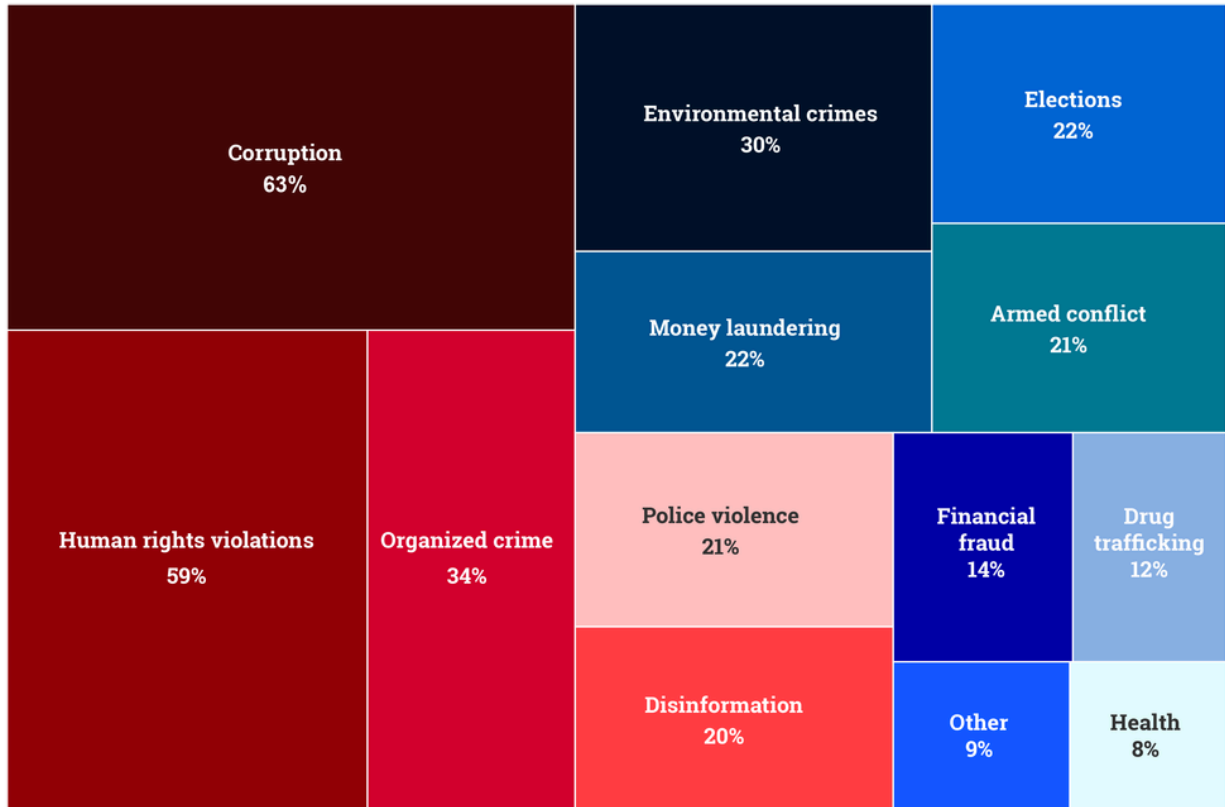
That is twice as many as criminal or armed groups (36%)\*

\*This specific percentage is based on aggregated multiple responses, with each respondent counted only once overall.

# What They're Trying to Silence

What investigation topic(s) do you think led to the threats?

Multiple-choice question



63%

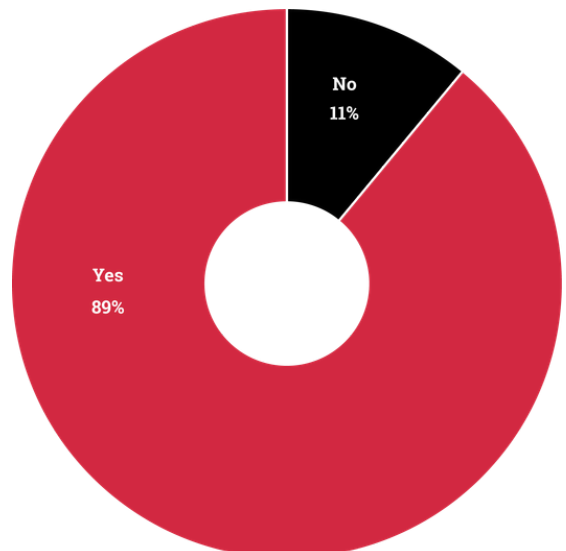
of respondents have been threatened for investigating **corruption**

30%

of respondents have been threatened for investigating **environmental crimes**

Would you say that in your country and region, isolated journalists are more exposed to threats and attacks?

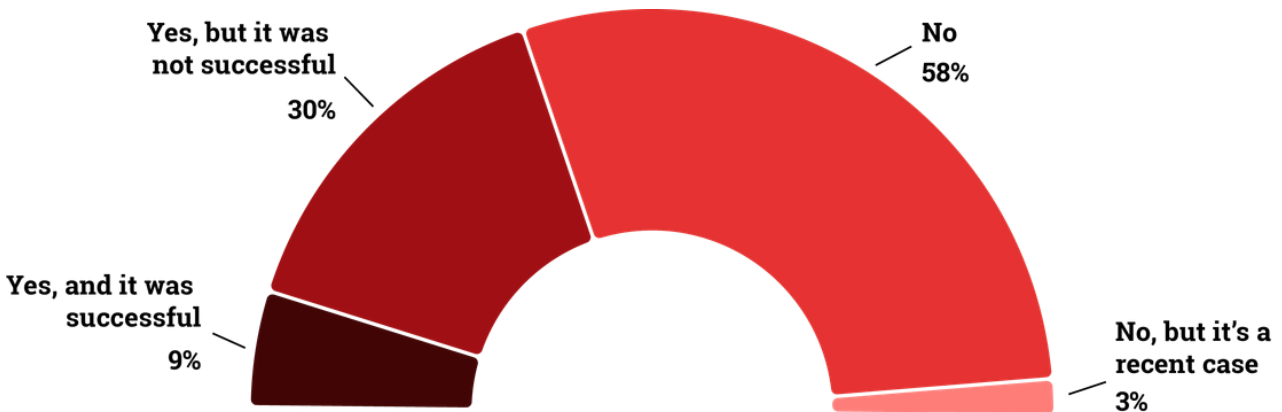
Single-choice question



# When the Justice System Fails Journalists |

Following these threats, did you take legal action?

Single-choice question



**88%** of respondents **did not file a complaint** following the threat (58%), or did so, but the **complaint was unsuccessful** (30%)

“ The regime has already tried to eliminate me. ”

— **Carlos Flores**, Venezuelan journalist

“ Three journalists have already been murdered in the region. ”

— **Vanderlei Filho**, Brazilian journalist

“ No one publishes such stories. If I am not writing about it, who will? ”

— **Betty Herlina**, Indonesian journalist



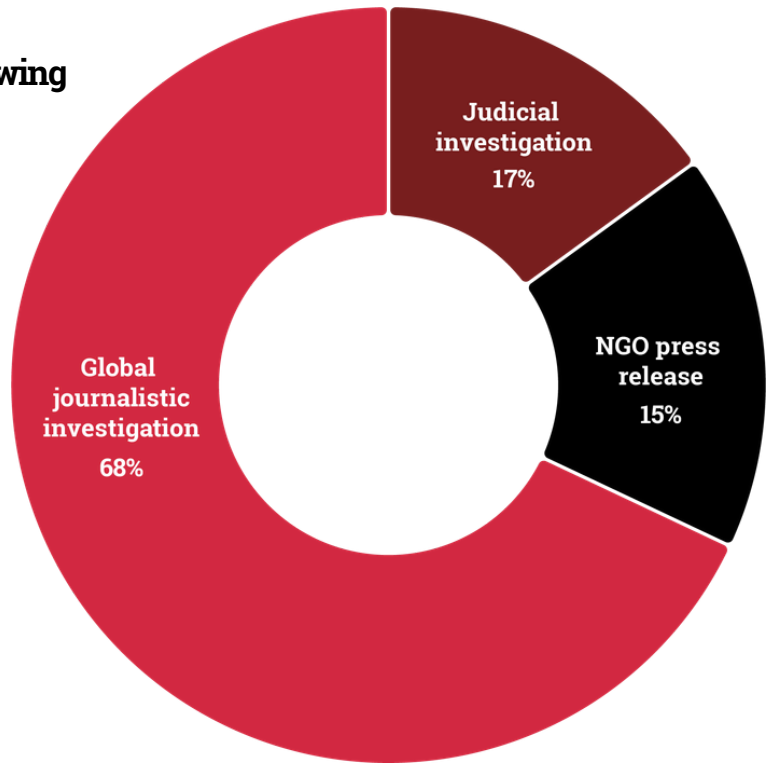
# What Attackers Fear Most: Journalists Working Together

In your opinion, which of the following three situations would the people threatening you dread the most?

Single-choice question

**68%**

of respondents say their attackers **“dread” global journalistic investigations** far more than NGO statements (15%) or legal action (17%).



## International scrutiny hits a nerve

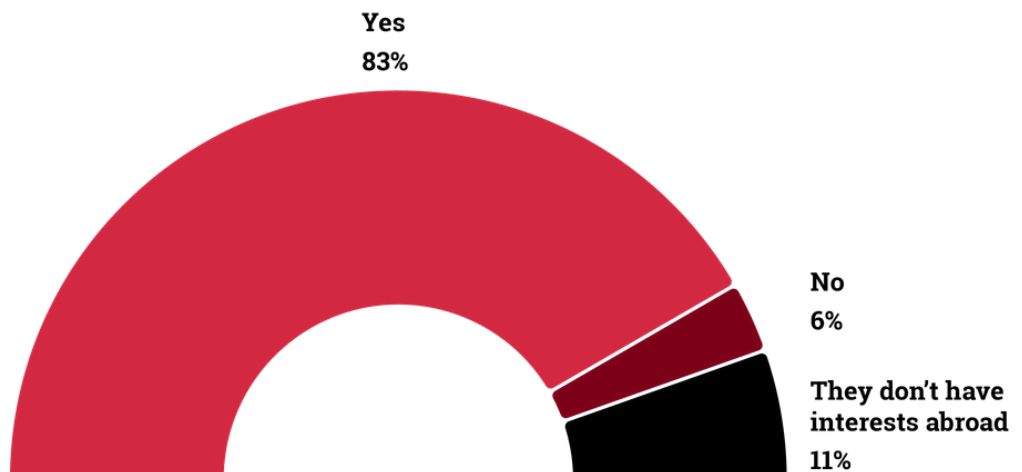
In your opinion, could the people who threaten you or are bothered by your investigations be afraid that an international network of journalists might investigate their possible “interests” abroad?

(real estate assets, bank accounts, supply chains, foreign clients, political connections)

Single-choice question

**83%**

of respondents say those targeting them could be concerned about **international investigations into their assets and activities abroad**



# Attack One, Face Many |

Forbidden Stories has been developing a mechanism that allows threatened journalists to make publicly known that their ongoing investigations are safely held by a global consortium of reporters: They make it clear to their aggressors that they are no longer alone and attempts to silence them are pointless.

If they are ever assassinated or jailed, Forbidden Stories will continue their work with its international network of media partners and publish it worldwide. The information some tried to bury is amplified.

Known as the SafeBox Network, this mechanism is currently used by over 250 reporters around the world. Forbidden Stories mobilized this unique network of highly threatened journalists to respond to the survey (78% of respondents, 159 out of 204).

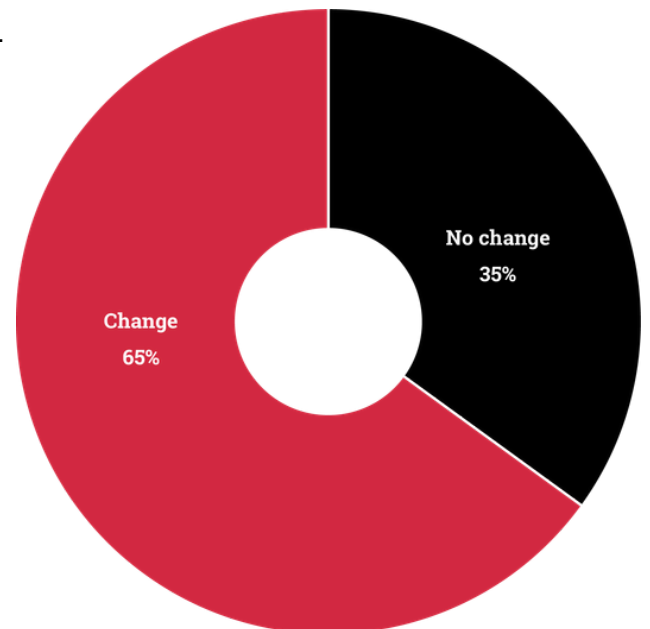
## If you are a member of the SafeBox Network and made your membership public, have you noticed changes since?

(e.g., a decrease in threats, a less aggressive attitude from the people you're investigating)

Single-choice question

**65%**

of SafeBox Network members report a change after publicly disclosing that their ongoing investigations are secured by a global network of journalists



“ When we publish a new investigation, we publicly state that the information is protected by SafeBox.

Several politicians in Ecuador told me that they now think twice before trying to silence us. ”

— **Leonardo G. Ponce**, Ecuadorian journalist, editor-in-chief of Tierra de Nadie, SafeBox Network member

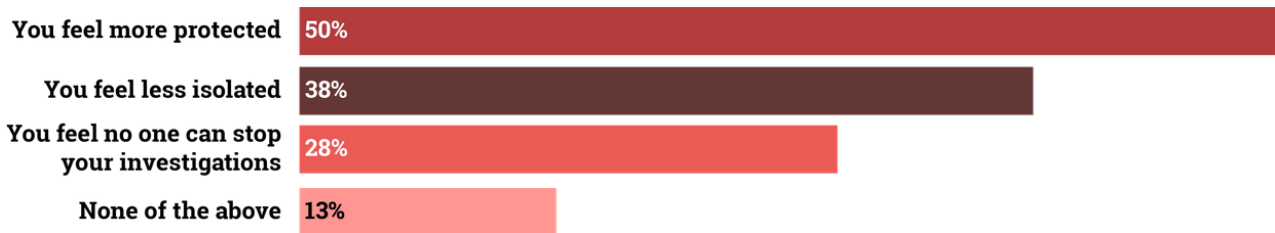


# “It Protects Both Our Work and Our Lives”

— Óscar Parra, Colombian journalist

## Since becoming a member of the SafeBox Network:

Multiple-choice question



**75%** of respondents report feeling “**more protected**” and/or “**less isolated**” since securing their ongoing investigations with Forbidden Stories through the SafeBox Network\*

\*This specific percentage is based on aggregated multiple responses, with each respondent counted only once overall.

“ By protecting my investigations, Forbidden Stories ensures anyone watching me that ‘Killing the journalist will not kill the story.’ ”

— **Marzia Hasmi Momo**,  
Bangladeshi journalist and  
SafeBox Network member



“ The SafeBox is the most potent blow dealt to enemies of press freedom. It has become the most trusted ally for journalists all over. ”

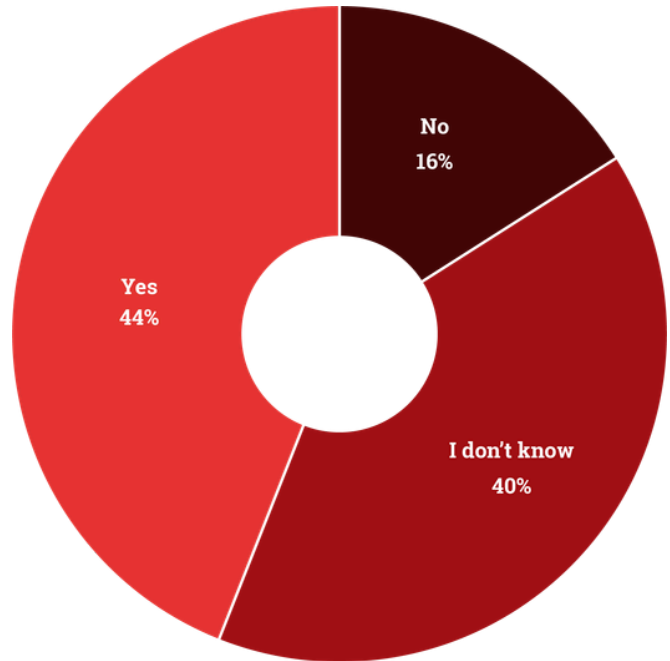
— **Lami Sadiq**,  
Nigerian journalist and  
SafeBox Network member



# Feeling Supported by Peers Around the World Expands What Can Be Reported

Has SafeBox Network’s support enabled you to conduct investigations that would otherwise have been too dangerous?

Single-choice question



# 70

members of the SafeBox Network report they were able to conduct **investigations that they would have otherwise deemed “too dangerous”** – stories that would have gone untold.

“ SafeBox is the hand on your shoulder that says, ‘Keep going. We have got the story covered,’ and it turns silencing a journalist into an outdated, failed strategy for perpetrators. ”

– **Rohit Upadhy**,  
Indian journalist and  
SafeBox Network member

“ The fight against misinformation upsets powerful interests, and some are willing to do anything to achieve their goals. Thanks to SafeBox, I can wage this battle with greater peace of mind. ”

– **Mardoché Boli**,  
Malian journalist and  
SafeBox Network member





**forbidden** stories

# Killing the Journalist Won't Kill the Story |

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