

2021

# LOCKED KICKED DOWN OR OUT

COVERING CHINA



THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB  
OF CHINA 驻华外国记者协会

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## COV ERING CHINA

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### FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' CLUB OF CHINA REPORT ON MEDIA FREEDOM IN 2021

#### INTRODUCTION

Foreign correspondents are facing unprecedented hurdles covering China as a result of the government's efforts to block and discredit independent reporting. As the number of journalists forced out by the Chinese state grows due to excessive intimidation or outright expulsions, covering China is increasingly becoming an exercise in remote reporting.

Ninety-nine percent of foreign journalists responding to an annual survey conducted by the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC) said that reporting conditions did not meet what they considered to be international standards.

Foreign journalists are routinely surveilled both online and offline, in the field as well as in the cities where they are based, including Beijing and Shanghai. The Chinese state continues to find new ways to intimidate foreign correspondents, their Chinese colleagues, and those whom the foreign press seeks to interview, via online trolling, physical assaults, cyber hacking, and visa denials.

"The tactics local public security bureau officials use to disturb journalists have become more elaborate and more thorough, especially when we try to report sensitive issues like religion or ethnic minorities," said the bureau chief of a Japanese outlet.

Chinese authorities also appear to be encouraging a spate of lawsuits or the threat of legal action against foreign journalists, typically filed by sources long after they have explicitly agreed to be interviewed. The FCCC highlights this development with alarm, as foreigners involved in civil or criminal lawsuits and court proceedings in China can be banned from leaving the country, based on past precedent.

Cheng Lei, an Australian journalist working for Chinese state broadcaster CGTN, and Haze Fan, a Chinese national working for Bloomberg News, have both been detained for more than a year. Chinese authorities still have not publicly released details regarding either Cheng or Fan, beyond vague allegations of being involved in state security cases.



Heightened dangers have prompted foreign journalists and their organizations to develop emergency exit plans in the increasingly likely event that they and their families are compelled to leave quickly given security concerns.

“The risk landscape is changing at the moment in unfamiliar ways. In particular, news organizations face warnings that their reporting may expose them to legal sanctions or civil lawsuits, or – most ominously – to national security investigations,” said David Rennie, Beijing bureau chief for the Economist.

“In the past, the main tools used to control media involved restrictions on access, blacklisting from events, or problems with press cards and visas,” he said. “The growing use of the law is new and worrying.”

Foreign journalists and their families are being harassed so severely by the state – including being surveilled and accosted on personal trips – that a handful of correspondents, demoralized and under attack, have simply left mainland China.

“As we made our hasty exit, the plainclothes police tailing us and our young children to the airport were final proof of the dangers we faced and of China’s deep intolerance for independent journalism,” said John Sudworth, a BBC correspondent who left his post in Beijing suddenly in March after the harassment and threats of legal action made staying in China untenable.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, state-backed attacks against foreign journalists, particularly trolling campaigns online, have made it increasingly hard for journalists remaining in China to operate as they foster a growing feeling among the Chinese public that foreign media are the enemy.

Coverage of China is suffering. International news organizations are fighting tooth and nail to continue providing a quality level of reporting despite reduced in-country staff. Nothing replaces on-the-ground reporting, free of state obstruction and surveillance.

“For a second straight year, we had to find ways to cover China almost entirely from outside the mainland,” said Jonathan Cheng, Beijing bureau chief for the Wall Street Journal. “It has tested our resourcefulness, and there are some things we simply are unable to do from afar, much of it related to bringing our readers outside [of] China’s biggest cities.”

The Chinese government’s expulsion of foreign journalists in 2020 remains the “single biggest blow to international reporting in China,” said Steven Lee Myers, Beijing bureau chief for the New York Times.

Myers, expelled from China and now based in Seoul, noted that many correspondents have “continued to cover China from over the horizon, but that involves obvious difficulties.”

Foreign correspondents unable to remain in China have relocated, including to Taipei, Singapore, Sydney, and London. Hong Kong is no longer an appealing option after China imposed a sweeping national security law on the city in 2020, and has begun expelling foreign journalists, on top of arresting and jailing local journalists.

“What’s more, in the last year, many people who once spoke freely and openly, frequently declined to speak by telephone, restricting another avenue of reporting,” Myers said. “That seems to reflect a general climate of fear that journalists in China have also experienced, but it is obviously an even greater challenge for those outside.”

The Chinese state is crippling the remaining journalists working for U.S. news organizations in China by refusing to renew their press cards. This new visa harassment tactic impacted at least 22 journalists from the U.S., U.K.,

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<sup>1</sup> [https://twitter.com/fccchina/status/1377165389507883012?s=20;](https://twitter.com/fccchina/status/1377165389507883012?s=20)

Canada, Italy, Japan, and New Zealand. Instead, MOFA issued paper letters to these journalists, giving them provisional reporting rights.

“We’re covering less news now than we have in a very long time. That’s a pity for readers outside of China trying to understand this country and for China,” said the bureau chief of a major U.S. outlet. “When staffing at foreign media shrinks to the levels they’re at now, one of the most notable things that gets lost is nuance. Everything gets more black and white.”

The Chinese government also handed these journalists shortened residence permits of two to three months rather than the standard one-year, leaving them in constant limbo.

While China’s strict pandemic measures have allowed authorities to curb the number of infections, Covid-19 has been used frequently by authorities seeking to delay approvals for journalist visas, shut down reporting trips, deny access to certain locations, and decline interview requests. Foreign journalists are often asked to comply with requirements and restrictions that do not apply to others, both Chinese and foreign.

“Continued zero-Covid policies, staffing issues, rising geopolitical tensions, growing mistrust, and at times outright hostility towards Western media in China create a perfect storm,” said Steven Jiang, Beijing bureau chief for CNN. “Life and work for foreign reporters in this country are only going to become more challenging in the foreseeable future.”

Travel restrictions within China – and specifically, in and out of Beijing – have been ramped up as the government prepares to host the Winter Olympic Games in February 2022, making it even more difficult than usual for foreign journalists to conduct their work.

“The situation with Covid has made us more reluctant to leave Beijing,” said Patrick Baert, Beijing bureau chief for Agence France-Presse. “Especially with the [Beijing Winter] Olympics coming up, we have started just postponing reporting trips outside of Beijing because we’re scared we won’t be able to return.”

As China pulls out all the stops for the Olympic Games, the FCCC is troubled by the breakneck speed by which media freedom is declining in China, a rising global power and the world’s second-largest economy.

China’s approach to foreign journalists is in direct contrast to its own stated policies for foreign media and the Olympic spirit of excellence, friendship, and respect.

Alarming, China’s obstructions to independent reporting are worsening at the same time the world becomes increasingly polarized over China’s rise. The correct response is not to block journalists and their ability to work, but to let more in and to allow them to report unfettered.

The FCCC strongly believes that an independent media presence in China will bolster the country’s standing globally. China can boost confidence in its story not by flooding the world with highly orchestrated state propaganda, but by also letting others tell that story.

## - VISA HARASSMENT -

Foreign media organizations in China are operating under critical labor shortages imposed by the Chinese state, which has largely refused to award new visas to foreign journalists after issuing mass expulsions in 2020.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) has failed to grant new credentials to numerous journalists seeking to begin assignments, citing the pandemic and geopolitical tensions. The Chinese government has, however, issued other types of visas to foreigners, such as business visas.

A handful of resident journalist J-1 visas were issued for journalists working at news organizations headquartered primarily in East Asia. In 2021, the FCCC was aware that at least a dozen J-1 visas were also granted to several European news media.

However, MOFA's cherry-picking of journalists means the majority of outlets are still waiting for visas to be approved. Some journalists have been waiting more than a year, and several organizations have more than one application outstanding.

Such visa delays have had a serious and detrimental impact on organizations' news-gathering capabilities.

- **46%** of respondents said their bureaus were understaffed because they had not been able to bring in the required number of journalists
  - Only **4%** of respondents said their organization had received a new J-1 visa in 2021
  - **36%** of respondents said that their organization specifically was still waiting on one or more J-1 visa applications

Correspondents surveyed said that MOFA officials raised concerns with their or their outlet's previous coverage of China. This indicates the Chinese government is willing to grant credentials to journalists and organizations, but only to those whose coverage they deem useful or favorable.

*We had two J-1 applicants who had been waiting for more than a year and finally gave up during 2021.*  
**-Bureau chief with a Western news agency**

*We have four people waiting for new visas, [the] longest since December 2020. The latest reason given is we are British media, and MOFA can't hand out visas to British media when the United Kingdom's COVID prevention policy is so bad. None of the people waiting are in the U.K.*  
**-Reporter with British media**

*Delayed J-1 visa for my reporter/cameraman. Each time we ask the [international press center] and our handler, we're told that it's still processing.* **-American media network**

Journalists working for news organizations headquartered in the U.S. have been additionally impacted as a result of retaliatory restrictions placed by Beijing against those outlets.

In September 2020, China stopped renewing press cards to journalists accredited with U.S. news organizations, regardless of their nationality. This impacted journalists from the U.S., U.K., Canada, Italy, Japan, and New Zealand.<sup>2</sup>

Instead, MOFA gave these journalists paper letters giving them provisional reporting rights. The Chinese government also put them on shortened residence permits of two to three months rather than the standard one-year, leaving them in a state of ongoing uncertainty.

- **22** respondents said they had received letters rather than press cards as well as truncated visas

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dropbox.com/s/xye6bhlicos4hqm/2020%20FCCC%20Report.pdf?dl=0>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/06/us/politics/china-us-journalists-visas-expulsions.html>

Due to this visa limbo, American citizens working for U.S. news outlets were unable to exit China and re-enter unlike most other foreigners working in China. Nearly all journalists chose to remain in China indefinitely to continue reporting, at great personal cost.

In November 2021, China and the U.S. agreed to ease some – but not all – visa restrictions on both countries' journalists. The FCCC welcomes this development and will be watching carefully to understand how it is applied on the ground.

As of the end of 2021, China had yet to grant visas to the handful of U.S. journalists promised under the agreement.

Meanwhile, correspondents with existing J-1 visas continued to face difficulty renewing them, with a number of journalists receiving truncated press credentials as punishment for coverage that MOFA disliked.

- **Nine** respondents (not working for U.S. media) said they had received truncated press cards valid for less than the standard one-year
  - **27%** of respondents had difficulty renewing their credentials in 2021
- **60%** of respondents were asked to come in for an interview prior to issuance of their press card

Renewing journalist credentials in China is a two-step process. First, correspondents must apply at MOFA for a renewed press card, which allows them to work as a journalist in China.

Then, correspondents surrender their passports to the police – the Public Security Bureau's Exit and Entry Administration – to receive a residence permit, which allows them to live in-country.

This period without a passport can present logistical challenges living and working in China, as foreigners are often required to present official ID for almost all administrative functions. Having official ID on hand has become even more necessary with China's strict Covid and contact-tracing measures.

- **41%** of respondents said press card renewal took more than 7 working days, MOFA's stated period for issuing a new card
  - **14%** said it took more than 7 working days for Exit-Entry to grant a visa
  - **10%** of correspondents said leaving their passport with Exit-Entry led to issues with banks, hotels, and international travel

Correspondents said they experienced lengthy haranguing from officials over their coverage of China and that of their colleagues in interviews with MOFA prior to receiving their press credentials.

*The discussion centered mainly on the Chinese government's unhappiness with the reporting our team had carried out on Xinjiang, Uyghur workers in mainland China, and the coverage of the WHO investigation into the origins of Covid-19. The tone was mainly lecturing and critical. They accused us of hurting the feelings of the Chinese people and of being biased in our coverage. MOFA also accused specific colleagues of being biased against China.*

**-Reporter with a Western news outlet**

*Friendly in tone, but the MOFA official...made multiple attempts to accuse my colleagues and me of failing to identify ourselves to get interviews, which would be a violation of rules for foreign journalists. I asked for examples but could not be provided with any.*

**-Reporter with a Western news outlet**

## - COVID IMPACT ON COVERAGE -

China continues to apply epidemic policies selectively, with both public and private entities frequently invoking Covid prevention measures as a supposed reason to turn down interviews and block access for journalists. That includes barring them from certain locations, such as the region of Xinjiang, where journalists have sought to investigate human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities that foreign governments and politicians have called genocide.

Further hampering the crucial work of journalists are new regulations that make returning to Beijing very difficult if a single Covid case occurs within the last 14 days in the city or administrative area one is traveling from. Frequent and sudden lockdowns remain common across China, prompting many journalists to cancel or postpone trips.

- **52%** of respondents said they were told to leave a place or denied access for health and safety reasons when they presented no risk, according to China's own regulations
- **29%** said Covid-related visa restrictions had left their bureau so understaffed, their coverage of China had been impacted
- **32%** reported other forms of interference tied to coronavirus regulations – such as being subject to mandatory testing or additional health requirements when other people were not asked to do so

In the face of ever-changing quarantine and testing policies as well as the uneven application of such rules, many reporters have had to cancel stories, marooning them in Beijing or Shanghai and unable to add more depth to stories.

*Interviews and visits are cancelled all the time "because of Covid," even when there are zero cases in the province. In one instance, claims were made by local authorities about an area being closed off for outsiders which later proved to be untrue. -Reporter for a Dutch outlet*

*In one case, a source was threatened with a two-week quarantine for himself, his wife, and his two school kids after meeting with a foreign journalist. To prevent him from being quarantined and to allow his business to stay open, we had to obtain PCR test results and green health codes from the date of filming and provide this to the local authorities. -Daniel Satra, ARD*

*We cancelled several planned trips, since we were basically certain that coronavirus restrictions would prevent us from getting to the places we needed to. -Jonathan Cheng, Wall Street Journal*

## - ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS -

Six reporters said that the personal risks of staying in mainland China were so high, they decided to leave altogether in 2021.

One of the most worrying developments is the use of lawsuits and other means of legal and online intimidation to target journalists who have published or broadcast outstanding journalism about China.

In March 2021, BBC correspondent John Sudworth suddenly left China and moved to Taiwan with his family, after facing severe online trolling and threats of Chinese legal action over his investigative reporting.<sup>3</sup> A lawsuit filed in a Chinese court could have resulted in preventing him and his young family from leaving China. Before his departure, Sudworth and his colleagues had also endured significant personal intimidation.

*The risks to personal safety are simply too high given the derisory access on offer to do good journalism. -Reporter for U.S. media*

Nine foreign correspondents said they had been sued or threatened with legal action by sources and/or government entities, miring them in legal proceedings, which detract from their time reporting and plunge them into great personal risk.

Chinese sources and entities appear increasingly willing to use the threat of legal retaliation to mandate positive stories about China. Correspondents have been asked to sign legal agreements containing astonishingly broad clauses prohibiting any negative coverage – or face legal action. Sources once eager to be interviewed have reneged on previous agreements to be quoted.

*Several days prior to the broadcasting of a story on digital power and surveillance in China, I got called by a MOFA official. He said he heard that we are planning to air this documentary and explained what I might have "misunderstood" in China. The following day, I received a complaint and a lawyer's letter from our protagonist of the documentary, claiming that we harmed his reputation and misrepresented China and that we are not allowed to air the documentary. Our lawyer answered the letter, we aired it, and luckily no lawsuit followed. -European broadcaster*

*One company we tried to interview said they needed us to sign a contract promising we would not do any negative coverage about them or related to them. We told them we couldn't sign a contract. -Greg Baker, AFP*

*A source in Sichuan who'd been very welcoming while I was reporting later called me frantically on WeChat and said she demanded I remove everything I'd gotten from their village or else they would take legal action against me. -Alice Su, LA Times*

## ONLINE TROLLING

Nearly a quarter of respondents said they were targeted in online smear campaigns as a result of their reporting in China. Such online attacks have further contributed to a hostile working environment.

Organizations including the BBC, NPR, and the Economist have been attacked by state-linked entities, state media, and anonymous social media accounts for their reporting.

*Some of our reporters covering China from outside the mainland have faced torrents of abuse and harassment from Chinese internet users, including attempts to hack into their personal social media accounts. -European media*

*Other foreign staff and our local staff have had their names, phone numbers, and ID details published online. I've faced relentless online abuse and trolling – sometimes encouraged by individuals working in Chinese state media. -European media*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-56586655>



Online trolling falls disproportionately on female journalists of East Asian ethnic descent, as well as Chinese employees of foreign news organizations. Attackers routinely disparage their coverage of China and make crude sexual innuendos, including alarming threats of physical violence.

*After a state-linked blog published numerous exposes criticizing my reporting from a half year ago as "illegal," hundreds of Chinese social media accounts began posting my picture along with comments like "beat her to death" and describing sexual acts.*

**-Emily Feng, NPR**

Such attacks on foreign journalists and their Chinese colleagues are sometimes directly encouraged and instigated by the state and state-backed entities.

Chinese officials – based in Beijing, as well as ambassadors stationed abroad – now regularly pen lengthy and vituperative takedowns of individual journalists which are published online, in state media press, or on official social media.

*The Chinese Embassy in my home country slammed a recent piece I wrote about Taiwan, describing me as full of "lies" in a long rant published on its website and its official Twitter account. My MOFA handler told me a couple of days before that they "knew very well of my file [to re-enter China], and they were examining it carefully." I am not holding my breath.*

**-Reporter with a European outlet**

*The Chinese embassy in Berlin sent a five-page statement of indignation to our editors-in-chief after we had published a cover story about the [Covid] lab leak theory.*

**-Georg Fahrion, Der Spiegel**

Growing public attacks reflect an emboldened Chinese government willing to go to great lengths to discredit foreign journalists and their work. Such criticism appears designed to pressure editors and managers at headquarters to dial back objective coverage of China. However, the FCCC notes that none of this has stopped foreign journalists from doing their job, nor major global news organizations from going after the stories that matter.

In numerous incidents, official Chinese government and state media accounts on Twitter have singled out journalists, specifically naming them and encouraging vitriol – even death threats. It should be noted that Twitter is censored by the government in mainland China. The fact that such attacks are allowed to take place further indicates that these campaigns against journalists are state-sanctioned and meant for a global audience.

*In one message, a handler from MOFA told me objective reporting was a precondition for access to media events [and] interviewees, which I took to mean if they did not like my reporting they would not invite me to Olympic press coverage events. -Paddy Fok, FSN*

*After filming a piece in China's Hubei province on a polluted day, I faced relentless online attacks from trolls and Chinese state media journalists accusing me of using a "special gray filter to make China look bad." I was then called into the local branch of China's foreign ministry to answer questions about whether I, or any of my colleagues, had indeed used some sort of "special gray filter." It seems clear to me that it's all part of a broader attempt to discredit our journalism and our work. -Ed Lawrence, BBC*

Online threats and attacks have real impact offline, encouraging real physical danger to foreign journalists and their Chinese colleagues working out in the field.

In July, when journalists were covering floods in Henan province, an official social media account of the Communist Party called on citizens to actively look for journalists working for the BBC – specifically correspondent Robin Brant – and alert the authorities if any were spotted.

After the post was published online, several journalists were confronted in the field by angry mobs.

*While reporting in Henan on the floods... a lady who worked at a local clinic, walked up to my colleague and snapped a picture of their face, then walked away. When asked what she was doing, she all but accused us of spying and engaging in nefarious activities as "foreign forces" and reported us to the police. At the same time, it appears she circulated messages on local chat groups, as large numbers of people started to appear around us as she made her accusations. -Reporter with a Western news agency*

*I was interviewing shopkeepers in Henan province who had lost their property in the floods, when a man in a white T-shirt told me to stop filming. Other people began gathering around us, including one woman who was filming us and blocked my way, asking whether I was legitimate media. A group of middle-aged to older men showed me a picture of a BBC reporter and asked whether that [person] was me. They became pretty aggressive, pushing me around. One man tried to snatch my phone from me. Others were shouting at me, calling me a bad person, accusing me of spreading rumors and of smearing China. -Mathias Boelinger, German TV reporter*

## - FIELD ISSUES: REPORTING ON CHINA'S INCREASING 'RED LINES' -

The most common method for blocking reporting in 2021 has also been the most low-tech. Using sheer force, Chinese authorities have physically blocked and harassed reporters as well as their sources.

- **62%** of respondents said they were obstructed at least once by police or other officials
  - **47%** said they were obstructed by unidentified individuals
- **12%** were manhandled or subjected to other forms of physical force while working

Foreign journalists are stonewalled when covering stories the Chinese government deems sensitive, such as human rights abuses and politically sensitive events.

*Outside a courthouse in Beijing, while covering the closely-followed Michael Kovrig trial <sup>4</sup> I was twice manhandled by uniformed officials who grabbed my equipment, shoved me, and stopped me from filming. -Journalist for a Western news outlet*

They have also been harassed while covering official events such as the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in July 2021, despite being issued occasion-specific press credentials by the government. Reporters were tailed and harassed while conducting interviews at the numerous state-organized press junkets pegged to the anniversary.

<sup>4</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/beijing-trials-arrests-china-canada-a417ecc1e5edf45edc4301ae2e183c82>

One of the most sensitive areas of coverage remains any story about China's leader Xi Jinping. Nearly one-fifth of respondents said they or their media organization was harassed while gathering stories about Xi, or threatened with repercussions following the publication or broadcast of such stories.

As China enters the third year of the pandemic, authorities continue to block reporting on the coronavirus – just as they have done since Covid-19 emerged in Wuhan in December 2019.

Foreign correspondents recounted being prevented from visiting key sites in Wuhan, as well as locations across China where experts suspect the coronavirus may have originated.

*Villagers with bamboo sticks obstructed the road when we entered and claimed "outsiders" had no access to their village, mentioning Covid as the reason. In another spot, near another set of caves in Yunnan, an unknown man started to manhandle me when I wanted to enter a dirt road leading to one of the caves on foot. -Sjoerd Den Daas, NOS*

*While I was photographing the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the security staff first tried to block me from photographing outside the institute. During the WHO team visit in Wuhan, unidentified men tried to stop me and other visual reporters from covering the WHO appointments at some facilities. -Photographer for a Western outlet*

Chinese officials have become more brazen, directly asking journalists to stop pursuing reporting the government deems critical of the state and its policies, leveraging their power to grant access as yet another way to pressure foreign journalists.

*I have been summoned to the Foreign Ministry [many times], including once in late November when I was asked that our media [organization] stop asking the spokesperson publicly about the Peng Shuai affair.<sup>5</sup> -Bureau chief at an international news agency*

*In one instance, we requested and received accreditation for the Canton Fair, but a few days later it was withdrawn again...Shortly after, I was invited and then disinvited from a government-sponsored press trip to Shaanxi. We learned that government officials had seen our reporting on Xinjiang, and didn't like it; therefore, they didn't want Der Spiegel on this trip. -Georg Fahrion, Der Spiegel*

## REPORTING ON XINJIANG

Reporting from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) proved particularly difficult, as has now been the case for many years. At times during the year, much of the region was off limits to foreign journalists due to Covid controls including an apparent seven-day quarantine.

Despite Covid controls, many more correspondents traveled to Xinjiang than in 2020. Thirty-two respondents visited the region at least once in 2021, a 78 percent increase from the year prior.

- **88%** of the journalists who traveled to Xinjiang in 2021 said that they were visibly followed, often by men in plainclothes
  - **44%** said their interviews were visibly monitored and disrupted
- **34%** were asked or forced to delete data, such as photos or video footage they had taken in Xinjiang

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<sup>5</sup> Peng Shuai is a tennis player who largely disappeared from public view after accusing a former top Communist Party official, Zhang Gaoli, of sexual abuse.

*When trying to get to certain locations, such as destroyed Uyghur shrines, we were accosted by men in plainclothes who physically assaulted us. They accused us of trespassing and taking photos in a military area, even while we were clearly in the middle of the desert with nothing for miles around. The videographer and I both got hit in the face, my lip was bleeding, and they confiscated some of our equipment. -Sophia Yan, Telegraph*

*In Aksu, a group of five to six men would tail me, including one wearing riot gear and carrying a rifle. -Journalist for a Western news outlet*

*When we were filming outside of a detention camp, we were approached by people claiming they were out for a walk. Security officials also showed up. They forced us to delete all the footage on our camera, as well as voice recordings, photos, and videos on our phones. -European media*

*While reporting in Xinjiang, local police and paramilitary police detained my photographer and me for around 90 minutes. They told us repeatedly that we would be released if we signed a handwritten note that said we had intentionally taken photos of a military installation. -Correspondent for Western news outlet*

One of the most pressing concerns for journalists when it comes to Xinjiang coverage is keeping sources safe. In the most extreme cases, sources have been jailed in retaliation for having contact with foreign journalists.

- **10%** said they witnessed their interviewees being threatened or facing retaliation after speaking to foreign journalists

*A woman who had been chatting with us amicably made a zipping motion across her mouth, pushed past us, and ran out of her store, literally fleeing from us after being spoken to by the shadowy men trailing us. -Journalist from an international news outlet*

As in other places in China, authorities in Xinjiang repeatedly invoked Covid as a reason to hinder foreign journalists.

- **47%** said they encountered officials citing Covid to block access to locations and interviewees

*We were denied access to Pishan County entirely because of Covid controls, even though Xinjiang hadn't officially seen a case for months at that point. We were denied access to Kurumkash/Kunyu. Entire cities didn't have a single hotel that would receive foreigners, forcing me to spend one night in a late-night hot pot restaurant and another one sleeping in our rental car at a highway rest stop while our minders parked in a triangular formation around us, high beams blazing and aimed straight at our car. -Journalist from an international news organization*

*In Xinjiang, police held us up for an hour at the train station when we arrived in a small town. They made us get a Covid test although it was in the middle of the night. They told us we couldn't film until the local publicity department grants us a permit to report. We went out filming anyway the following morning. Many interviewees received a phone call while speaking to us and left clearly worried. -Reporter for European outlet*



For some foreign correspondents, the official pressure did not end when they left Xinjiang and returned to Beijing. One respondent faced direct threats concerning their visa status, while many others were reprimanded by MOFA for their coverage.

- **24%** said MOFA summoned them for a meeting after they left the region

## REPORTING ON TIBET

Access to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is officially restricted for foreign journalists. Despite efforts from international governments, including a 2018 piece of US legislation<sup>6</sup> demanding reciprocal access to TAR for journalists and officials, foreign journalists remain unable to freely visit.

Journalists must apply to the government for special permission or join a press tour organized by China's State Council or MOFA. Such tours are by invitation only, allowing the government to select specific journalists.

*I was specifically denied, and was told it was on the request of TAR officials. Another colleague who had not covered the region was permitted in my place. -Journalist at a Western outlet*

None of the four journalists who applied for permission to travel to TAR in 2021 were approved by the government.

Journalists selected by the Chinese government to participate in state-organized trips to TAR were closely watched and prevented from going to places or meeting people other than those presented by state officials hosting the visit.

Foreign correspondents also experienced harassment while reporting in Tibetan-inhabited areas outside of the TAR, such as Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces.

*Interviews cancelled, thrown out of towns in Tibetan areas of Sichuan by police, detained in Chengdu. And not all for sensitive stories either. It's become impossible to do any journalism. -Magazine reporter for U.S. media*

*I was traveling with my husband [in Sichuan] when a "doctor" in a lab coat showed up at our hotel room at 10 pm and said we had to either quarantine for 14 days right away in our hotel room or leave, because of Covid. There were no cases reported in the area at the time and no official regulations about foreigners' extra quarantine. He insisted we leave right away and got some plainclothes guys to drive us four hours back to Chengdu in the middle of the night. -Alice Su, LA Times*

## REPORTING ON HONG KONG

For the second consecutive year, Covid travel restrictions have made it impossible for correspondents based in mainland China to travel to and cover Hong Kong on the ground. That has significantly reduced international exposure of Beijing's growing interference in the territory's local governance and daily life.

The media environment in Hong Kong continued to deteriorate under the National Security Law (NSL) after its implementation in 2020.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.google.com.hk/search?q=reciprocal+tibet+act&oq=reciprocal+tibet+act+&aqs=chrome..69j57joi433i512joi512l8.2418joj7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

Space for independent press is shrinking as the political “red lines” hemming in press freedoms multiply. In their 2021 annual report entitled “Freedom in Tatters,” the Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) highlighted that “the risks journalists face amid the NSL and the imminent fake news legislation is growing.”<sup>7</sup>

Fear of being punished under the NSL have also dissuaded sources from speaking to foreign journalists. One of the biggest blows to press freedom was the closure of Hong Kong’s largest pro-democracy paper, Apple Daily, and the arrest of its publisher, Jimmy Lai, and five of its top executives.

As 2021 drew to a close, seven editors and board members at the independent outlet Stand News were arrested under the NSL. Citizen News, another independent outlet that also closely covered Hong Kong’s 2019 anti-extradition protests, shut down soon after over safety concerns.

Deteriorating press freedom in Hong Kong has directly affected the work of correspondents reporting from the mainland, as sources based in the city who were once happy to be interviewed now increasingly decline requests.

*I reached out to a historian specialized in modern Chinese history in Hong Kong to discuss the 100-year anniversary of the Communist Party and the concept of “historical nihilism.” He told me that since he “lives and works in Hong Kong,” he was not going to accept this interview request. -Charles Pellegrin, France 24*

## REPORTING ON OFFICIAL EVENTS

Reporting on China’s official events presents a unique set of challenges. Foreign journalists seeking to cover these events – for instance, the Communist Party’s 100th anniversary celebration, the Winter Olympics in February 2022, or the “Lianghui” annual political meetings – must apply and be approved for credentials specific to the event, despite already having press cards to work in China. This process is often cumbersome and bureaucratic, which takes away time from reporting.

It also allows the Chinese government another opportunity to play gatekeeper. Similar procedures apply for state-sponsored press trips, as only certain journalists are invited to apply, and an even smaller group approved to attend. On those trips, as earlier detailed, journalists are restricted from conducting independent reporting.

- **One-third** of respondents have been denied access to a government-organized media event widely available to other foreign journalists

Official press events are almost always staged. Chinese officials typically require selected media organizations to provide their questions in advance so that they can be vetted prior to press briefings. Such events are broadcast on Chinese state media and presented to the public as legitimate press conferences, when in fact everything is tightly choreographed.

Media freedom deteriorates in the periods around China’s major events – a time when the authorities want to ensure political stability. This translates to even less opportunity for foreign journalists to report.

*I wanted to interview a Party member about becoming a member. At least two of those who were willing to give me an interview were told to be quiet by their party cell. -Mari Manninen, Helsingin Sanomat*

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hkja.org.hk/en/%E6%9C%AA%E5%88%86%E9%A1%9E-en/2021-annual-report-freedom-in-tatters/>

*I had credentials checked twice by different police along the same stretch of road around the period of the Party's 100th anniversary. One let us proceed with our work, while the second made us wait while doing checks. After some time, we told the officers we would leave the area and were allowed to go. Some of our interviewees outside of Beijing received calls from the police after our assistant made contact with them. -Asian media organization*

It is against this deteriorating media freedom backdrop that Beijing is gearing up for the 2022 Winter Olympics.

Many news organizations are planning to send foreign journalists from outside of China to cover the Games, which will require entering a quarantine bubble, along with other as-of-yet unclear conditions. Most China-based correspondents, however, expect to stay outside of this bubble in order to maintain mobility and continue reporting.

- **90%** of respondents are not planning to go in the Olympics bubble

Foreign correspondents say Chinese authorities, including the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (BOCOG), have not provided clear information about access and logistics, such as Covid procedures and requirements.

- **60%** of respondents say they did not receive adequate information prior to Olympic-related events
  - **23%** were unable to get in touch with appropriate Olympics committee personnel
  - **32%** were excluded from events open to other media

In contrast, only 10 percent of respondents say they have been able to reliably attend pre-Olympics events and press conferences. Correspondents often only learn of press events – usually well-attended by Chinese state media – after they occur.

*I was outside our bureau on a public street doing a basic vox pop about the Beijing Winter Olympics. My colleague and I were suddenly prevented from filming an interview by two unidentified plainclothes [police] who claimed an authorization was required because we were on a "private" site. Shortly afterwards, my Chinese producer was physically prevented from leaving by the two men. -European journalist for a global newswire*

*Requests to interview Chinese athletes or coaches participating in the Olympic Winter Games were all met with the same reply: "permission is needed from China Sports Association." But CSA doesn't give any permissions, so effectively all interviews with Chinese athletes and coaches are banned. On interviewing academics and SOE employees: I have given up sending them requests a long time ago. Permission is almost never granted, so it's a waste of time. -Journalist of Dutch newspaper*

*I was yelled at and criticized by a BOCOG media organizer after I mentioned human rights boycotts in one of my reports, which included an official tour of Olympic venues. -Broadcast journalist*

*Communication has been unbelievably bad. We have been excluded from events open to other media on grounds of Covid prevention and limited capacity. There does seem to have been an effort recently to invite us to more, but to low-interest tours (e.g. athletes' villages, official ceremonies), rather than test events. -Tom Cheshire, Sky News*

## - PRESSURE AND THREATS AGAINST SOURCES -

To prevent independent reporting, Chinese authorities harass and intimidate those most vulnerable to political coercion: Chinese sources. In extreme cases, sources have been sentenced to prison, police have intercepted interviewees on their way to meet journalists, and threatened sources in front of correspondents.

*One of my sources was detained and sentenced to prison after forwarding me a screenshot. It was a deeply traumatizing ordeal, and I have no idea when he will get out. I have no idea how the authorities found out about the matter. -Western journalist*

*While reporting on the Chinese property sector crisis, I was approached by a man who said he had lost money and wanted to talk. We walked a few blocks away, and when I set my camera up to interview, plainclothes officers pounced and roughed him up while stopping me from speaking to him. -Correspondent for U.S. media*

Journalists conducting vox pops in non-sensitive public spaces have been aggressively stopped, while sources are routinely threatened by police and forced to cancel interviews last-minute.

- More than a quarter of respondents said their sources were harassed, detained, or called in for questioning by police more than once, while 14% of respondents said this happened once
  - 42% said they either know for sure or suspect that an interview was cancelled or withdrawn because of pressure from authorities
  - 92% had interviews declined by sources who said they required prior permission from the authorities or their employers to speak to foreign media

Access to academics, think tankers, and employees of both state-owned and private enterprises continues to shrink, with the vast majority requiring approval from higher-ups in order to speak to foreign journalists.

*I had one [retired] academic who had me ask permission of her ex-research institute and of the Foreign Affairs Office of the province where she lived. The FAO had someone listening in on the interview. He interfered when he thought questions were inappropriate, even though my interviewee had no problems with the questions and was willing to answer them all. -European newspaper correspondent*

*I was interviewing people in Jingshan Park. Guards stopped me and took a photo of my press card. They told me I had to send an application to Beijing park officials, including the questions I was going to ask ordinary people in the park. -Mari Manninen, Helsingin Sanomat*

*We have had police at the bureau door wanting to discuss a story after we sent messages to potential contributors on WeChat. -British media*

*I intended to trek with a renowned ranger for several days, but the ranger was visited several days beforehand in his remote mountain village by police who told him to cancel the trip because I was "anti-China" and using the hike as an excuse to sneak into Tibet. The story was about China's improving conservation record. -Emily Feng, NPR*



## - PRESSURES AND THREATS AGAINST CHINESE COLLEAGUES -

Chinese staff employed by international media have always been a crucial part of every foreign news-gathering operation. They provide valuable insight into China and help translate and produce, despite being barred by Chinese law from directly reporting themselves.

Now, they face ever more dire harassment from authorities, causing several to quit their jobs in the face of unbearable pressure. In some cases, authorities have outright denied Chinese individuals permission to work at foreign media outlets.

Haze Fan, a Chinese journalist for Bloomberg News, remains incommunicado in detention more than a year after being taken by police from her Beijing apartment in December 2020. Chinese authorities have provided almost no information about her whereabouts or cause for detention, only alluding to suspicion of endangering national security. She has not been formally arrested or charged.

As in previous years, Chinese colleagues were asked to attend regular meetings with officials from the Ministry of State Security, during which they were asked about their work and for information regarding their foreign colleagues and news organizations – in one case, even being forced to undergo a videotaped confession. State Security agents have referred to Chinese colleagues' families in a threatening way during these interviews.

Chinese colleagues of foreign journalists have also been suddenly visited at their homes, aggressively interrogated about their work, and had their family members in-country harassed.

*Our Chinese news assistant was called into increasingly frequent meetings with State Security agents. She was pressured to provide information regarding specific news, forced to undergo videotaped interrogations, and threatened with having her parents in her hometown contacted, causing great mental distress and eventually leading to her resignation.*

**-European broadcaster**

*My Chinese colleague is invited to "tea" by State Security at least every other month and interrogated about our work and warned against crossing "red lines"* **-American news outlet**

*During one meeting, State Security agents told my colleague that she had a really nice family and they hoped that she would not do anything rash – presumably politically [while] working for foreign media. The meetings spooked my colleague into quitting.* **-American news outlet**

Chinese colleagues have also been verbally abused both online and offline, by members of the Chinese public and government officials as "traitors" for working with foreign journalists while in the field. Some have been doxxed online and received threatening calls and messages.

*Our fixer has been insulted just for working with foreigners and called "hanjian," or "race traitor."* **-European broadcaster**

It is now virtually impossible for Chinese colleagues to research stories on sensitive topics such as Xinjiang and Hong Kong without endangering their safety.

- Nearly **40%** of respondents said their Chinese staff had been pressured, harassed, or intimidated by government authorities at least once
- **50%** said they had put in place additional security procedures in their bureau to reassure their Chinese colleagues

China does not allow foreign media to directly hire Chinese nationals to work in any capacity, for instance, as a researcher, translator, or office manager. Instead, they must be formally employed by the Beijing Personnel Service Corporation for Diplomatic Missions (DPSC), a state-run organization attached to MOFA, and then seconded to foreign news organizations.

This year, that staffing agency began placing new hires under far greater scrutiny. Applications to hire Chinese nationals took months to process – if they were approved at all. Prospective candidates were called in for meetings and asked pointed questions regarding their political views and personal lives.

Some applications were delayed for so long that candidates quit or news organizations were forced to find alternatives. Others were denied the ability to hire their chosen candidate.

*Our researcher candidate was blocked from registering with the Beijing Personnel Service Corporation because she "was not up to their labor standards." When asked to provide a more detailed explanation, DPSC refused to clarify but said "she knows why" she cannot be hired. This is her first job and she completed a master's abroad in journalism. This is really harmful to her future. -Bureau chief at a European outlet*

*We have a firewall on sensitive stories including Xinjiang and Hong Kong. She doesn't know I am working on such stories and does not help with reporting on these at all. We no longer give bylines at all to researchers. -Reporter at a U.S. outlet*

These stepped-up restrictions on Chinese employees indicate the Chinese state is intent on not only hindering correspondents' reporting capabilities, but also on weakening the operational capacity of foreign media bureaus in mainland China.

*Our drivers were pressured and no longer work with us. Building management for the property that houses our bureau has been pressured. They no longer supply cleaners, and we were told (by police who contacted building management) not to use an outside balcony that we've used for over a decade for live reporting during the [Shanghai] Import expo. Our building management were even told by the police to physically block the door to stop us going out there but couldn't, as it is also a fire escape. -Reporter with European media*

## - HUMAN AND DIGITAL SURVEILLANCE -

Police surveillance and harassment on reporting trips have become the norm. More than half of correspondents surveyed experienced human surveillance on trips, such as being followed or having their hotel room entered. As the number of topics deemed politically sensitive by the Chinese authorities has ballooned, so has the use of surveillance.

- **25%** fear Covid contact tracing apps can be used for additional surveillance
- **One-third** of respondents were told to delete or show their data, such as photos and footage, to the police.

*In one instance, police entered my home using a key provided by a neighbor.*  
**-Reporter for an international news agency**

Ubiquitous surveillance has forced journalists to change the way they plan their reporting, and in many cases, that has meant not communicating at all with certain sources in efforts to protect their safety.

*It's absolutely crippling not to be able to use WeChat to communicate with sources, especially when other forms of communication – Signal, or other platforms that require a VPN – are increasingly inaccessible. I have in many cases abandoned the idea of contacting someone because of fear of surveillance.* **-Yuan Yang, Financial Times**

*It is very hard to book any interviews before going on trips, because chances are fairly high they will be pressured into cancelling, or at least monitored. Also, if I need to go on a trip, I want to book the trip as late as possible in order to give as little time for the local authorities to prepare as possible.* **-Correspondent from an European media outlet**

While Chinese platforms like WeChat come with surveillance built-in, state-sponsored attackers are also trying to crack foreign platforms.

*I was told by both officials and Tencent sources that my WeChat messages are under special watch by the government, as are many journalists'.*  
**-Reporter at major European news media**

*MOFA officials have referenced details about my personal life that could only have been known if they intercepted or hacked my texts and emails.* **-Correspondent for U.K. media**

*On Telegram, I had repeated login attempts through an attacker intercepting the password -reset SMS text messages. Given the mobile carriers are state-owned, it's highly likely these are state-sponsored attacks. Thankfully, these are thwarted by adding two-factor authentication.*  
**-Yuan Yang, Financial Times**

## - 2021 IN REVIEW: NOTABLE INCIDENTS -

In January and February, journalists covering the WHO experts' visit to Wuhan as part of an origin-tracing investigation experienced obstruction and harassment from government security officials and plainclothes minders, including at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. One international media team believes they were deliberately prevented from asking questions at the official press conference at the end of the visit.

Also in February, the Chinese embassy in Paris published a statement strongly criticizing an article by Le Monde correspondent Simon Leplâtre about Chinese people mourning the death of Wuhan medical whistleblower Li Wenliang one year on. The attack statement included inflammatory language, throwing out barbs such as "some media like to eat mantou<sup>8</sup> dipped in human blood." This spurred personal attacks against the journalist on Chinese social media.

In March, Sky News journalists had interviews for a story on the tea-growing industry in China cancelled last minute. The reasons given by the source were that "relations between China and the U.K. are not very good" and as such it would be "too sensitive" to speak to foreign media.

Also in March, Alice Su from the Los Angeles Times was blocked from entering Garze, a primarily Tibetan county in Sichuan province, by car. She was singled out at a highway checkpoint and surrounded by about ten police officers asking for ID and negative Covid test results. When she showed her negative test result, they then said she could not enter because she is a journalist, telling her: "This is an autonomous area; we make our own laws."

In April, a foreign journalist was tailed while driving 200 kilometers from the airport into rural areas of Fujian province on a vacation with her husband, two young children, and another family. The car that followed them parked directly outside the hotel they were staying in, remaining through the night.

The same month, German correspondent Mathias Boelinger had his previously cooperative sources intimidated by local police during a reporting trip to Hanyuan, Sichuan. The sources then retracted their quotes and footage, claiming they hadn't been aware he was a foreign reporter. Boelinger was tailed by a car until he reached the highway to Chengdu. Sky News reporters were also constantly followed during a reporting trip to Ningxia, a region primarily populated by the Hui, an ethnic Muslim minority.

In May and June, several correspondents were closely tailed by plainclothes police while visiting the village of Liangjiahe in Shaanxi province where Party leader Xi Jinping spent time as a teenager during the Cultural Revolution. Police intimidated all villagers who spoke with the foreign journalists. In one case, an American correspondent's taxi driver received calls from police demanding updates regarding their movements. correspondents experienced similar state surveillance and source intimidation while visiting Yan'an in Shaanxi, another key site in Communist Party history, in the weeks leading up to the 100th anniversary of the Party's founding on July 1.

Around the same time, Telegraph correspondent Sophia Yan experienced sustained harassment from police and plainclothes minders on a nine-day reporting trip to Xinjiang. On two occasions, Yan and videographer Lorenz Huber were surrounded by several men who physically blocked them from filming or shooting photographs. In one of these instances, the men pinned her arms behind her back, grabbed her clothes, and pulled her backward. They hit Yan and Huber in the face – causing Yan's lip to bleed – confiscated equipment, and forced

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<sup>8</sup> Mantou is a fluffy, steamed Chinese bun made of rice flour



them to delete photos and footage. At the peak, they were surrounded by 30 men for nearly three hours who aggressively accused them of illegally trespassing and photographing in a military zone.

In July, several correspondents and their Chinese colleagues were harassed while reporting on the devastating floods in Henan province. In the most alarming incident, the local Communist Youth League – an official organization – asked its 1.6 million followers on Chinese social media to report the whereabouts of BBC correspondent Robin Brant, after which he became the target of extreme online harassment. A few days later, Zhengzhou residents surrounded Mathias Boelinger, a German TV reporter, and Alice Su of the LA Times, after mistaking Boelinger for BBC's Brant. The crowd grabbed Boelinger's arm and clothes and briefly prevented both reporters from leaving the site. Since then, the China-based staff for BBC, LA Times, and others have been doxxed online and received death threats, intimidating messages, and calls. Some have since left China as a result of the harassment.

In the weeks that followed, Boelinger wrote a Twitter thread where he called the attackers a "mob." Foreign ministry officials demanded several meetings with him, mandating that he delete the tweet or change its wording. At some point, officials threatened to withdraw his accreditation if he refused to comply. Also in Henan, Al Jazeera's crew were followed and filmed while reporting outside a waterlogged metro station, while the Associated Press were stopped and reported to the police while filming in a public area. Agence France-Presse journalists were forced to delete footage by hostile residents and surrounded by several dozen men while reporting on a submerged traffic tunnel.

In late August, a European media correspondent was closely tailed by local officials while reporting on the decade-long fishing ban in Poyang Lake, Jiangxi province. Their sources and driver were intimidated, which led to interviews being cancelled. Officials also accompanied them throughout an interview and followed them to the airport.

In September, the Global Times' Chinese edition singled out four foreign journalists for their "anti-China reporting" and accused them of "spreading lies," marking an escalation in state-sanctioned personal attacks against individual correspondents.<sup>9</sup> These included the LA Times' Alice Su and German correspondent Mathias Boelinger, who experienced mass trolling and online death threats for their reporting on the Henan floods. The article also publicized a lawsuit against Economist correspondent Stephanie Studer and accused BBC's John Sudworth of biased reporting.

In October, the local government of Bijie, Guizhou province announced that a Party cadre was rewarded by the Ministry of State Security for reporting a Western journalist who "conducted illegal reporting" in the area. Shortly afterwards, the Global Times' Chinese edition published an article accusing NPR correspondent Emily Feng of discrediting poverty alleviation efforts through her reporting in Bijie and outing her as the target of the investigation. The article examined basic biographical info about Feng and concluded she was "anti-China" based on her previous coverage of Xinjiang and rights activism in China.

Also in October, another European media correspondent was personally attacked for coverage of Taiwan in a lengthy statement published by the Chinese embassy of their home country. The same month, a European television correspondent was closely followed by around eight plainclothes officers while reporting on a climate change story in rural Shanxi province.

The same month, correspondents from several media outlets experienced issues gaining access to Winter Olympics test events. The FCCC issued a statement<sup>10</sup> calling on the Beijing Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games to provide journalists with up-to-date information and access to events and conducted a follow-up call with the International Olympic Committee on the matter.

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<sup>9</sup><https://3w.huanqiu.com/a/cob22f/44sttdjAxsr>

<sup>10</sup><https://twitter.com/fccchina/status/1455397747842961414?s=20>

## - CONCLUSION -

The year ahead looks grim. Bureaus are still reeling from headcounts far below what is needed to provide engaging and comprehensive coverage of China. Journalists remain surveilled, their Chinese colleagues threatened, and their sources intimidated. The country's strict "zero-Covid" policy is expected to remain in full force in 2022 – and possibly longer – hampering reporting trips and cutting correspondents off from vast swathes of the country.

These developments will complicate coverage of the upcoming Winter Olympics in Beijing, which kick off in February 2022. Thousands of international journalists will be flying into China to cover the Games within carefully designated Covid "bubbles."

The FCCC hopes international standards for media freedom and access will apply within the bubbles. Outside, across greater China, such media freedom will remain under attack, reducing what is possible for broader reporting on the Games' host country.

Despite a broader deteriorating media freedom environment, there have been some positive signs for the foreign media in 2021, including a preliminary agreement between the U.S. and China regarding both countries' journalists.

That deal could see a small number of American journalists working for U.S. outlets granted new J-1 visas. If so, these would be the first new resident journalist permits for U.S. news organizations approved by the Chinese government since 2019. However, none of the 18 journalists working for American media who were expelled in 2020 will be allowed to return. The FCCC is monitoring the issue and hopes commitments materialize.

"The recent agreement between the U.S. and China to allow some journalists to return, while welcome, barely begins to address the loss in reporting strength for those organizations hit hardest by the expulsions," said Steven Lee Myers, Beijing bureau chief for the New York Times, who relocated to Seoul after being expelled in 2020.

These potential steps forward still leave the foreign press far behind the numbers it previously enjoyed. Successive restrictions – some unstated, some formalized – have rapidly chipped away at news bureaus' basic abilities to hire, protect, and replace staff. Ongoing online and offline harassment has only intensified. All signs point to China doubling down on its isolationist stance in the name of Covid prevention.

This isolation has produced an unfortunate suspicion and hostility towards the press. The FCCC notes with disappointment that instead, the Chinese state is closing in on itself at a time when the world, more than ever, needs rich and robust journalism on China.

## - SURVEY METHODS -

This report is based on a survey of journalists who belong to the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China in Beijing and the Shanghai Foreign Correspondents' Club. Conducted in December 2021, 127 of 192 correspondent members representing news organizations from 30 countries and regions responded to the survey.

Percentages reflect the proportion of responses to a specific question. Not all respondents answered every question. Additional interviews with bureau chiefs at ten news organizations headquartered in North America, Australia, Asia, and Europe, were conducted for this report.

For data citations, please credit the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China (FCCC), a Beijing-based professional association whose members include correspondents from 30 countries and regions.

