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## Press Freedom Tracker Counts U.S. Violations

By [Kirsten Ballard](#) August 28, 2017



Four staples in the head and a concussion.

This was the cost for one CBS 6 photojournalist covering an anti-fascist march in Richmond, Virginia, where he was struck in the back of the head with a blunt object.

He is the 15<sup>th</sup> journalist to be attacked in the line of duty in the U.S. this year. This number is sure to rise, but finally someone is keeping track.

The [U.S. Press Freedom Tracker](#) is a new platform counting violations of press freedom. Peter Sterne, Managing Editor of the Press Freedom Tracker, says the standards tracked by CPJ and Reporters Without Borders do a good job tracking press freedom violations around the world — but the standard is relatively high, counting journalists' murders and imprisonment.

"In the U.S., those standards don't really work," Sterne says. "That doesn't mean there aren't press issues."

He says the site is not a reaction specifically to President Trump's beef with the media. "I think the site itself was in some sense a reaction not the presidency but the election of Trump and Trump campaign and constant demonization of journalists and 'fake news,'" he explained. "That woke a lot of people up... Press freedom issues did not start with Donald Trump."

The tracker, for instance, does not count every Twitter attack by the president.

"It's important to emphasize the threats Trump poses to journalists, but there this issue roots in previous administrations," Sterne says.

None of the transgressions being seen today are new. The Obama administration had the largest number of leak prosecutions. Journalists have been arrested at protests for Occupy and Black Lives Matter, but they were never documented comprehensively.

At the time of publication, 20 journalists had been arrested, there were 12 equipment searches and seizures, 15 physical attacks and four border stops in 2017. And that's just what's been reported.

### So what qualifies as a violation?

Whenever a journalist is arrested in the course of doing their job; when a journalist is physically attacked by law enforcement, politicians or private individuals as a result of doing their job; whenever a journalist is stopped at the border and interrogated about their work or they have their devices seized and searched; whenever a journalist is subpoenaed to testify in a criminal case; chilling statements from public figures designed to discourage journalists; whenever journalists are prevented from attending something that should be open to the public or is traditionally open to journalists; and retaliatory denial of access.

The response to the tracker has been almost entirely positive.

"Obviously people realize reporters have been arrested at protests, but the general public did not realize the extent of the issue and the fact that there are press freedom issues and violations in the U.S.," Sterne says.

The tracker relies on people, especially journalists, to send in tips whenever they are involved in an incident or hear about one. If you know of a press freedom violation in 2017 that is not yet on the site, you can email [tips@pressfreedomtracker.us](mailto:tips@pressfreedomtracker.us).



Kirsten Ballard



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