

# FEIND BILD

## JOURNALIST 6

Hatred on the doorstep

EUROPEAN CENTRE  
FOR PRESS & MEDIA  
FREEDOM

**ECPMF**



**MEDIA FREEDOM  
RAPID RESPONSE**

## Key findings of the study

**Another negative record:** With 83 physical attacks against media workers, 2021 once again exceeds the peak of 2020 (69 attacks).

**Crime scene demonstrations:** 75 percent of all cases occurred at protests against the coronavirus measures.

**The hatred is moving westwards:** Although Saxony remains the negative front-runner with 23 cases, attacks in western Germany are increasing significantly.

**Diffuse political classification:** 39 percent of assaults in 2021 were from the right-wing spectrum, one percent from the left-wing, 60 percent could not be clearly assigned.

**A worrying development:** Journalists are increasingly withdrawing from reporting on protests.

**A winter of violence:** 19 cases in December 2021, 18 cases in January 2022 – never before have so many cases been recorded in two months.

**Overall view 2015-2021:** The ECPMF documented 265 cases.

## Inhalt

Key findings of the study.....	2
1. Introduction .....	3
2. Looking back on 2021/22.....	4
3. No „walk in the park“ – Querdenken-followers radicalise press hatred.....	14
4. Local journalism – hate on the doorstep .....	25
5. Perpetrator profile: mostly male, often right-wing.....	29
6. Verbal threats and damage to property: The new normality.....	32
7. Emaciated press: Impact on media professionals and journalism.....	37
8. Classification of the results in the long-term survey and ideological component .....	39
9. Countermeasures by politics, police, publishing companies and associations.....	41
10. Recommendations for action .....	46
11. Conclusion.....	47
Bibliography.....	48
About the authors.....	51
Study design.....	52

## 1. Introduction

New year, new negative record: With 83 attacks, more assaults on journalists were verified in 2021 than in any other year since recording began in 2015. The violence affected 124 media professionals, and a considerable number of unreported cases can be assumed. The development seemed to intensify in the beginning of 2022 until the start of the Ukraine war. In January 2022 alone, 18 attacks were verified; in February, the number of recorded cases initially fell. The continuing increase in the number of cases is additional proof of the thesis of the Feindbild Journalist studies that journalists are fundamentally at risk everywhere and at all times when publicly and recognisably carrying out their profession in Germany.

Demonstrations and protests remain the most dangerous places to work: 95 percent of attacks were registered at gatherings. In 2021, hybrid forms of demonstration and the spread of attacks into rural areas brought about a further increase in the potential for attack. The most important developments since the last study was published in March 2021 can be summarised in the following six theses:

- I. Unannounced spontaneous protests bring with them an additional increase in the level of danger to media professionals.
- II. Violence against the press is also occurring more frequently in western Germany, but Saxony and Berlin remain above-average regions in terms of their danger.
- III. Threats against local journalists in rural areas increased significantly at the turn of the year 2021/2022.
- IV. The hatred against the press, driven by the pandemic-related protests, has further solidified in an alliance of AfD supporters, right-wing extremists and bourgeois-appearing individuals.
- V. A small group of journalists covering the protests are attracting the bulk of the attacks.
- VI. The extent of non-physical threats has increased again during the pandemic, according to unanimous statements by those affected – both online and out in public.

## 2. Looking back on 2021/22

### Figures and statistics

In 2021, 83 assaults against members of the press were verified in Germany – the highest amount since recording began.<sup>1</sup> The new record replaces that of 2020 with 69 violent attacks, making it the second negative record in two years. In practical terms, this means for the daily work of journalists: Every five days, one media worker was attacked for performing journalistic work.

The continuing violence against media workers is clearly linked to the further radicalisation of pandemic-related protest movements: 77 percent, or 64 assaults, occurred within this context. 62 of these assaults took place within the context of pandemic-related demonstrations, while two further cases were registered away from gatherings of coronavirus deniers.<sup>2</sup> The remaining 19 assaults were right-wing related and right-wing extremist assemblies (14), a demonstration of the left-wing spectrum (1) as well as other, politically not clearly assignable areas such as a pro-Pal-

estine protest march (2) or an attack in the open street as well as an assault in a court. Thus, a total of 95 percent of all recorded attacks occurred at demonstrations.

It is striking that in 2021, a large number of attacks occurred on a small group of journalists: For example, a journalist collective drew more cases with 13 assaults than the total in 2017 (10). In total, assaults on four individual media workers and one journalist collective accounted for 47.5 percent of all assaults reviewed.

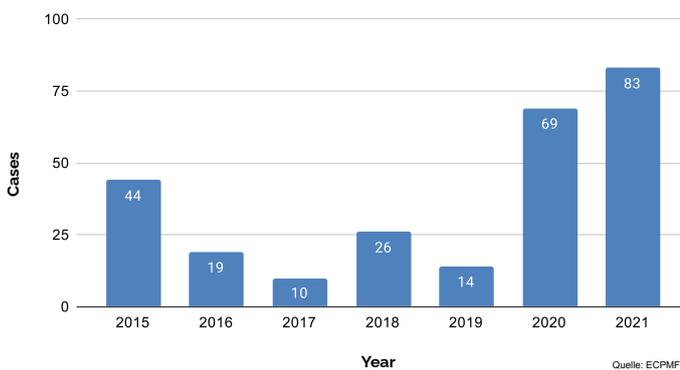


Figure 1: Number of assaults 2015 - 2021

### Political attribution of cases

For 2021, 50 cases were categorised as having no clear political attribution. 32 assaults (39%) can be clearly attributed to the right-wing spectrum, while one assault was left-wing motivated.<sup>3</sup> The very high proportion of cases that cannot be clearly

<sup>1</sup> A total of around 150 reported and researched cases were analysed. Of these, a total of 105 attacks were verified for the period from 1 January 2021 to 1 March 2022.

<sup>2</sup> "Pandemic-related" and "coronavirus-related" assemblies refer to demonstrations whose content is directed against the state coronavirus protection measures and which also display a fundamental criticism of the political response to the crisis situation. The mere fact that the content of the pandemic is discussed is therefore not sufficient to be considered a coronavirus-related assembly. An explanation of the political location of the assembly can be found in the study design in the annex.

<sup>3</sup> According to ECPMF criteria, a case can be assigned to the right-wing spectrum, for example, if the offence is committed by participants of clearly right-wing demonstrations (e.g. AfD, Pegida, NPD, Die Rechte, etc.), the perpetrators wear symbols typical of the scene, e.g. through clothing or tattoos, make clearly right-wing extremist statements or can be identified by party or scene affiliation (e.g. in the neo-Nazi hooligan milieu). If the political affiliation is not clearly possible, but cannot be ruled out either, the case is noted as "unknown/other". The categories "right-wing" and "left-wing" serve as auxiliary constructions to make the public everyday assessment of the political spectrum comprehensible in a shortened form. Accordingly, the recording of attacks in these categories is done for the purpose of an in-depth analysis of attack patterns. The "extremism theory" (colloquially known as the "horseshoe theory") is not considered plausible by the authors. For further explanations, see the annex "Notes on the study design"

categorised (60%) can be attributed to the large number of assaults at pandemic-related demonstrations (previous year: 48%). As the political spectrum of participants in such gatherings remains heterogeneous, these assaults were not assigned to a specific political camp.

The assaults that can be attributed to the right-wing political spectrum took place, in more than half of the cases, in pandemic-related contexts (18 out of 32). In addition, there were 14 cases of right-wing violence that were not directly related to the pandemic. Three attacks occurred at neo-Nazi demonstrations or at "funeral marches" organised by the "Die Rechte" party, one took place in the aftermath of a Pegida demonstration. In addition, there were three violent attacks that took place during the riots after the Dynamo Dresden football match on 16 May. In two other cases, three journalists who were accompanying a left-wing demonstration in Zwönitz, Saxony, were hit. Protests were formed against the demonstration from the right-wing spectrum, from whose direction the journalists were pushed and spat at. Four anti-press attacks occurred at rallies of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party: At various party events in Heiligenstadt (Thuringia), Northeim (Lower Saxony) and Hannover (Lower Saxony), the reporters present were attacked – their cameras were pulled, they were pushed or attacked with umbrellas and flagpoles. In addition, a photojournalist in Hildesheim was physically assaulted by participants during a right-wing demonstration under the slogan "Solidarity against left-wing agitation".

Thus, a total of 39 percent of the assaults can clearly be classified as right-wing motivated. While in the years from 2015 to 2019 the proportion of cases with a right-wing motivation was on average around 76 percent, this proportion already decreased in 2020 (45%) and again in 2021. This is accompanied by an increase in attacks that are not clearly politically attributable, which can be explained by the emergence and establishment of pandemic-related protests.

One case could be categorised as politically left-wing motivated. The proportion of cases with left-wing perpetrator involvement fluctuated in the years from 2015 until 2019 between 0 and 33 percent. In 2020, seven percent of cases were attributed to the left-wing spectrum.

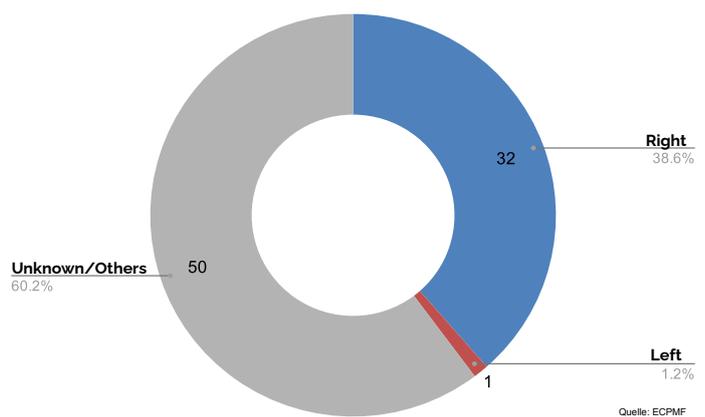


Figure 2: Political attribution 2021

### *Demonstrations: The most dangerous place to work*

Demonstrations and protests remain by far the most dangerous place for journalists to work in Germany: Over the whole year, 79 of the 83 attacks took place in connection with demonstrations, protests and gatherings. That is 95 percent, which represents a further increase in the proportion compared to previous years (2020 = 84%). The increase is probably related to the increase in unauthorised demonstrations. For 65 attacks, it was possible to research whether they took place at an authorised or unauthorised<sup>4</sup> assembly: At least 43 percent, or 34 of all cases recorded at protest events, took place at unauthorised assemblies. This also includes rallies that were only authorised for a specific location and whose participants then illegally moved through the city as a group. The situation is similar for assemblies that were broken up by the police and then continued anyway. It is not always possible to reconstruct whether an assault took place during the authorised or unauthorised part. However, unauthorised assemblies also include so-called spontaneous protests, mostly organised via the messenger service Telegram, which participants refer to as “walks in the park”<sup>5</sup> These account for at least eleven assaults in the fourth quarter of the year among the 17 unauthorised pandemic-related protest marches by the authorities in that period.

The four incidents that did not occur at demonstrations had a pandemic-related context in two cases. A TV presenter was spat at and called a “vaccination Nazi” in a supermarket in Berlin. The other attack occurred during a party founding attempt from the Querdenken spectrum in a Berlin bar. Another incident occurred in Berlin when a Turkish journalist living in exile was attacked and injured by three men. Also in Berlin, another attack occurred away from demonstrations: A photographer was beaten so badly in the main hall of a Berlin district court that he had to go to hospital.

- 
- 4 The statistics include both authorised and unauthorised spontaneous demonstrations, as well as assemblies that were initially authorised and then turned into unauthorised marches after being broken up by the authorities.
- 5 Since there is no exact definition to distinguish these spontaneous protests from other forms of protest due to the lack of consistent characteristics, and since there are no official records of this protest phenomenon, gatherings are categorised as such either by the self-description of the protest participants or by the journalists concerned (for a more in-depth analysis of “walks in the park” see section 3.III).

*The federal states in comparison*

Saxony is again the state with the most anti-press assaults, as was the case in four out of six years between 2015 and 2020. 23 anti-press assaults were verified in the Free State in 2021. This is followed by Lower Saxony with 21 cases and Berlin with 14. The capital had registered the most cases (23) in the previous year. Bavaria counted ten cases; Baden-Württemberg six. Three cases were recorded for both Thuringia and Hesse. North Rhine-Westphalia, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein each had one case. No cases were recorded for Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate, Hamburg, Bremen, Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt in the investigation period of 2021.

Looking at the geographical distribution of assaults by quarter, the concentration of assaults in the western German states in the first quarter of 2021 is striking: 18 of 22 assaults were registered there; three in Berlin. The only case in eastern Germany occurred in Saxony. The largest proportion (eleven of 22) occurred in Lower Saxony during this period. Berlin and Hesse were each affected three times; Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg twice each and Saxony once.

In the second quarter, the most affected federal state was Saxony with four cases. Three cases were counted for Berlin, as well as two cases for Thuringia, Baden-Württemberg and one for Lower Saxony.

In the third quarter, Saxony was again the leader with seven cases, followed by Lower Saxony and Berlin with four cases each and Bavaria and Thuringia with one. In the last quarter of the year, the most assaults were registered: Journalists were assaulted in 32 cases. With eleven verified cases, Saxony had the most, followed by Bavaria with seven and Lower Saxony with five cases. Four cases were recorded in Berlin, two in Baden-Württemberg and one assault each in North Rhine-Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. This increase in registered cases in the last quarter continued in the first two months of 2022.

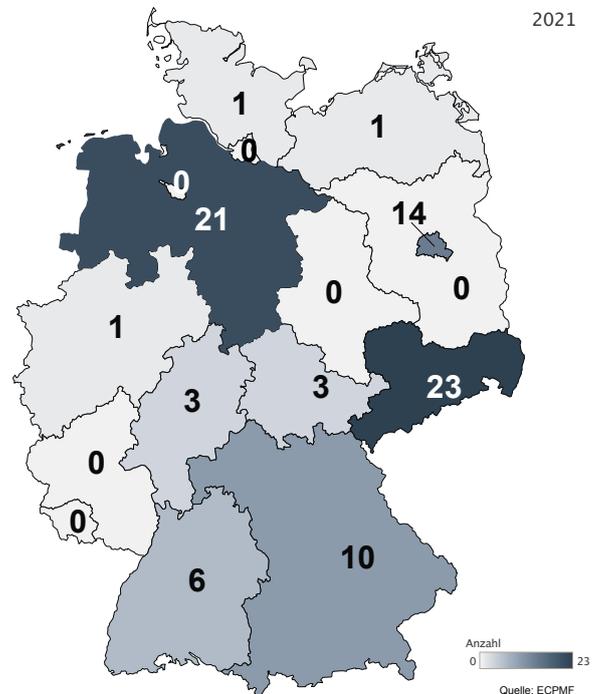


Figure 3: Assaults in 2021 by federal state

### Events and review of the year 2021 by quarter

The view of the year 2021 is characterised on the one hand by some large gatherings from the Querdenken milieu, at which particularly violent attacks on media workers were recorded, such as in Kassel and Stuttgart in the spring, and on the other hand by the increase in unannounced protest formats, which represent a new and massive potential danger for media workers, especially at the end of the year.

#### First quarter: 22 assaults, fisticuffs in Kassel

On 16 January 2021, an officially authorised car procession took place in Hanover, which was directed against the coronavirus measures. Within this context, protesters gathered for other, unauthorised assemblies and partly disguised them as sporting events by suggesting that they were doing fitness exercises together. Three photographers accompanied these gatherings. Two men attacked them by pulling their cameras and grabbing the lens. In Munich, opponents of the coronavirus measures gathered on 7 March for a demonstration that was authorised for

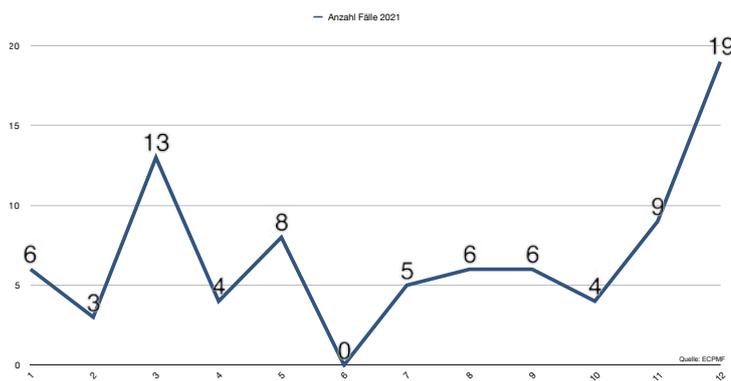


Figure 4: Development of assaults during the year 2021

100 people. This number was exceeded and the leader of the meeting called upon those present to move through the city separately from the main demonstration. Behind the Pinakothek der Moderne, a demonstrator tried to steal a photographer's camera. However, they were unsuccessful. On 13 March 2021, about 1,000 protesters gathered under the slogan "Enough is enough!" in Stuttgart to demonstrate against the coronavirus measures. After the event ended, one participant threw plastic waste at the cameraman of an SWR team present. Beforehand, the team had been subjected to insults and hostility several times.

The meeting organised by the Querdenken network in Kassel on 20 March with around 20,000 participants was one of the most aggressive in the course of the year. Three attacks with eight victims, one of whom was injured, were recorded there. The event had been authorised for 6,000 participants on two adjacent squares and under hygiene conditions. However, the conditions were largely disregarded and the number of participants was significantly exceeded. The participants did not stay at the authorised place, but moved through the city in an unauthorised procession. There were clashes with counter-demonstrators and the protesters broke through police lines. The atmosphere towards the press was very hostile. Protesters attacked media workers with punches to the face and vandalised their cameras. One photojournalist was thrown to the ground and beaten up. Teams of reporters from Hessischer Rundfunk, who were travelling with security personnel, were also surrounded and physically attacked.

*Second quarter: Twelve attacks, hooligans chase media workers through Dresden*

Another large demonstration by Querdenken took place on 3 April 2021 in Stuttgart under coronavirus restrictions. About 10,000 participants were there. Here, too, there were several attacks on members of the press. Two attacks with three victims were recorded. One demonstrator punched a journalist in the face. A live broadcast by SWR during the demonstration had to be interrupted because the camera team was deliberately pelted with objects and insulted with shouts of "lying press", as the broadcaster reported to ECPMF on request. Despite hundreds of hygiene violations and anti-press attacks, the police did not break up the demonstration.

On 17 April, demonstrators attempted to gather illegally in Dresden several times. During another attempt in the evening, three men attacked several freelance journalists and a team from an English TV station. One of the attackers attacked a journalist with a backpack containing a beer bottle. The security team was able to stop the attackers, and one was arrested by the police.

The Middle East conflict, which escalated again in May, led to demonstrations in Germany, some of which were marked by great hostility towards the press. Two pro-Palestinian rallies in Berlin on 15 May were marked by physical attacks on members of the media. One demonstrator attacked a cameraman with a wooden stick, causing them minor injuries. The attacker was arrested. At another pro-Palestinian demonstration, an RTL team was with an Israeli journalist. After she said something in Hebrew, fireworks were thrown at the team. The journalists present were subjected to anti-Semitic insults such as "Zionist press".

On 16 May, there were several particularly brutal attacks on journalists in Dresden when violent riots broke out following the promotion of the Dynamo Dresden football club. Although a larger celebration had been prohibited in advance due to hygiene regulations, thousands of fans gathered in front of the stadium, among them hundreds of violent football hooligans. After police officers were attacked, the hooligans' violence was also directed against journalists, who were chased through the streets shouting "Jewish press". At least five members of the press were physically attacked. A female photographer was sexually insulted, kicked, choked and pushed against a fence by three men. Her camera was destroyed and she suffered bruises on her neck.<sup>6</sup> In addition, two young media workers from the journalist collective *vue.critique* were attacked. One of them was thrown against a car, while the other was kicked until he lost consciousness. The 17-year-old suffered craniocerebral trauma and injuries to his abdomen and had to be hospitalised. The emergency doctor who was present described his condition as critical.

6 ECPMF statement from DNN: As if on a battlefield, retrieved from: <https://www.zeit.de/2021/21/dynamo-dresden-fans-gewalt-hooligans-polizei>; Nearly 240 violent criminals identified after riots at Dynamo Dresden, retrieved from: <https://www.zeit.de/sport/2021-11/dynamo-dresden-ausschreitungen-gewalttaeter-identifiziert-polizei-angriff-flaschen>.

*Third quarter: 17 assaults, Turkish journalist beaten up*

What is striking about the period is that only just over half of the attacks took place at pandemic-related protests, while eight assaults were recorded at organised right-wing events. In early July, Turkish journalist Erk Acarer, who lives in exile in Berlin, was beaten up and injured in the street. The victim suspects that the reason behind the attack was his work as a journalist.

In Zwönitz in the Erz Mountains, a demonstration organised by left-wing groups took place on 31 July, which was in turn directed against the coronavirus protests that had been taking place for weeks. These were organised by the "Free Saxons" party, which is now classified as right-wing extremist by the Saxon Office for the Protection of the Constitution. Protests from the right-wing spectrum repeatedly formed against the left-wing demonstration. Media representatives that were present reported an aggressive atmosphere towards them. Members of the right-wing spectrum harassed a journalist from *vue.critique* several times, and later a man approached and threw himself at him. Another participant of the right-wing counter-protest spat and flicked a cigarette towards two journalists.

On 1 August, about 5,000 people gathered for pandemic-related, unauthorised protests in Berlin. About 600 participants were briefly detained by the police in the interim. Jörg Reichel, regional director of the German Journalists' Union (dju) in Berlin-Brandenburg, was also present at the protests to observe the security situation for journalists and to report on anti-press attacks. He had already been threatened several times by supporters of the "Querdenken" movement. During the marches in Berlin, he was attacked by two men who saw him filming with his mobile phone. They pulled him off his bicycle, tried to steal his mobile phone and attacked him violently. Only when passers-by intervened did the attackers let go of him. Reichel had to go to hospital for treatment of his injuries. Although there is video footage of the attack, the police state security has not yet identified any perpetrators.

In the third quarter from July to September 2021, eight incidents could be attributed to the right-wing political spectrum. Four incidents occurred at rallies of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. On 21 August, a photojournalist was attacked several times at a party event with Björn Höcke. The photojournalist was pushed, threatened with death and had his camera grabbed.

At another AfD event with Björn Höcke in Northeim, Lower Saxony, on 10 September, a photojournalist documenting the event was again attacked. A party member approached the photographer, grabbed his camera and pushed him away. Together with a steward of the event, he tried to twist the photographer's arm behind his back and push him away, at which point the police intervened. A few moments later, another rally participant approached and stabbed the photographer in the shoe with an umbrella.

Another attack took place on 2 September by supporters of the "Bürgerbewegung Leipzig 2021" group<sup>7</sup>, which is classified as right-wing extremist by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, who called for the disruption of an election campaign appearance by the Prime Minister of Saxony, Michael Kretschmer. A freelance journalist was reporting on the unauthorised event when a participant ran backwards towards and into him and struck. The police immediately intervened and the journalist was unharmed.

One assault took place during a Pegida rally in Dresden on 13 September on journalist Thomas Datt, who had also been the victim of an assault in Zwönitz. A participant in the Pegida rally approached the reporter and the cameraman several times in a threatening manner but let them go when the police intervened. After the event ended, the same man threatened the team again and pulled at their clothing.

#### *Fourth quarter: 32 cases, escalation in Rottenacker*

Since case recording began in 2015, no month has recorded as many cases as December 2021, with 19 cases. The entire quarter from October to December 2021 recorded the most incidents for the year with 32 assaults: four in October, nine in November and 19 in December. 30 of the recorded cases had a pandemic-related context. Of the assaults, ten took place at demonstrably registered rallies and demonstrations. The sharp increase in the number of assaults in December can be attributed, at least in part, to the sharp increase in unauthorised spontaneous protests. This includes at least eleven assaults in the fourth quarter among the 17 unauthorised pandemic-related protest marches in that period.

On 8 November, a three-person team from MDR accompanied an unannounced spontaneous protest in Zwickau called by the right-wing extremist party "Free Saxons". Two masked people broke away from the crowd and approached the team threateningly. They pushed the camera aside and attacked the reporter, who was filming with his mobile phone. The police intervened and the two attackers left. The reporter sustained a minor injury to his hand.

Two of the six anti-press attacks in Baden-Württemberg took place in the fourth quarter. Both occurred in Rottenacker when about 80 people gathered for a "vigil". A local butcher, who had previously violated his quarantine orders, had called for it. During the gathering, a woman attacked a reporter from the Südwestpresse and tried to knock her mobile phone out of her hand. The woman described the atmosphere as aggressive; "lying press" and death threats were shouted at her. The second attack a few minutes later was by a man. He snatched the mobile phone from the reporter and also tore the mask from her face, which he accompanied with the words "They should hang you". When the reporter tried to follow the attacker, two other participants of the "vigil" held her down.

<sup>7</sup> Saxony's Office for the Protection of the Constitution classifies "Bürgerbewegung Leipzig 2021" as extremist, retrieved from: <https://www.lvz.de/Region/Mitteldeutschland/Sachsens-Verfassungsschutz-Buergerbewegung-Leipzig-2021-extremistisch>

On 12 December, unannounced protests called by the "Free Saxons" took place in Bennewitz near Leipzig. In the evening hours, several protesters attacked the freelance journalists from [vue.critique](#) and another media worker. The attackers pushed them and tore at their clothes, causing one of them to fall to the ground. The journalists protected each other by standing in front of each other until the police intervened. Later, the same group was surrounded, jostled and pushed by people from the "Young Nationalists" and by hooligans from the Lokomotive Leipzig football club.

Another attack in Freital, Saxony, on 27 December again hit the Dresden documentation collective [vue.critique](#). As no police were present at the unannounced spontaneous protest, they did not film at the beginning. Although two security guards were present, they assessed the situation as too dangerous for filming. Over the course of the evening, they were insulted and harassed and later followed and finally attacked by several men. The men pushed them several times and one of the security guards was hit in the face. Only after pepper spray was used did the attackers let up, so that the team was able to get to safety in the car.

Protesters against the coronavirus measures gathered in the small town of Hannover-Münden in Lower Saxony on 29 December. The "Free Lower Saxony" group, which the Lower Saxony Office for the Protection of the Constitution considers to be anti-democratic in parts, had called for this. The photographers present were working with flash because of the darkness. This made them easily recognizable as journalists to the protesters. The attackers surrounded the photographers and pushed them against the wall of the company with the help of umbrellas, attacked them repeatedly and grabbed the camera until the police intervened.

*2022's trend: more violence in the countryside*

The accumulation of violent attacks which have already been verified for the year 2022 is alarming. In January 2022 alone, 18 cases were registered; almost as many as in December 2021 (19 cases). In February 2022, the number of verified cases dropped again to four. Just under half (nine of 22 cases) occurred in cities and towns with up to 100,000 inhabitants in this period; which is almost as many as in the entire fourth quarter of 2021 (eleven out of a total of 32 cases). The geographical concentration of assaults is shifting – according to an initial analysis – with the spread of pandemic-related protests into rural, non-urban areas.

In parallel, a broader geographical spread of attacks can be observed. While in each of the first three quarters of 2021, attacks were detected in five to six federal states, in the fourth quarter of 2021 alone, attacks occurred in eight federal states, and in January and February 2022 in ten.

### *Summary*

In 2021, a new negative record was set with at least 83 assaults. The main driver of this development was – as in the previous year – the gatherings of pandemic-related protest networks such as Querdenken and others. For the environment of coronavirus deniers and critics of measures, a good three quarters of all recorded assaults were registered (77%), followed by attacks on gatherings organised by the right-wing spectrum (17%). Only five percent of the verified cases were not related to riots, protests or demonstrations. The sharp increase in the fourth quarter and the continued high number of attacks in 2022 allude to a problem that continues to escalate, especially in more rural areas.

According to a case-by-case analysis, 18 attacks on pandemic-related protests were attributed to aggressors from the right-wing spectrum. In addition, 14 attacks were attributed to this political camp that had occurred at right-wing extremist or right-wing populist gatherings. Thus, a total of 32 attacks, i.e., 39 percent of all attacks, can be attributed to actors from the right-wing spectrum: Six attacks occurred at rallies of the “Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)” or in connection with the youth organisation “Junge Alternative”, two of which had a pandemic context. Others took place at “funeral marches” of the radical right; at least six cases at protests organised by the far-right rally party “Free Saxons” or its predecessor grouping.

### 3. No „walk in the park“ – Querdenken-followers radicalise press hatred

The violence emanating from opponents of the coronavirus protection measures is driving the number of anti-press acts to a new record high. 75 percent of the attacks occurred at gatherings of pandemic-related protest movements like Querdenken. To be sure, some specialist journalists saw the movement as already disintegrating in the spring of 2021, and there are some indications that the movement is becoming increasingly fragmented.<sup>8</sup> However, it was able to regularly bring tens of thousands of people onto the streets during the year. The proportion of physical aggression from this environment has again grown slightly (2020: 71 %). The demonstrations of Querdenken and similar protest initiatives thus remain the most dangerous workplaces for journalists. The further increase in assaults is striking, but not really surprising. The increase in violence is the result of five interrelated factors: (I) Some of the opponents of the measures have become radicalised again in the course of 2021. At the same time, (II) more rallies have taken place than ever before in the history of the Federal Republic, driven by protests against the coronavirus measures. A (III) growing proportion of these demonstrations took place in the form of so-called “walks in the park”, unannounced assembly scenarios with an increased danger for media workers. (IV) In the process, the pandemic-related outrage movements have once again intensified press hatred and “lying press” narratives in West Germany. Journalists who work in the field of protest reporting are particularly (V) frequently attacked.

#### *(I) Radicalisation of Querdenken & Co: End of violence not in sight*

Violent anti-press attacks from the midst of the pandemic-related outrage movements began almost immediately after their emergence in the spring of 2020. Since then, part of the following has become further radicalised. From the very beginning, hatred of the media acted as a unifying ideological bracket for the politically heterogeneous movement. Threats and attacks on media representatives were tolerated or even rewarded by the majority of other protest participants. Violence against media workers increased almost steadily over the course of the year (cf. Hoffmann & Betche 2021, pp. 15-22). From autumn 2020 at the latest, the radicalisation in word and deed could be attributed, at least in part, to the increasing appropriation of the protests by right-wing extremist structures; in some places, the rallies have since been orchestrated by actors from this scene. This was directly felt by some media representatives, as feedback from the RBB shows: “Especially in regions where opponents of the coronavirus measures increasingly gather, for example in Lusatia, there was a noticeably more aggressive atmosphere at the

<sup>8</sup> The end of the “Querdenker” as we know them, retrieved from: <https://www.rbb24.de/politik/thema/corona/beitraege/2021/05/analyse-querdenker-bewegung-demonstrationen-berlin-pfingsten.html> ;  
The stance on the war in Ukraine could split coronavirus protest movement, retrieved from: <https://www.verfassungsschutz-bw.de/Lde/Corona-Protstbewegung+droht+Zersplitterung>

turn of the year 2021/22, especially when actors of the more violent and extreme right-wing scene used the demonstrations for their own appearances."

Corresponding to this, the Kassel political scientist Wolfgang Schroeder stated at the beginning of 2022: "The choreography of these protests is strongly influenced by right-wing extremist and right-wing populist forces."<sup>9</sup> At the same time, however, he pointed out that by no means all participants in the protests were of right-wing extremist sentiment and the supporters were still politically heterogeneous. In this respect, the radicalisation of the Querdenken supporters cannot be attributed one-sidedly to right-wing extremist attempts to influence them. An analysis of the Thuringia Monitor also showed that pandemic deniers in the federal state had radicalised themselves over the year of 2021, but did not increasingly tend towards right-wing extremist positions. According to the study, radicalisation is not accompanied by the adoption of extreme right-wing attitudes (Reiser et al. 2021, p. 13f). This is also supported by a study of the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin on the mobilisation potential of the initiative. This is very heterogeneous, according to the researchers: "It is not limited to certain, clearly identifiable social groups. Even though the political extremes, especially the radical right, are represented to an above-average extent in this mobilisation potential, it is predominantly to be located in the political centre" (Grande et al. 2021, p. 3).

Nevertheless, academics as well as security authorities<sup>10</sup> and subsequently also politicians<sup>11</sup> unanimously stated that the radicalisation of these protest formations increased again in the course of 2021. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution has been observing the pandemic protest formats since spring 2021 in the specially created phenomenon area of "delegitimisation of the state relevant to the protection of the constitution".<sup>12</sup> It sees this as "a new form of extremism", which "cannot be classified as right-wing, left-wing or Islamist, as has often been the case in the past". However, right-wing extremists in particular could use conspiracy theory content to tie in with attitudes sceptical about coronavirus, according to the service's assessment.<sup>13</sup> The willingness of many protesters to use violence has been evident at the latest since the targeted attacks on police officers. In Berlin alone, between 28 March 2020 and 31 December 2021, 362 physical assaults by Querdenker

- 
- 9 Pandemic consequence: Loss of authority of those in power?, retrieved from: <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/pandemiefolge-autoritaetsverlust-der-regierenden-dlf-kultur-5651c1f3-100.html>
  - 10 PM from the Ministry of the Interior for Baden-Württemberg: Resolutions of the Autumn Conference 2021, retrieved from: <https://im.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/service/presse-und-oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/pressemitteilung/pid/beschluesse-der-herbstkonferenz-2021/>
  - 11 PM of the Federal Ministry of the Interior: Nancy Faeser: "Many Querdenker are becoming more radical", retrieved from: <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/DE/2021/12/querdenken.html>
  - 12 New phenomenon area "Deligitimisation of the state relevant to constitutional protection", retrieved from <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/DE/2021/2021-04-29-querdenker.html>
  - 13 PM des Innenministeriums Baden-Württemberg: Resolutions of the Autumn Conference 2021, retrieved from: <https://im.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/service/presse-und-oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/pressemitteilung/pid/beschluesse-der-herbstkonferenz-2021/>

against police officers were counted.<sup>14</sup> Since press representatives, like police officers, are seen as conspiring with a hated state power, this makes both professional groups the enemy stereotypes of Querdenken followers. With a share of more than three quarters of all attacks, protests from this milieu have proven to be the biggest driver of anti-press violence since the beginning of the study series.

### ***(II) The more protests, the more confrontations***

The protests continued to attract considerable media attention in their second year of existence. At the same time, the number of political gatherings has increased since the beginning of the pandemic. In the period from August 2020 to May 2021 alone, more than 2,700 gatherings against coronavirus restrictions are reported to have taken place.<sup>15</sup> A nationwide overview of registered and unregistered gatherings is not available for the period under review, but figures from individual federal states illustrate the scale of the protests. For example, the police in Thuringia registered an increase in the number of participants in the protests in 2021/2022.<sup>16</sup> A response from the Lower Saxony Ministry of the Interior to an ECPMF enquiry indicates an extreme volume of gatherings. For example, the LKA reported that for Lower Saxony recorded a total of 1,474 unreported pandemic-related gatherings between 1 November 2021 and 8 March 2022,<sup>17</sup> while police in Baden-Württemberg recorded 160 such protests for a single Monday in early 2022, with 23,700 participants.<sup>18</sup>

At the time of publication of this study, there were no conclusive, cross-state estimates on the frequency of assemblies and the number of participants in political demonstrations. However, a comparison of the number of participants in pandemic-related protests with the number of far-right demonstrations in 2019 – the only reliable data available for gatherings in this political spectrum – indicates a sharp increase in the number of protests: In the whole of 2019, before the pandemic, the number of all participants in far-right demonstrations had amounted to 9,746.<sup>19</sup>

Thus (subject to final figures), the number of opportunities for confrontation between press representatives reporting from there and press foes has also increased once again. Even before the pandemic, political demonstrations were by far the riskiest workplace for media professionals. The figures for 2021 show that this finding still holds true: 95 percent of all attacks occurred at political gatherings of the various camps or in their surroundings. If the number of demonstrations and participants

14 Querdenken and arson, Tagesspiegel from 11.01.2022, p. 7.

15 Printed material 19/29654, information request by delegates from the Die Linke party on the subject of: Demonstrations related to the coronavirus pandemic, answer of the Federal Government dated 12.05.2021, retrieved from: <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/296/1929654.pdf>

16 Tens of thousands at illegal coronavirus protests in Thuringia, retrieved from: <https://www.zeit.de/news/2022-01/03/thueringen-polizei-zaehlt-ueber-8000-menschen-bei-corona-demos>

17 Response of the Lower Saxony Ministry of the Interior and Sport to ECPMF enquiry.

18 A staged riot: How right-wing extremists try to instrumentalise the anti-coronavirus protests for their own purposes, Zeit, 13.01.2022, p. 2.

19 ECPMF research

increases, attacks also become more likely. In addition, the police can hardly cope with this large number of demonstrations in terms of personnel and administration. It was no longer possible to provide adequate security for the demonstrations everywhere, and journalists could often not be protected in the course of their work.

### ***(III) "Walks in the park": Risk is incalculable, hardly any protection by police***

Not only the sheer number of political demonstrations, but also a new form of unauthorised pandemic-related gatherings, led to an increased risk for media workers. Unannounced spontaneous protests, referred to by participants as "walks in the park", were recorded much more frequently in the last quarter of 2021 and at the beginning of 2022 than before.<sup>20</sup> Unauthorised demonstrations had already taken place as "hygiene demos" or similar since the emergence of the Querdenken movement.<sup>21</sup> The term "walk in the park", which is now being used by critics of the measures and has been taken up by the media in many cases, was already used by Pegida for the Monday protest marches from 2014 onwards and is intended to establish a reference to the Monday walks in the autumn of 1989. They were to lose their demonstration character, trivialised as "walks in the park". In addition, the temporary restrictions on freedom of assembly laid down in the coronavirus decrees were to be circumvented in this way. In part, the demonstrations were only allowed as location-based rallies with a small number of participants.

The increase in these irregular spontaneous demonstrations can thus be attributed to the tightened assembly requirements as a political measure against the pandemic: Since demonstrations at the end of the year were often completely banned or only allowed to take place under strict conditions, protests were often no longer officially reported to the authorities, but organised informally via the messenger service Telegram or other forums. For the fourth quarter of 2021, 17 of 32 assaults at unregistered gatherings were recorded. In eleven of these assaults, either the participants themselves or the journalist concerned described the meeting as a "walk in the park". In rural areas (cities and towns with less than 100,000 inhabitants), there were eight assaults in this period. For January and February 2022, eleven of the 22 recorded cases could be assigned to the self-designation "walk in the park" under these characteristics, seven of them in rural areas. Here, a shift of assaults to rural areas is alluded to by the year 2022: While only about five percent of all cases outside urban areas were recorded in the first quarter of 2021, this rose to about 17 percent in the second quarter, 35 percent in the third quarter and 34 percent in the fourth quarter. The trend is perpetuating in January and February 2022 to a figure of around 41 percent.

<sup>20</sup> The exact demarcation from other forms of protest against the backdrop of the coronavirus pandemic is hardly possible due to a lack of consistent characteristics: there is no official recording of this protest phenomenon. For the purposes of this study, gatherings were categorised as "walks in the park" either by the self-designation of the protest participants or by the classification of the journalists concerned.

<sup>21</sup> How the Corona protests have changed, retrieved from: <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/bayern/wie-sich-die-corona-proteste-veraendert-haben.Sunz21X>

While demonstrations that were interrupted or banned by the authorities at short notice continued in conurbations as protest formations diffusely distributed in small groups across the urban area, in rural areas unannounced spontaneous protests apparently established themselves immediately as a complete substitute for registered demonstrations. Instead of officially registering the planned gatherings, the supporters arranged themselves directly and flexibly via social media platforms and messenger services. Police escorts at these protests were often very sparse or sometimes non-existent. Officers were attacked and harassed. In many cases, they were unable to offer adequate protection to members of the press who were present. Many journalists reported to the ECPMF that these unannounced spontaneous protests in rural areas in particular led to even more threatening situations during their reporting.

One photojournalist recounts: "You have to see if you can report at all, if you have police around, because sometimes you cannot work if the police are not there. Sometimes you also have to break off after dark, because people get bolder when it's dark and then it's more likely to lead to attacks." At least the police in Lower Saxony do not share this assessment for the "walks in the park" to the ECPMF: "Based on the data collected and previously presented, no per se increased risk potential for journalists at undisclosed gatherings within the context of the coronavirus pandemic (here: so-called walks in the park) can be identified from the point of view of the police here. The findings from Lower Saxony as well as from other federal states are included in the assessment of the situation here."

A photographer told the ECPMF that police officers in rural areas were sometimes well acquainted with the demonstrators. As a result, the officers partly excuse their behaviour and therefore find it more difficult to distance themselves from the demonstrators and protect the media. In addition, some of the demonstrators apparently regard media representatives as partners of the police. This is another reason why they act aggressively, says Tagesspiegel journalist Julius Geiler: "I have often heard that as a journalist you are labelled, you would cooperate with the police or only tweet so that the police know the location of the demo. Because the police are always the enemy of the demo. It's easier with registered demos." The resulting risk is hardly calculable for the media workers concerned. Police and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution estimate that extremists "regularly take part in these 'walks in the park' throughout Germany".<sup>22</sup> Numerous particularly brutal attacks against media workers have been carried out by this group of people in recent years, such as the attack on two specialist journalists in Fretterode in 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Printed material 20/774, information request by delegates from the Alternative für Deutschland party on the topic of: New Phenomenon Area Constitutional Protection-Relevant Delegitimation of the State, Federal Government Answer on 17.02.2022, retrieved from: <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/007/2000774.pdf>

#### *(IV) Hatred of the press is also on the rise in West Germany*

The federal states with the most attacks in 2021 were Saxony, Berlin, Bavaria, Lower Saxony and Baden-Württemberg. The fact that Saxony and Berlin once again occupy top positions in the negative ranking is not surprising when looking at the statistics of recent years: In 2020, Berlin had the most assaults in the ECPMF record, while Saxony has been the sad frontrunner in almost all other years since the record began (in 2017, Hamburg was ranked first, and in 2019 Saxony was ranked first jointly with Berlin).

However, the finding that assaults will be recorded much more frequently in western Germany in 2021 is cause for concern. While in 2020 about 52 percent of the attacks were registered in the western German states (without Berlin), in 2021 it was already 61 percent. However, the different population shares of the two parts of the country must be weighed here: In 2020, 67 million people lived in the west of Germany, about five times as many as in the east German states with 12.5 million (in each case excluding Berlin).<sup>23</sup>

This shift points towards a now more widespread entrenchment of anti-press attitudes in many West German regions. It is ostensibly due to the emergence of pandemic-related outrage movements such as Querdenken, which started in the Stuttgart area and was also able to mobilise numerous supporters in the West German regions. Their broad ideological connectivity – compared to Pegida, for example – for different political camps makes “lying press” accusations more connectable in previously less radicalised milieus and thus carries the hatred of the press increasingly into the West German federal states.

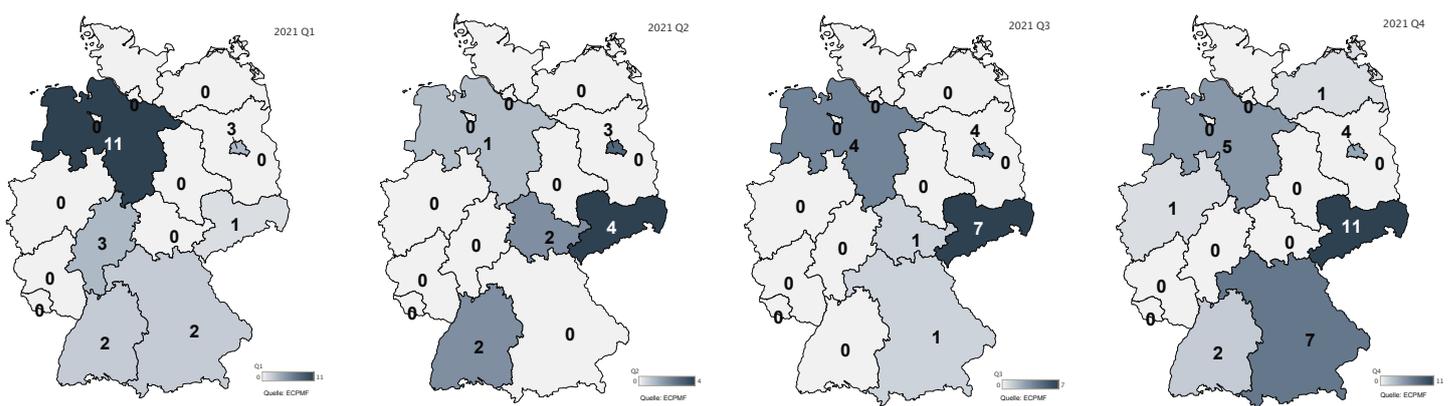


Figure 5: Federal states 2021 per quarter

<sup>23</sup> Population development in East and West Germany between 1990 and 2020: Alignment or consolidation of differences?, retrieved from: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Querschnitt/Demografischer-Wandel/Aspekte/demografie-bevoelkerungsentwicklung-ost-west.html?session-id=6E7E8964D649F1E647911E05E09071D9.live721>

Beyond the ideological component, it is worth taking a look at the special characteristics of the most affected regions in western Germany. While, for Bavaria, attacks have been verified repeatedly in this study for years, for example in connection with Pegida offshoots in Munich or right-wing extremist demonstrations in the Franconian region, Lower Saxony and Baden-Württemberg have only become danger zones for journalists as a result of the pandemic.

In Baden-Württemberg, this can be explained by an increased mobilisation of Querdenken, especially in the last two years, as there were repeated calls for demonstrations with relatively large numbers of participants in the network's region of origin (Frei/Nachtwey 2021, p. 6). The increase in verified cases in Lower Saxony, on the other hand, can be attributed to two causes: At the beginning of 2021, several demonstrations of the right-wing camp took place there, at which media workers were attacked. But there is a special effect to this. A small group of reporters was particularly affected by attacks in Lower Saxony, presumably because they frequently report on pandemic-related protests or explicitly position themselves as politically left-wing (see also: next section): Three journalists alone accounted for 13 of 21 attacks in 2021 in Lower Saxony – and thus the largest share.

In contrast, the old "Nazi strongholds" such as Dortmund hardly carry any weight. There, especially in 2015, attacks and threats were registered at demonstrations from the organised right.

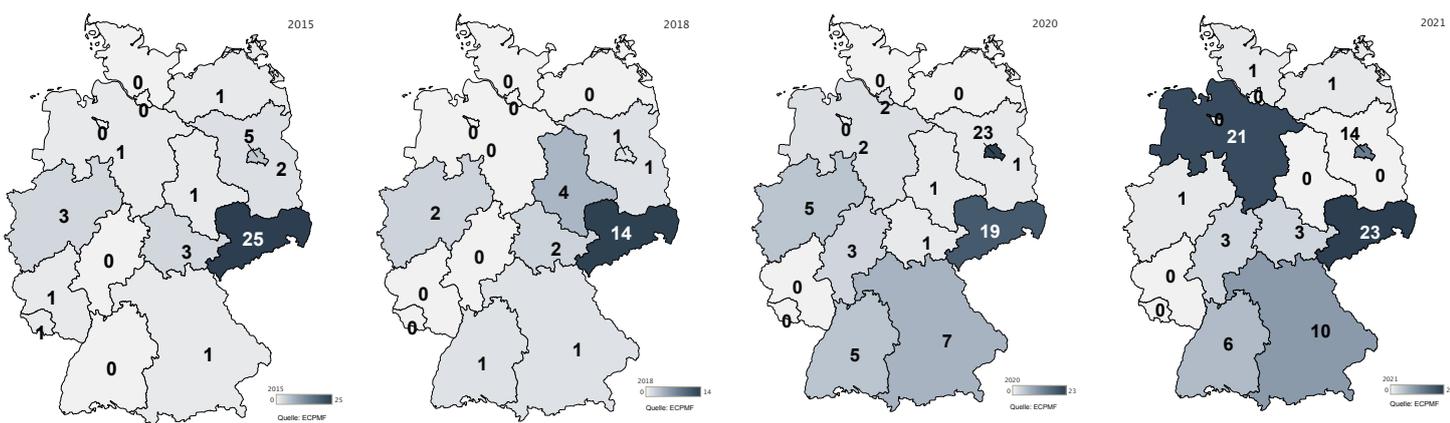


Figure 6: Geographical distribution of attacks in 2015, 2018, 2020, 2021

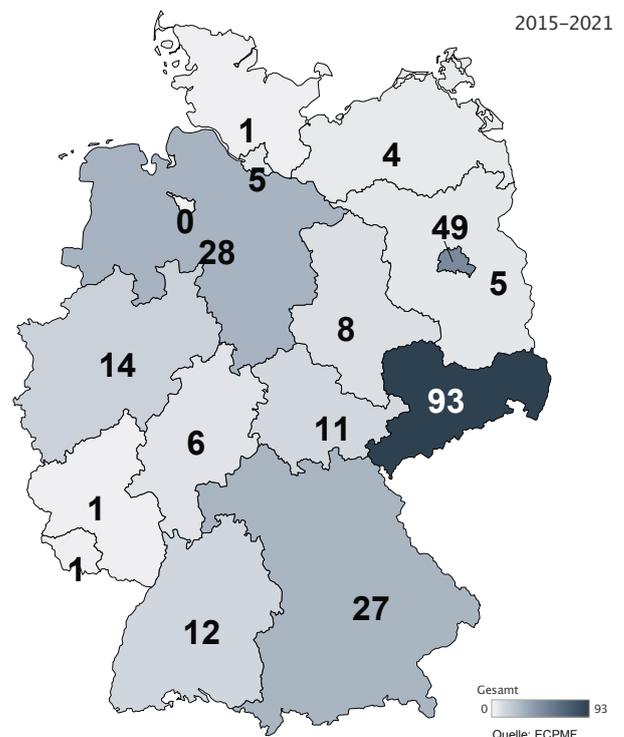
*Saxony remains risk area no. 1*

Saxony remains one of the central risk areas for journalistic work. With 23 attacks, more than a quarter of all assaults in 2021 were registered there, although only a twentieth of the German population lives there. The above-average risk for journalists in Saxony is largely due to a higher degree of organisation of the right-wing extremist scene and a greater potential of people alienated from democracy (cf. Vorländer 2021, p. 25). Both factors lead to more frequent and more participatory political gatherings in the east than in other regions of the country – and thus in turn to more opportunities for confrontation.

Another explanation could be a greater affinity for violence among East German demonstrators. According to sociologist David Begrich, this could be due to the right-wing extremist socialisation of demonstration participants in the 1990s. According to the Magdeburg scientist, they still have a greater affinity for violence and feel that the coronavirus-related protests have given them a boost. He sees a different composition of demonstration participants in the East and West: "These are people with experience of violence who are testing how far they can go", Begrich tells the weekly newspaper Die Zeit.<sup>24</sup>

*The "bad" East does not exist*

At least for anti-press attacks, the thesis of an above-average violent East cannot be confirmed across the board. In addition to numerous cases in Saxony, some attacks were also registered in Thuringia – as in almost all previous studies. In addition, the risk of attack for journalists is statistically almost four times higher, if the number of attacks and the population distribution between East and West are weighted. But in 2021, no assaults were verified in Brandenburg or Saxony-Anhalt; in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, there was only one. To declare the entire German East a crisis area across the board is thus not supported by the facts. Rather, since the beginning of the recording in 2015, assaults have been verified in almost every federal state. Only in Bremen has not a single case been registered in seven years of recording.



### *(V) Special hazards: Reporting of protests<sup>25</sup>*

When analysing the case statistics, it was noticeable that a group of four media workers and a journalist collective consisting of two people accounted for almost half (47.5%) of all verified attacks in 2021. Such a concentration of attacks on a few journalists had not occurred in previous years. Since the six media professionals have some commonalities in their field of work and working methods, we will discuss possible reasons for their above-average vulnerability.

It is obvious that their focus on protest reporting makes them particularly exposed to attacks. All those affected state this focus of work on their social media profiles. On their Twitter profiles, for example, it states:

"Focus: extreme rights & social movements" or "Topic focus: Protest & Social Movements, Extreme Rights" or "Protests | Climate | Society | Reports and Images". They thus move in a particularly dangerous working environment with above-average frequency: 95 percent of all attacks in 2021 took place in the environment of protests.

Another common feature of media professionals who are particularly frequently affected by violence is their freelance journalistic work and their focus on photo and video documentation. Evaluations of the ECPMF case recording the investigations of previous years have shown that photojournalists in particular are the target of attacks. On the one hand, the cameras make them more directly recognisable as journalists; on the other hand, many protesters feel provoked by the camera shots. Quite a few also direct their violence against the cameras visibly carried by the media workers. In the period between January 2015 and March 2020, this was the case in almost half of all cases registered by the ECPMF (cf. ECPMF 2020, p. 12).

In addition to the focus on image documentation, another reason for the above-average number of attacks on this group could be the superficially recognisable networking with actors of the left-wing political camp. For example, on Twitter they follow accounts of publicly visible activists of the left political spectrum such as Antifa research networks, solidarity alliances or victims' initiatives against right-wing violence. The social media accounts and internet portals of media professionals are often hardly distinguishable from those of left-wing activists. The design of the presences can create the impression of proximity to left-wing activism. Since the majority of assaults can be attributed to attackers from the right-wing political camp – between 2015 and 2020, around 68 percent of attacks came from the right-wing spectrum<sup>26</sup> – they combine two enemy images from the perspective of aggressors. They are journalists and can also be perceived by attackers as "antifa sympathisers".

<sup>25</sup> Transparency note: The chapter was revised after the study was published in early May 2022 to explain in more detail the distinction between those recorded as journalists in this study and other persons affected by violence. The criteria used by the ECPMF to determine who is and who is not included as a journalist do not claim general validity, nor do they assess the content of journalistic work. Specific references to tweets, press reports and other sources available to the authors are omitted in this chapter if conclusions can be drawn from them about the identity of the journalists presented anonymously here.

<sup>26</sup> See Feindbild Journalist 5; p. 26

Various videos, internet comments and media reports also show that the recorded protest journalists were observed at least by some of the attackers as left-wing activists. For example, they were called "damn antifa" or "antifa journalists" by attackers and on social media.

The ascribed political positioning as "antifa journalists" could contribute towards a reciprocal effect: If the media professionals publish an attack or a serious threat to themselves via their Twitter account, they also become better known among the subjects of their (critical) reporting, for example in the chat groups of Querdenken. This could also increase their risk of being attacked at one of the next meetings. This is not least because these Twitter accounts are also seen by enemies of the press when those concerned publish the attacks and threats directed against them.

Complementarily, a dark field effect could also explain the above-average representation of protest journalists in this case study: While these journalists often make violent attacks and serious threats against themselves a topic of discussion in the social media, other media workers do not even make attacks on themselves public (cf. also the section "Critical case reflections" in the annex). For example, one specialist journalist wrote to the ECPMF: "As a matter of principle, I do not comment on such attacks in public because, in my experience, it reinforces the problem and would make my work even more difficult; however, each reporter concerned handles this in his or her own way."

In addition, the high number of attacks could also be due to a higher willingness to take risks on the part of this group. Various video recordings show that those who are attacked most frequently often directly enter the demonstrations or into situations unprotected by the police, while other journalists may have retreated from potentially threatening situations. This willingness to take risks provides protest journalists with exclusive footage. Many other colleagues base their research on their documentary work. In addition, the material of protest journalists is also bought up by periodically published mainstream media. Jörg Reichel, regional director of the dju in ver.di Berlin- Brandenburg, said: "The citizen journalists and social media bloggers, some of whom professionalised themselves under the conditions of the coronavirus protests, are stepping into the breach where no one else is reporting anymore."

#### *Study: Distinction between journalist and activist is necessary*

Since this study collects, verifies and analyses attacks that are directed against a specific professional group, it is necessary to distinguish between journalists and other people affected by violence in the reported attacks. Therefore, for each potential attack, it is analysed whether a journalist is affected or not. In order to make this distinction, a comparatively broad definition of journalistic activity is applied in the case research (see study design). However, in dozens of cases, there were no contributions or images of the "freelance journalists" in regularly publishing media, or minimum requirements for journalistic work, such as the separation of commen-

tary and report, were undermined on their own blogs and platform accounts. Enquiries by the ECPMF about other possible publications, possible memberships in professional associations or the possession of a national press card were sometimes not responded to. There can be many understandable reasons for the ECPMF not responding to enquiries. For example, some journalists do not want to relive the trauma they have experienced as a result of attacks by describing their cases. As a result, however, journalistic activity cannot be proven for these cases according to the definition of the study design. Therefore, these attacks were not included in the survey.

### *Journalist or activist?*

Political activists who pretend to be freelance journalists on the internet can only be distinguished from the group of freelance protest journalists mentioned above with a great deal of research. They often announce on Twitter that they have been attacked as press representatives at demonstrations. Especially in connection with the Twitter campaign #AusgebranntePresse (burnout press), which drew public attention to the ongoing precarious working conditions and hostility towards journalists at the end of December 2021, many activists proclaimed that they had been attacked because of their journalistic work.<sup>27</sup>

The recent increase in the number of reports of attacks by people who could not be proven to be journalists could be related to the large number of pandemic-related outrage movements. Since activists see "observing demonstrations" as a way to act against the growth of right-wing protest networks such as Querdenken, the number of activists appearing publicly as journalists could have increased. This is indicated by the comments, references and retweets on many of the activists' accounts as well as their founding dates.

Based on their self-conception as journalists, these "demo observers" claim the same protection for their work as the media professionals of established media. They expect the police to grant them access to meeting areas that are only accessible to journalists and to protect them in their work. This group uses the unprotected professional title of "journalist" and thus increasingly softens the dividing line between left-wing activists and journalists. This could have a negative impact on the security situation of journalists working on demonstrations. On the one hand, activists posing as journalists could undermine the role of journalists as serious reporters; on the other hand, this hybridisation complicates the police protection of journalistic work at political gatherings. At an ECPMF dialogue event between press representatives and the police in September 2020, the State Secretary of the Interior of Thuringia, Udo Götze, summarised the problem from the perspective of police officers: "The boundary between journalists and activists is difficult for police officers

<sup>27</sup> Burnt-out press – or when the journalist becomes an activist, retrieved from: <https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Ausgebrannte-Press-oder-wenn-der-Journalist-zum-Aktivisten-wird-6316012.html?view=print>; Collective press burnout, retrieved from: <https://taz.de/Ausgebrannte-Press-!5824602/>

to recognise when on duty, and those affected also define themselves as journalists. They then claim that no violence can be used against them, even though they are activists on the move.”<sup>28</sup>

#### *Disinformation by media activists*

In addition, there are the “media activists”, who can often be classified as belonging to the Querdenken/coronavirus denier spectrum and who have their own YouTube channels with live streams of the protests. They often have “press cards” that can be ordered for a small fee without valid proof of their own journalistic activity. An example of this is the “Saxon Press Card” issued by the far-right party “Free Saxons”. Personal data and “an indication of the medium for which reporting is to take place (e.g., Telegram channel, website, YouTube channel, etc.)” are required to obtain the 40-euro card.

#### **4. Local journalism – hate on the doorstep**

Before the emergence of the coronavirus-related protests, local journalists were relatively rarely the focus of anti-press attacks. It is true that even before the start of the pandemic, media workers from local and regional editorial offices had to endure threats, occasional physical attacks or sometimes even company visits by right-wing extremist actors. But the majority of the “lying press” attacks hit journalists from national media or specialist journalists at political demonstrations, most of which took place in urban areas. With the spread of irregular spontaneous protests into rural areas becoming visible at the end of 2021, special burdens for local journalists are becoming increasingly apparent<sup>29</sup>. The threat posed by the relocation of political gatherings are intensified by the particular living and working situation of those affected. They are rooted in the region and are therefore exposed to permanent threats from the local environment.

The share of local journalists among those affected by attacks was still comparatively low in 2021. But the development alludes to a worrying trend: While in the whole of 2021 there were only four cases, and thus about five percent of all incidents, which were directed against the local press; this proportion rose in the first two months of 2022 to six of 22 cases, or 27 percent.

The reason for this increase may be a general shift of protest events from the city to the countryside, which then also increasingly affects local journalists. This was

28 Campus Talk Press Freedom Codex for the Police, retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kW4VEIRJUAg>

29 For the purposes of the study and in order to achieve the greatest possible comparability, a narrow definition of local journalism and press is applied. A local employment relationship or a (continuous) assignment by a local editorial office for a freelancer determines the characteristic of local press. Those who report as correspondents or reporters for national media, as specialist journalists, or as social media bloggers are accordingly not included in the definition. A closely related characteristic that is included for the first time in this edition is that of “rural areas”. This includes cities and towns with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants. By combining both characteristics, the special situation of the local press in rural regions is to be investigated and made visible. An indisputable stand Local journalists in big cities are also increasingly at risk of being attacked (cf. study design annex).

the result of the evaluation for the year 2021 and the first months of 2022. Not only local journalists, but also reporters, camerapersons and other media professionals were affected. While in the first quarter of 2021, only about five percent of all cases were recorded away from larger cities, this share rose to about 17 percent in the second quarter, 35 percent in the third quarter and 34 percent in the fourth quarter. The trend intensified in January and February 2022 to a value of around 41 percent. This means that significantly more attacks were registered in rural areas in 2022 than in the previous year. Based on this analysis, the following consideration of the threat situation of local journalists focuses mainly on rural and small-town regions, although local journalists in large cities are also affected.

The first attack against a representative of the local press in 2021 was on 16 May 2021 against a photographer from the newspaper *Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten* in the capital of Saxony. Several men attacked the woman in the vicinity of the riots following *Dynamo Dresden's* promotion, insulted her in a sexist manner and destroyed her camera. Then, at the beginning of December, a reporter for the *Südwestpresse* in Rottenacker, Baden-Württemberg, was attacked twice when she tried to report on a vigil: "One of the participants, who was standing 15 metres away, came over and told me to leave. Then he took my mobile phone, tore the mask off my face and said 'You should be hanged'. Two other participants in the vigil held me so that I could not follow the man with my mobile phone. I found it later in the bushes", said the local reporter.

At the first unauthorised spontaneous protest on 18 December 2021 in Hildesheim, a reporter accompanied the march. Towards the end of the event, the reporter positioned himself at the side of the only police patrol present to take a photo of the crowd when one of the participants targeted him. He approached with the words "Piss off, trash" and "Shut up" and jostled him. An official complaint was filed. The journalist concerned reports that this experience has sensitised him and that he has now become more cautious and only goes to such events as part of a team.

### *Heightened security situation at the beginning of 2022*

The proportion of attacks on the local press increased massively in the first two months of 2022, accounting for six cases, almost a third of all attacks. Local press representatives were affected three times in Baden-Württemberg, once each in Bavaria, Saarland and Saxony. Five of these cases took place in small towns and cities and all six at unauthorised spontaneous protests. In five of the cases, the alleged aim was to attack the camera or mobile phone, or the attackers demanded that recordings be deleted and became violent in the process. In one case in Coswig, Saxony, protesters threw bottles towards the journalists present, making it impossible for them to continue their work. In another case, the tyres of a car belonging to a local editorial office in Landsberg am Lech were slashed. A few weeks earlier, a reporter and a photographer from the same editorial office were attacked at an evening unannounced spontaneous protest in the small Bavarian town.

The finding of a worsening security situation, especially in the rural areas of western Germany, is confirmed by reports from editors-in-chief and publishing companies, which were analysed in a survey jointly initiated by ECPMF and the German Association of Digital Publishers and Newspaper Publishers (BDZV). From Schleswig-Holstein to the Upper Palatinate, editors-in-chief report that the hostility is closely related to the influx of pandemic-related protests and the "lying press" accusations that have been rekindled as a result. Some, though by no means all, respondents reported almost weekly incidents of hostility towards the press. They ranged from shouting and insults to physical assaults. Claus Liesegang, editor-in-chief of the Märkische Oderzeitung and Lausitzer Rundschau reported in his letter to the ECPMF: "We experience anti-press attacks almost every Monday during the 'walks in the park' against the coronavirus rules at various locations. These are mainly in Oranienburg, Eberswalde, Fürstenwalde, Frankfurt (Oder) and Eisenhüttenstadt. The quality of the attacks ranges from shouting from the group ('lying press, shut your mouth' etc.) to verbal attacks against individuals, sometimes naming them, and shoving, to calls in relevant Telegram chats for 'company calls' to an editor whose private address had previously been posted there (we have filed a complaint against this)."

From the opposite side of Germany, Jost Lübben, editor-in-chief of the Westfalenpost writes his assessment: "Furthermore, colleagues in the local editorial offices observe a clearly more aggressive mood at these events ('walks in the park'). In the social networks (Telegram), names of colleagues are also mentioned, sometimes 'visits' are announced. In two cases, there are charges of 'defamation' from among the so-called coronavirus deniers – against a local editor and against myself. However, we do not – yet – perceive this as a threat."

One cause of the massively worsening security situation for journalists in rural areas from the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022 is the increased incidence of unannounced spontaneous protests. All six recorded cases for local journalists in 2022 occurred in this protest format. They are particularly dangerous event contexts, as some of the demonstrators there display an above-average willingness to use violence and there is also a lack of police protection for the press in many places (cf. for more detail: Chapter 3).

In addition, some of those working in the local area have little experience with reporting on political gatherings. For example, Beate Luber, who works as a local journalist in the Upper Palatinate and was, herself, attacked during a coronavirus demonstration in 2020, reports in an email to the ECPMF: "Mostly events are covered, especially at the weekend or in the evenings, by freelance (unskilled) workers who are mostly retired, do it as a hobby and are completely inexperienced/inept at journalism despite decades of working for the press. In addition, they are very poorly paid and therefore often only stay at the event for a short time. So, of course, no adequate reporting is possible. (...)" The bourgeois appearance of many self-proclaimed "walkers in the park" further complicates the risk assessment for this group.

### *A provincial problem: Diving into anonymity impossible*

The publication of address data, for example in the chat groups of regional coronavirus deniers, can pose a particular threat to local journalists. One post on Telegram is enough to turn a local journalist's private space into a demonstration site. Unlike reporters from national media, local journalists are rooted in the region and can therefore be exposed to continuous threats. It is not possible for staff to retreat into the anonymity of a big city, as Beate Luber also reports: "I felt very defenceless in public shortly after the attack [August 2020 in Weiden], as attackers could potentially be anywhere. Since then, I no longer report on such events. I perceived the fact that there was no longer any space to retreat as a great burden. That is a difference to the diversified big city." Instead, some of the hostilities extend right to one's own front door. Franziska Klemenz, a journalist working for the Sächsische Zeitung in Dresden, recognises clear challenges for journalistic work in rural regions:

"I see a difference for colleagues in local newsrooms in smaller towns. I write for the whole of eastern Saxony from Dresden, and I can half-disappear into the anonymity of the big city. Only now and then do I have unpleasant encounters. In local newspapers, readers often know where the colleague lives, where his children go to school, what his parents' names are. There, the filter is missing; the barrier, the immediacy is completely different – and with it, so too is the potential threat.

### *Counteractions by media houses*

Some publishers and newspapers have taken measures to counter the threats. In the economically weakened sector, however, this is not a matter of course – there is obviously a lack of material resources to take robust measures, such as accompanying reporters with security staff, intensive training of employees or the creation of individual protection concepts. Nevertheless, there remain other possibilities for protection. The Südkurier, for example, only sends its employees on assignments in teams where an increased potential for danger is expected, such as demonstrations. The journalists are then required to contact the police on site and in advance. The editor-in-chief of the Schleswig-Holstein newspaper publishing company Stefan Hans Kläsener explains: "As journalists, we have to be sensitive, but not thin-skinned. A certain robustness is part of our profession, especially when working locally. But that doesn't change the fact that we have to support and strengthen each other. Gross insults or threats will be reported."

### **Impact of the threat**

Both the development of the number of cases and the reports from publishers, newspapers, and reporters in the field attest to the increasingly tense working situation for the local press. The geographical spread of the protests, the diffuse protest formats and the unpredictable aggression potential of the participants lead to an increased burden. Due to their local prominence and anchoring in the region, many local journalists also lack the potential to protect themselves effectively outside of their official assignments. If the hostilities continue, journalists from local newsrooms could increasingly withdraw from the profession in order to avoid constant stress. This could become a problem for local journalism, which is already under pressure, as Franziska Klemenz of the Sächsische Zeitung fears: "Circulations are falling, which means there is less money and fewer jobs. For many colleagues, especially in local journalism, the workload has increased. In the long run, the quality of the research can only suffer." If this trend continues, white spots could appear on the journalistic map of Germany.

## **5. Perpetrator profile: mostly male, often right-wing**

Statements on the perpetrators of attacks are only possible to a limited extent on the basis of the data collected in this study, as neither interviews with perpetrators nor information from the authorities, such as criminal records or registration data, can be used. However, based on the data collected by the ECPMF, the following characteristics can be identified: The perpetrators in 2021 were again predominantly male and tended to belong to the right-wing political spectrum. This corresponds to the findings of previous years.

In 2021, the current year of investigation, 64 out of 83 assaults were committed by male perpetrators; in eight cases women were also involved. In 14 assaults, the gender of the assailants cannot be clearly traced.<sup>30</sup> This distribution roughly corresponds to that of the previous year (2020: men were involved in 43 out of 69 cases, women in ten out of 69, in 20 cases the assignment is unknown). The proportion of women involved in the crime has thus remained fairly constant in the last year.

In 2021, the attackers could be assigned to the right-wing political camp in 39 percent of the cases, which corresponds to 32 cases. In 28 cases, men were involved in the crime; a woman was involved in one case, and in three cases the gender is unknown.

Five of the recorded attacks in 2021 occurred at protests called for by the "Free Saxons". At a march in Hannoversch Münden, Lower Saxony, the "Free Lower Saxons"

<sup>30</sup> Since in some cases several persons attacked, these figures are not congruent with the absolute number of cases.

mobilised for the protests. The rallying movement, which first appeared in 2021, is modelled on the "Free Saxons". An attack in 2022 in Erfurt took place in connection with a protest to which the "Free Thuringians", another group founded along the lines of the "Free Saxons" group, had called for a protest. All three groups mobilise via the messenger service Telegram. The channel of the "Free Saxons" has just under 150,000 subscribers, the "Free Lower Saxons" just over 20,000 and the "Free Thuringians" just under 20,000.<sup>31</sup> As of 27 March 2022, the "Free Saxons" advertised over 150 meeting places across Saxony on their Telegram channel, always emphasising that they were not the organisers, but that the "local citizens" were responsible.

The leader of the party "Free Saxony", which was founded as a rallying movement against the background of the coronavirus pandemic in February 2021, is Martin Kohlmann, known as a right-wing scene lawyer, who sits in the Chemnitz city council for the "ProChemnitz/Freie Sachsen" parliamentary group.<sup>32</sup> Together with other right-wing groups, "ProChemnitz" was instrumental in organising the riots in August 2018, during which ten journalists were physically attacked. Both "ProChemnitz" and the "Free Saxons" were classified as right-wing extremist by the Saxon Office for the Protection of the Constitution. The "Free Saxons" were also classified as a suspected case by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution in January 2022.<sup>33</sup>

The right-wing extremism researcher Matthias Quent sees personal overlaps with those involved in the riots in Chemnitz in the late summer of 2018: "These are the same actors who demonstrated in Chemnitz three years ago against the accommodation of refugees, who demonstrated at Pegida. This is not a coincidence, nor is it a spontaneous eruption, but rather a pent-up, collected and hardened milieu of right-wing radicalism that has basically emerged and established itself since 2013 and that has now discovered a new topic with the coronavirus pandemic. With the worrying development that they have succeeded in reaching beyond their own right-wing clientele, which is already large enough, especially in Saxony and other eastern German states, but not only there."<sup>34</sup>

The "Free Saxons" mobilise not only right-wing extremists with their so-called "walks in the park", but a thoroughly heterogeneous spectrum of participants. Families with children who do not agree with the coronavirus measures take part, but so do right-wing extremists who incite against the government and the media and represent anti-constitutional ideologies. The acceptance of right-wing extremist positions and the resulting violence became evident in Chemnitz late in the summer of 2018 at the latest, when a coalition of those prepared to use violence could be observed,

<sup>31</sup> Date 3 April 2022

<sup>32</sup> Monitorium Rechts: The Free Saxons". Dresden, retrieved from: [https://kulturbuero-sachsen.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Monitorium\\_Freie-Sachsen\\_12s\\_220207\\_WEB.pdf](https://kulturbuero-sachsen.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Monitorium_Freie-Sachsen_12s_220207_WEB.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution classifies "Free Saxons" as a suspected case nationwide, retrieved from: <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/sachsen/verfassungsschutz-stuft-freie-sachsen-bundesweit-als-verdachtsfall-ein-100.html>

<sup>34</sup> Torchlight procession at coronavirus protest: Extremism researcher: "This was not spontaneous", retrieved from: <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/panorama/corona-rechtsextremismus-sachsen-fackelaufmarsch-100.html>

which included right-wing extremist cadres, AfD sympathisers and people with a middle-class appearance. This alliance was also evident at protests in Leipzig on 7 November 2020, where there were massive attacks on police officers and members of the media. It has now been consolidated in the "Free Saxons" movement. This is evidenced not only by the political goals announced in the chat groups but also by the overlapping of the leading figures in the two movements, "ProChemnitz" and "Free Saxony". A problem for journalists is the incalculability of the risk of attack resulting from the heterogeneity of the participants.

Since attackers with a middle-class appearance are more difficult for journalists to recognise than right-wing extremists who mark themselves as such through clothing and habitus, journalists have difficulty in assessing their personal risk on the spot. This increases the feeling of insecurity that now accompanies media professionals in their work at gatherings. Local journalist Beate Luber writes to ECPMF: "The protesters come more and more from the middle-class milieu or from the extreme centre – to put it superficially: they look totally normal. That's why police and politicians are inhibited from sanctioning violations of the law, publicly condemning them or to initiating similar means to contain the protest movement." Tagesspiegel journalist Julius Geiler describes how pronounced this irritation is in an interview:

"Since the beginning of the demos, I have noticed that I feel 'safer' on pure Nazi demos, such as in Dresden, because they are much easier to assess. Here, we know that these are dangerous people. In contrast, it is still surprising when the supposedly more bourgeois clientele, also consisting of older women, attack you, defame you and hit the camera. Overall, I'm more concerned about violence from the middle-class clientele, that's new." This diffuse threat situation is cause for continuous tension for many press representatives in their journalistic work amidst the public.

## 6. Verbal threats and damage to property: The new normality

The negative record of recorded violent attacks is accompanied by a further increase in serious threats, crude insults, and numerous cases of damage to property. The annual survey of major media companies revealed a clear trend in the perception of threats. In unison, public media and some publishing companies<sup>35</sup> report a further increase in non-physical aggression. For example, the Bayerischer Rundfunk states about the recent development of the security situation at demonstrations: "In reporting on protests by critics of the coronavirus measures, opponents of vaccination and so-called Querdenker, an increasing potential for aggression against our employees can be observed." The NDR gives a similar assessment: "The approach on the part of the demonstrators has become more aggressive." SR reports: "Our staff report that the tone towards journalists has become tougher at demonstrations of the so-called Querdenker scene." Verbal hostilities such as "lying press", "system whore" or "shame on you" are now part of everyday working life. They can hit journalists while they are working in the pedestrian zone as well as during a live broadcast from a demonstration.

### *Death threats, online and offline*

Beyond the crudest invective, however, serious verbal threats were also registered in 2021. Among them were death threats directed specifically at employees of public broadcasters and a member of the DJV federal executive,<sup>36</sup> which were posted in various Telegram groups. The aggressors' lack of inhibition became clear, for example, during the court proceedings on the death threats marked NSU 2.0 in March 2022: There, the defendant threatened the witness Deniz Yücel, who was affected by hostility, during the trial that he would do completely different things to the journalist if he could.<sup>37</sup>

When journalist Alexander Roth, deputy head of the online editorial department at the Waiblingen newspaper publishing company, researched the connections of right-wing radicals to the coronavirus protests, he became the target of fierce threats: "My name was mentioned again and again in the corresponding groups on Telegram, and I was insulted. It escalated further when I submitted an enquiry to the former AfD member of the state parliament Heinrich Fiechtner, who was due to appear at a demo shortly before New Year's Eve 2020. Fiechtner published my request

<sup>35</sup> Together with the BDZV, the ECPMF addressed a survey to the association's members and received numerous responses from the publishing companies of German regional newspapers. In addition, upon request, the ECPMF received assessments of the security situation of its own staff from Deutschlandradio, BR, HR, MDR, NDR, RBB, Radio Bremen, SR, SWR and ZDF.

<sup>36</sup> The press as an enemy: Threats to journalists by "Querdenker" increase, retrieved from: <https://www.rnd.de/medien/warnung-des-djv-bedrohungen-von-journalisten-durch-querdenker-nehmen-zu-lWBF3MQ3ENDLTOMCSRFVHTBPIM.html>

<sup>37</sup> Accused threatens witness Deniz Yücel, retrieved from: <https://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/nsu-2-0-prozess-zeuge-deniz-yuecel-von-angeklagtem-bedroht-a-ec4b3bfb-0f35-4c72-9f60-34c4e3d35f30>

on Telegram. This was followed by comments like 'Nothing will happen without bullets in the head' and 'The movement needs a lone perpetrator'. People offered to carve my name into bullets. That was the first time we in the newsroom also alerted the police. The question was whether I needed personal protection.<sup>38</sup>

Even on conventional shoots, such as in a nursing home in Cumbach, Thuringia, media workers were exposed to aggression. At the beginning of December 2021, a camera team from MDR was insulted by employees of the home and filmed with their mobile phones – despite repeated requests to stop. In the end, the team stopped filming in order to prevent further escalation after being asked to do so by the home's management, the broadcaster told ECPMF. A reporter from the RBB was virtually surrounded while reporting on a demonstration by opponents of the coronavirus measures in Cottbus on 18 December. Despite security personnel, they threatened him with the words "We're hunting you!"

Company cars widely recognisable as broadcaster property could increasingly become a source of danger for staff: On 22 July, for example, MDR employees were forced off the motorway into an exit ramp in their station-branded company car. "The driver reacted with presence of mind and prevented an accident"; stated the broadcaster. A report was filed. In January 2022, according to the broadcaster, an MDR employee in Bautzen was attacked by two demonstrators with beer bottles as she got out of her company car. While one bottle missed its target, the other attacker abandoned his plan when police approached. Hessischer Rundfunk reports that the logos on the company car of a regional studio employee were removed after the car was damaged by demonstrators.<sup>39</sup> The media worker had previously reported several times on Querdenken assemblies in the region. In addition, the responsible editorial office and the legal department of the institution arranged for all references to him to be deleted from the online pages of Hessischer Rundfunk. In another incident, participants in a protest march tipped rubbish into a Hessischer Rundfunk company car. In Landsberg am Lech, Bavaria, the tyres of an editorial car were slashed in February 2022.

### ***Damage to cars, equipment and buildings***

In addition, attacks are also repeatedly directed against the equipment of media workers and publishing companies, and buildings of media companies have also been the target of anti-press campaigns. For example, trespassing occurred at ZDF's regional studio in Hanover, Lower Saxony; the culprits were part of a high-profile banner campaign. Furthermore, the MDR regional office in Görlitz was smeared with slogans in December 2021, while the Dresden state broadcasting centre received a

38 "The threats have not stopped since", retrieved from <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/corona-demos-was-alexander-roth-in-baden-wuerttemberg-erlebt-a-1139981f-ac54-48fc-9ca2-5e384e6e708a>

39 The Dutch public broadcaster NOS already decided in 2020 to remove the broadcaster logos from its company cars to prevent attacks. On the situation in the Netherlands, see: <https://www.mappingmediafreedom.org/2020/11/05/reportit-when-attacks-force-journalists-to-hide-their-identity/>

bomb threat by email in January. On 22 March 2022, two men obviously belonging to the right-wing political spectrum, damaged the entrance door of the editorial office of the newspaper Neues Deutschland in Berlin. The drunken perpetrators fled after defaming and threatening those present on site as “lying press” and attempting to physically assault them.<sup>40</sup>

Even local newsrooms are not spared visible hostility. The Schleswig-Holstein newspaper publisher reported to the ECPMF by email: “The graffiti with one’s own name in the pedestrian zone with the invective ‘Schmierfink’ (Flensburg), the small demo in front of the editorial office (Eckernförde), the wooden cross with the grave light or the ‘Lügenpresse’ (Lying Press) sign on the visitors’ car parks (Flensburg) are one thing, posts on social media or insults by phone (there often connected with sexualised invective against young female colleagues), are another.”

### *Marches in front of publishers and media companies*

In addition to these direct threats and damage to property, editorial offices, publishing companies and broadcasting companies were again the target of marches last year. In April, people gathered in front of the HR headquarters in Frankfurt/Main, in August in front of various press buildings in Berlin, and in September there was a so-called “Freedom March [sic] to the media companies” in Hanover.<sup>41</sup> At the end of December, there was a spontaneous march past the NDR regional studio in Rostock, as the station reported to the ECPMF.

This trend continued in 2022. According to an email to the ECPMF from the SWR press office, around 3,000 participants from the Querdenken environment took part in a demonstration march to the SWR broadcasting centre in Stuttgart in January. The banners read “Immune to propaganda”, “Against division and incitement by the leading media” or “Let’s go to SWR, that’s where the virus is”. In the months before, several small protest marches had already targeted the SWR premises in Stuttgart.

It is true that in previous years there had already been sporadic demonstrations past media companies. In addition, the NPD organised a demonstration in Hanover in 2019 specifically against three journalists – so far, an isolated case. However, the number of demonstrations in the past year, as well as the increasing number of assaults and the reported further increase in serious threats, can be read as an expression of the progressive manifestation of anti-press ideas.

<sup>40</sup> “What a shit shop”, retrieved from <https://taz.de/Tageszeitung-Neues-Deutschland/!5840282/>

<sup>41</sup> Protect media people, demonise, retrieved from: <https://mmm.verdi.de/beruf/medienleute-schuetzen-nicht-verteufeln-72647>; [https://twitter.com/ver\\_jorg/status/1431513049828036608](https://twitter.com/ver_jorg/status/1431513049828036608); [https://twitter.com/foto\\_kemp/status/1434118957892521989](https://twitter.com/foto_kemp/status/1434118957892521989)

### *Marking as “enemy of the scene” on social media*

Numerous journalists reported to the ECPMF that photos and their private addresses were circulated in chat groups during demonstrations. The dissemination of private addresses, known as “doxing”, is usually associated with serious threats against media professionals and is an intimidation tactic previously used by political extremists against enemies of the scene. Doxing has been used against specialised journalists for a long time. In right-wing extremist circles, so-called enemy lists have been circulating for years, which also contain the names of media professionals. However, in conversations during the ECPMF case research for this study, it is striking how widespread this tactic has become. With the widespread use of messenger services like Telegram, the enforcement of many Querdenken groups with right-wing extremists and the advancing radicalisation of the followers, doxing now also affects a large number of reporters who were not previously known as specialist journalists and who have made themselves unpopular in the scene through their research. Private addresses are not always published. Calls to intimidate members of the press are – more or less explicitly – almost always articulated. In the meantime, such digitally disseminated markings as enemies of the scene have become part of everyday life for many media workers. Julius Geiler reports on his doxing experiences: “Targeted threats happen at demos and on social media and it happens all the time. I don’t mind, but I am definitely marked as an enemy of the scene. My name and photo are shared on Telegram all the time, I get photographed up close at demos.”

On channels of so-called media activists from the Querdenken milieu, videos are published with the identities of journalists who accompany political demonstrations.<sup>42</sup> The videos sometimes reach six-figure viewing figures and thus a hardly manageable mass of potential attackers. For years, reporters, photographers and camera teams have been “counter-filmed” by demonstrators at demonstrations. Even experienced journalists feel uneasy about this, as one BR journalist describes: “Not knowing who they are, how the filmed material is played out, where it is made available and might be posted on which forums, I find this really threatening. It does something to me.”

While social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter now at least rudimentarily implement their own guidelines and are subject to a certain degree of (self-)regulation, things are different with messenger services like Telegram. Private chat groups and channels are beyond any means of control. The content shared here, up to and including death threats, is neither moderated nor deleted externally. Opponents of the press organise themselves there and repeatedly intimidate media professionals such as the investigative journalists from the Y collective, writes Radio Bremen to the ECPMF: “During the Y Collective’s research on ‘Far-right settlers in Saxony’, we aborted a filming trip due to a message in a Telegram group of more than 3,000 people that was understood as intimidation.”

<sup>42</sup> Querdenker on the hunt for journalists, retrieved from: [https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2021/05/12/querdenker-auf-journalistenjagd\\_30816](https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2021/05/12/querdenker-auf-journalistenjagd_30816)

### *Hate speech as an everyday experience in editorial offices*

Digitally transmitted threats have been hitting not only reporters and photographers in the field for years. In the meantime, hate is being carried digitally into editorial offices on an enormous scale. For example, ZDF states: "Hostilities against ZDF journalists in the digital space in the form of hate messages and threats continued to be immense in 2021." Social media editors are confronted with hate and agitation almost every day, especially when they work in the field of community management, the moderation of comments. Their work is dominated by hate speech, misinformation and hostility against the editors. MDR writes about this: "[It happens again and again] that MDR employees are blatantly insulted and threatened, especially when individual comments are deleted or not approved."

Malice, insults and threats are also directed at editors in the viewers' editorial offices, for example at BR. Here, there are wild insults on the phone: "There are regular situations on the phone where BR staff are shouted at without there even being a valid reason."

### *Female journalists as the enemy*

Women journalists are often exposed to multiple stresses. In addition to the most severe public defamation and threats of violence, they are also exposed to sexist threats. Insults against them are often accompanied by sexualised content. Threats of rape, published fake nude pictures and insults such as "system slut" are now part of the recurring work reality for some of those affected, as SWR reports:

"Overall, anonymous written threats are also increasing from presenters in the most foul-mouthed manner, incl. death threats, rape threats, threats of stalking and 'retaliation.'" This is different from the hostilities compared to male colleagues, analyses Franziska Klemenz of the Sächsische Zeitung: "Women are quickly degraded to objects. Male colleagues less frequently experience their body playing a role for the mob - at most in an insulting sense, not in a sexual one."

Reporter Sophia Maier, who has regularly reported from political demonstrations for SternTV, said: "[The insults] are partially also aimed at my womanhood" and reports a comment under one of her videos that was shared in a Telegram group of conspiracy ideologue Attila Hildmann: "That bitch, I wouldn't even fuck such a dirty whore, she should have her face smashed in properly."<sup>43</sup> Women journalists are much less likely to be physically attacked, but they are more likely to be verbally hated. A study by the United Nations in 2021 sees the major platform media as the most important "enablers" of hate directed against female media professionals and noted a further increase in hate speech during the pandemic (cf. Posetti et al. 2021).

<sup>43</sup> "Querdenker" attack journalists: "When this is all over, you'll be hanging from a tree", retrieved from: [https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/id\\_91397130/-querdenker-hass-gegen-journalisten-wenn-das-alles-vorbei-ist-wirst-du-an-einem-baum-haengen.html](https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/id_91397130/-querdenker-hass-gegen-journalisten-wenn-das-alles-vorbei-ist-wirst-du-an-einem-baum-haengen.html)

## 7. Emaciated press: Impact on media professionals and journalism

The physical and psychological integrity of journalists has never been so at risk since the rise of the “lying press” accusations. The risk of violence remains particularly high at demonstrations. For journalists, this often means having to work for hours under enormous tension, as HR describes in a submission: “A camera crew had to cope with ‘boxing in’ by Querdenker. At times, agitators pursued a team and insulted them for a period of about 30 minutes. All those affected complained about the intolerability of the hatred they were subjected to, sometimes for long periods of time (six to eight hours).” Many media workers have been exposed to this high level of stress for years now. It now pushes even hardened reporters to the limits of their endurance.

Their physical integrity is further threatened by hazards specifically related to coronavirus: Since 2020, assignments at protests have been associated with an increased risk of infection. The majority of demonstrators did not wear protective masks. Several of those affected reported that attackers tried to rip their protective masks off their faces. In addition, various videos show that protesters coughed and sneezed offensively in the direction of the media.

Some journalists felt “double-marked” by wearing the mask and carrying their camera – and thus more easily identifiable as potential targets of attacks. Filming media activists and doxing in chat groups increases the asymmetry of knowledge between attackers and journalists: Potential attackers know the journalists, while for reporters, possible aggressors are often hardly identifiable due to their bourgeois appearance. If there is a lack of police protection, as recently with the large number of unauthorised spontaneous demonstrations, the pressure on media workers increases even more. This places a particular burden on local journalists. Because of their roots in the region, they cannot retreat into their private lives after work. They also experience hostility after work, away from the daily routine. The threats – perceived as permanent tension – can cause a lot of psychological stress.

### *Media professionals withdraw*

After years of hostility, a growing number of media workers no longer have the strength or the will to endure the almost continuous threats. This is reflected in reports to the ECPMF, but also in a social media campaign initiated at the end of December 2021 under the hashtag #AusgebranntePresse.<sup>44</sup> Reporting for years from such tense situations is exhausting, writes reporter Sarah Ulrich in the taz: “Quite a few reporters – including myself – have withdrawn from covering demonstrations and coronavirus ‘walks in the park’. Why? Because the dangers involved in reporting are out of proportion to what one earns as a freelance journalist. So #Ausgebrann-

44 z. B. <https://twitter.com/leonenrique/status/1475865947974127629>

tePresse [burnout press] is also a consequence of the crisis in journalism."<sup>45</sup> It is now affecting the health of many journalists.

The social counsellor of Hessischer Rundfunk says that the stress resulting from verbal and physical attacks became an issue in 2020. She summarises the effects that the recurring threats over the years have on media workers: "Many of the colleagues who seek counselling are heavily burdened by the, sometimes, massive violations of their boundaries. Some staff members have experienced such massive threats in the field and on the phone in recent years that they can no longer work in these fields. I have experienced massive traumatisation in isolated cases, accompanied by panic attacks, sleep disorders, psychosomatic disorders and depression. Often the effects are associated with longterm inability for work or professional disability."

As a result, journalism is developing a structural problem; in some cases, reporting in local areas is no longer possible to the full extent. As a result, not only the affected journalists suffer. It can also make it more difficult to ensure full coverage. Gerhard Kockert, BR-Studio Franken, warns: "It is becoming more and more difficult to find reporters who are willing to cover demonstrations by opponents of measures, vaccination opponents and contrarians."<sup>46</sup> Comparable reports of journalists who withdrew from covering protests or even completely from their jobs because of hostility increased last year. While ECPMF's research in previous studies found only isolated evidence of media professionals withdrawing, significantly more reporters now expressed similar sentiments to local journalist Beate Luber on Twitter in December 2021: "Since I was attacked once as a freelance journalist at a Schwurblerdemo [Querdenken gathering], I have never reported on such an event again. Because it causes too much stress for me. It's called the 'silencing effect' and it threatens freedom of the press."<sup>47</sup>

Not only the stress caused by the constant threats, but also the fear for their physical integrity makes journalists change jobs – away from the streets.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> The collective burnout was foreseeable, tageszeitung, 30.12.2021, p. 14

<sup>46</sup> Violence against journalists at record high in 2021, retrieved from: <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/gewalt-gegen-journalisten-2021-auf-rekordhoch>

<sup>47</sup> <https://twitter.com/yoyosefine/status/1476285445201965063>

<sup>48</sup> Violence against the press, instead of love and peace, retrieved from: <https://freelens.com/politik-medien/gewalt-gegen-die-presse-statt-liebe-und-frieden/>

## 8. Classification of the results in the long-term survey and ideological component

The negative record of 2021 reveals the potential for violence among the supporters of Querdenken & Co. However, it is not an expression of a new quality of hatred towards the press, but rather the result of a hostility towards the press that became established in the long term from 2015 onwards. The analysis already made by the ECPMF in 2020, that hatred of the press has become the new normal, was confirmed again last year. The hostility is carried by outrage movements and fuelled by their leaders. For example, the "Die Basis" politician Ronny Poge threatened an NDR journalist in Stralsund on camera: "And the one-sided reporting in the media. You hear the same thing on all the stations. People are not stupid. It's transparent. How long do you want to play this game? I can tell you how long you will continue. Until there are so many of us, until we get you out of your editor's office."

The reach of such agitation is great: In the 2021 federal election, some 630,000 people voted for the small party "Die Basis",<sup>49</sup> which emerged from the Querdenken scene. In a representative telephone survey commissioned by the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, one in ten respondents could imagine taking part in the Querdenken protests at the end of 2020. Based on this, a potential mobilisation of up to 10 million people can be roughly calculated (cf. Grande et al. 2021, p. 3). It is true that even in 2021 only a small proportion turned violent against the press. Nevertheless, the reach for hate-fuelled ideology and conspiracy content shared on masse is frightening. The negative record of 2021 is still part of what is now the third phase of anti-press violence driven by pandemic-related protests that began in the spring of 2020.

Outrage movements have formed the foundation for press hatred since Pegida, from which the assaults emerge. The development goes back to the activation of an old enemy image: the accusation that journalists are part of a "lying press", a conspiracy of the media and political elites directed against the so-called "people" (cf. Seidler 2016). Since the emergence of Pegida in 2014, this sweeping slander of an entire profession has been carried out of its far-right niche into the public sphere. Propagated by the then new right-wing populist actors, the "lying press" narrative thus became a hinge of the extreme right to previously more moderate circles.

In 2015, the first phase of anti-press violence began; the reactivation phase. It lasted until 2018, from the rise of the Gida movements to the violence at the Chemnitz demonstrations. During this time, hatred of the so-called "lying press" was cultivated and thus became connected to broader social groups. In 2016 and 2017, the number of attacks dropped by about half compared to the negative record of 2015. The development of the two years initially fed the illusion to media professionals and civil society that the attacks would disappear with the increasing marginalisation of

49 Second votes in the 2021 federal election, retrieved from: <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/bundestagswahlen/2021/ergebnisse/bund-99.html#zweitstimmen-prozente12>

Pegida and other right-wing populist initiatives. However, this hope was shattered by the violence in Chemnitz in the late summer of 2018.

The second phase of the establishment of hostility towards the press began with the closing of ranks of the right-wing extremists, right-wing populists and so-called Wutbürger:innen.

Since then, the distinction between angry citizens and extremists, which is hardly objectifiable anyway, had lost all discriminatory power. The year 2018 set a second negative record after 2015 with 26 cases, and in the following year the numbers briefly dropped by half again.

However, from 2020 onwards, the Querdenker have further spread the “lying press” slander, which has been rampant since 2014/2015, to the breadth of the population and thus once again intensified the hatred against the press. Their fundamental rejection of the state and its elites, characterised by conspiracy theories, is clearly different from the extreme right-wing Pegida programme. It is more accessible to a broader section of the population. According to the MIDEM study 2021 for Saxony (Vorländer

2021, p. 25), the decisive factor for the tendency to adopt positions critical of coronavirus is not so much the political position, but “the trust in the work of political elites and institutions, the degree of confidence in one’s own political self-efficacy, and the feeling of being set back from others and not treated fairly.”

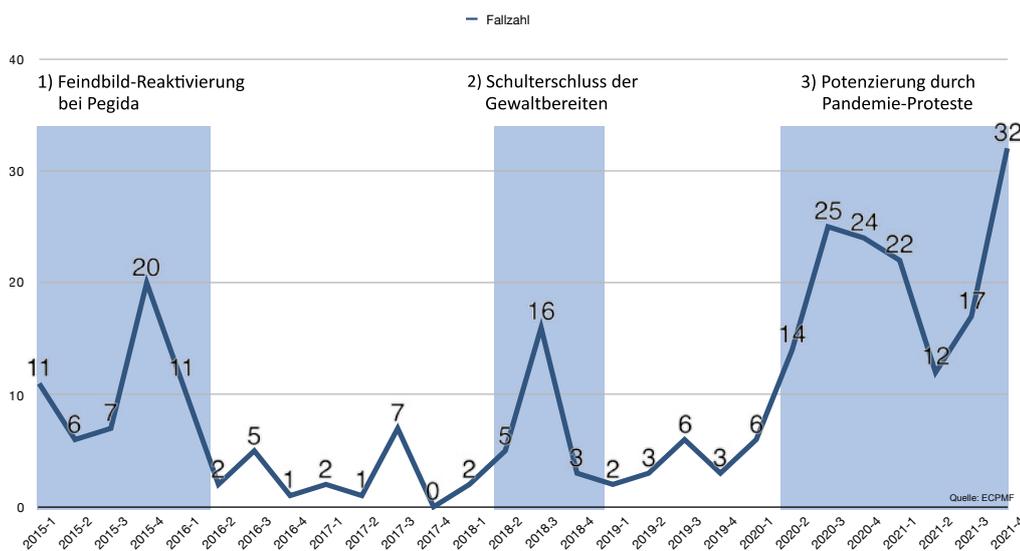


Figure 8: Violent attacks on journalists 2015-2021: Three phases of anti-press aggression

## 9. Countermeasures by politics, police, publishing companies and associations

### *Politics and police*

"We are committed to the safety of journalists"<sup>50</sup> is stated in the coalition agreement of the federal government that took office in autumn 2021. An analysis by the Conference of Interior Ministers in June 2021 shows how urgently this statement needs to be implemented. The interior ministers and senators had accurately summarised the threat situation within the context of their biannual conference under agenda item 23: "The IMK observes with concern that there has been an increase in violent attacks and intimidation attempts against journalists in recent years – especially on the fringes of demonstrations. The coronavirus pandemic has further intensified this phenomenon, with attacks being committed in many cases by persons with extremist ideology." Referring to this, they affirmed their support for the revision of the 1993 Code of Conduct for Police and Media, which has been promoted by the Press Council and journalists' associations for several years. This appears "necessary in light of the changes that have occurred".<sup>51</sup> According to the Press Council, work on the joint draft of the new version is still ongoing as of early April 2022. "Both sides already agree on the core principles of conduct; namely the constitutional obligation of the police to support media professionals in their work and to enable reporting, especially in critical situations", the press office says.

In light of the threat situation stated by the committee of interior ministers, an assessment by the Saxon Ministry of the Interior seems incomprehensible. It was also published in the summer of 2021 that from the findings on attacks on journalists in connection with the coronavirus pandemic rallies, "it is currently not possible to derive the assessment that media workers are exposed to an 'increased risk situation' in direct connection with [these] rallies."<sup>52</sup>

However, the government of the Free State had already initiated a whole series of measures in previous years, which should provide better protection for journalistic work. In addition to the efforts already described in previous Feindbild Journalist studies to deepen the training of their forces on the rights of media workers, individual police directorates have developed protection concepts for journalists. Depending on the occasion, they provide for the deployment of officers specifically responsible for the security of media professionals at gatherings.

50 Dare more progress. Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability. Coalition Agreement 2021-2025 between the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), Bündnis 90/Die Grünen and the Free Democrats (FDP), p. 99, retrieved from: [https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Koalitionsvertrag/Koalitionsvertrag\\_2021-2025.pdf](https://www.spd.de/fileadmin/Dokumente/Koalitionsvertrag/Koalitionsvertrag_2021-2025.pdf).

51 Collection of the decisions of the 214th session of the Standing Conference of the Ministers and Senators of the Interior of the Länder released for publication, retrieved from: <https://www.innenministerkonferenz.de/IMK/DE/termine/to-beschluesse/20210616-18/beschluesse.pdf?blob-publicationFile&v=2>.

52 Saxon State Parliament, Drs. 7/5868, p. 8.

In some federal states, police chiefs and interior ministers have also reached agreements with journalists' associations in 2020 and 2021 to better protect media professionals in their work. In December 2020, Berlin's Senator of the Interior Andreas Geisel and Police Commissioner Barbara Slowik, as well as the trade union dju in ver.di agreed on closer cooperation to protect journalists. Joint training of police officers and regular discussion rounds were planned.<sup>53</sup> In April 2021, the Minister of the Interior of Baden-Württemberg, Thomas Strobl, presented a press code for police work in the federal state.<sup>54</sup> However, this does not contain any robust measures for improved protection of media professionals, but can be seen as a summary of updated guidelines for external police communication.

The effectiveness of the police efforts announced in 2021 cannot be conclusively assessed at present. Both the renewed sharp rise in the number of demonstrations and the increasing prevalence of unauthorised protests, which the police are often unable to secure in a way comparable to authorised gatherings, stand in the way of a conclusive assessment for 2021. Criticism of individual components has already been voiced: After the announcement of the Berlin protection concept, the DJV criticised that the establishment of a "media protection area", i.e. an area designated and increasingly secured by the police within a large Querdenken assembly, was tantamount to "embedded journalism".<sup>55</sup>

The need for continued dialogue between police and press representatives as well as further training on journalists' rights was also demonstrated in 2021 by various cases of police misconduct and the use of violence by officers.<sup>56</sup> In the summer, for example, Munich police detained freelance journalist Michael Trammer for several hours and then sent him away when he tried to report on a squat.<sup>57</sup> In another case, a DPA photographer in Düsseldorf was repeatedly beaten with a baton by a police officer while working on a demonstration.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, there is no question that journalists would have been affected by violence much more frequently without committed reactions from the police. A number of journalists reported to the ECPMF during the research for this study that police officers had intervened appropriately in dangerous situations in recent months.

53 Improving the Relationship between Police and Media, retrieved from: <https://mmm.verdi.de/beruf/verhaeltnis-von-polizei-und-medien-verbessern-70373>

54 State-wide standards for police press relations, retrieved from: <https://www.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/service/presse/pressemitteilung/pid/landesweite-standards-fuer-die-pressearbeit-der-polizei/>

55 Security in the protected area, retrieved from: <https://www.djv.de/startseite/service/blogs-und-intranet/djv-blog/detail/news-sicherheit-im-schutzbereich>

56 The Feindbild Journalist studies do not record cases of police violence, as police use of force is subject to more complex criteria to be assessed by lawyers than assaults directed by citizens against journalists. See also 1) Criteria of case recording in the study design. Nevertheless, police action repeatedly restricts the rights of journalists. In order to publicly address this issue at European level, to educate police officers about the rights of journalists and to promote a dialogue between the two professions, the ECPMF has developed the Press Freedom Code for the Police, more information at: [www.policecodex.eu](http://www.policecodex.eu)

57 taz colleague arrested, retrieved from: <https://taz.de/Berichterstattung-ueber-die-IAA-Proteste/!5800081/>

58 Demo in Düsseldorf: Journalists attacked by police officers, retrieved from: <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/demo-in-duesseldorf-journalisten-von-polizisten-angegriffen-17409454.html>

## Media companies

In recent years, the public broadcasters have differentiated the measures they took in 2015 in order to protect their teams of reporters, technical staff and editors when working at political rallies, but also from online hate.

A number of broadcasters have now installed training courses. BR, for example, offers a webinar entitled "Hostilities in the field – dealing with violence, threats and assaults". Strategies for de-escalation are presented. The SWR organises half-day workshops in which employees are trained in dealing with verbal aggression and physical threats, and the NDR also offered reporters coaching on "Hostilities in the field" in 2021. Most of the public broadcasters stated in the survey that a risk assessment is carried out internally before any potentially risky deployments are made. Sometimes, the respective security management or the management level of the editorial offices are also involved. At MDR, for example, an "extremism expert team" from various state broadcasting companies and station management offices analyses the working conditions in this field in order to develop additional countermeasures as needed.

In addition, some broadcasters stated that they regularly hold background discussions with the police. Where police have set up protected areas at gatherings for journalists, such as in Berlin, staff are encouraged to use them where possible. MDR also concluded a collaboration agreement with the Saxon Police College in 2021. The aim is to develop a greater understanding between the two professions. It was agreed that, within this framework, police officers would be trained.

The police say that the basics of media freedom are being taught, and specific training measures are being developed.<sup>59</sup>

Depending on the risk assessment, the broadcasters continue to rely on external security guards. For example, ZDF, SWR, HR, DLF, RBB, NDR, SR, MDR and Radio Bremen confirmed to the ECPMF that they provide security personnel to their reporting teams. BR stated that it does not communicate concrete security measures to the outside world. In addition, at least one station equips its staff with stab-proof vests.

If employees have been affected by attacks, they have access to psychosocial support services at SWR, RBB, BR, MDR, DLF and HR, according to feedback from the broadcasters. In individual cases, those affected are also offered direct support. In addition, the legal offices of the public broadcasters offer legal aftercare to those affected. However, as in previous years, some broadcasters report that prosecution of attacks is generally considered to have little chance of success. In individual cases, broadcasters reported that they had excluded staff members affected by sustained threats from coverage of meetings.

<sup>59</sup> MDR and Saxon police want to cooperate more closely, retrieved from: <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/sachsen/mdr-kooperation-polizei-100.html>

Newspaper companies are also increasingly taking security precautions. Many newsrooms now only use reporters in teams of two to cover events. They also encourage their staff to contact the police for a threat assessment before going out into the field. The Schleswig-Holstein newspaper publisher reports that it has already deployed security personnel at its customer centre because of the threats.

### **Associations**

The journalists' associations, as well as the Federal Association of Digital Publishers and Newspaper Publishers (BDZV), have pointed out the increasingly precarious security situation with great regularity in 2021. Anja Pasquay, press spokesperson for the Federal Association of Digital Publishers and Newspaper Publishers (BDZV), describes the further increase in violence against media makers in Germany as "frightening and unacceptable". "In the event of acute attacks and threats, it is important for freelance journalists as well as permanent editors to know that the editorial team is behind them and that such incidents are 'on record' in the truest sense. This is another reason why the BDZV wants to offer long-term monitoring together with the ECPMF. It is intended to go beyond the very commendable selective analysis of the 'enemy image studies' in order to generate reliable data over a longer period of time." In addition, some daily and weekly newspapers have already joined the code of protection for media professionals initiated in 2021, which provides a bundle of practical measures for victims of verbal or physical violence, said Anja Pasquay.

The code of protection, which ECPMF also supports, was initiated by the German Journalists' Union in ver.di, the German Journalists' Association, the New German Media Makers, Reporters Without Borders and the Association of Counselling Centres for Victims of Right-Wing, Racist and Anti-Semitic Violence (VBRG e.V.). In addition to the appointment of fixed contact persons for victims of assaults, it provides that media organisations committed to the Code of Protection offer psychological support or legal assistance in setting up information blocks.<sup>60</sup> In January 2021, the DJV also published a flyer to help police officers distinguish the national press card from fake cards and at the same time to give journalists recommendations on how to deal with the police. Among other things, media professionals are recommended to maintain continuous contact with the police – at the same time, it is pointed out that police orders also apply to members of the press.<sup>61</sup>

Practical help and continuous reporting of hostilities has been provided for several years by the managing director of dju.in ver.di for Berlin-Brandenburg, Jörg Reichel. He reports on site about anti-press attacks on his Twitter account and observes the

<sup>60</sup> Code of Conduct for the Protection of Journalists, retrieved from: <https://mmm.verdi.de/beruf/kodex-zum-schutz-von-journalisten-72897>

<sup>61</sup> Journalistic reporting in operational situations. Information for media professionals and police forces, retrieved from: <https://www.djv.de/startseite/info/themen-wissen/medienschaffende-und-polizei>

behaviour of participants, police and press at demonstrations. In addition, Reichel gives journalists safety tips on how to protect themselves when working at rallies.<sup>62</sup>

### *Individual protection concepts*

In the summer of 2021, a group of volunteer security guards was formed in the Dresden area under the name "Between the lines".<sup>63</sup> Their aim is to provide security for freelance journalists covering pandemic-related protests in Saxony. According to their own statements, the group relies exclusively on private individuals with various professional backgrounds who are trained in advance. They see their work as a "self-defence measure for the freedom of the press", Klemens Köhler told the Süddeutsche Zeitung.<sup>64</sup> According to member Klemens Köhler, the persistence of attacks on journalists during the Querdenken demonstrations was the reason for founding the initiative.<sup>65</sup>

62 [https://twitter.com/ver\\_jorg](https://twitter.com/ver_jorg)

63 [https://twitter.com/btl\\_de?lang-de](https://twitter.com/btl_de?lang-de)

64 Spat at, beaten, chased, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 31.01.2022, p. 3.

65 So that journalists can keep their heads clear, retrieved from: <https://mmm.verdi.de/beruf/damit-journalisten-den-kopf-frei-haben-80673>

## 10 Recommendations for action

### *I Renew mutual agreement between police and media*

The new version of the principles of conduct between the police and the media should be put into a resolution form by the Conference of Ministers of the Interior, in consultation with the Press Council, at the earliest possible date. Following their resolution, the updated guidelines should be implemented in the everyday work of both professional groups. On the basis of the guidelines, any progress and problems in the relationship between the two professional groups should be discussed by a complementary body.

### *II More training for police officers*

The police authorities of the Länder and the Federal Police should intensify the training and further education of their forces. Dialogue formats that go beyond the mere imparting of knowledge and sensitise people to the needs and perspectives of the other professional groups are particularly suitable for strengthening police and journalistic confidence. Riot police units in particular should be well trained. They are most often confronted with journalists in their main field of activity, political gatherings.

### *III Monitoring on a KPMD-PMK basis*

The recording of crimes against the media should be developed into a monitoring instrument on the basis of the BKA statistics on politically motivated crime (Criminal Police Reporting Service - Politically Motivated Crime). In addition to the status of investigations and convictions for each registered offence, the results should be published regularly, ideally annually, in a separate situation report. The recording criteria for offences against the media should be made transparent and standardised between the Länder in order to establish comparability.

### *IV Media companies: Adhere to protective measures and support*

Media companies must protect their employees, both permanent and freelance. This includes, where necessary, the provision of security personnel, training with seminars on de-escalation and self-protection, as well as financial and legal support in dealing with physical and psychological attacks. The practice, already established in many editorial offices, of drawing up risk assessments together with media professionals even before the planned journalistic work is done, must be further expanded. It is recommended to sign the protection code, which sets binding standards for the protection of one's own employees.

## 11. Conclusion

The negative record of 2021 is still part of what is now the third phase of anti-press violence. Already since spring 2020, the gatherings of Querdenken & Co. have been driving up the attack figures. The once again escalated violence could be clearly traced back to the protests against the coronavirus measures also in the second pandemic year.

Demonstrations and protests thus continued to be the most dangerous workplace in 2021. Physical attacks and threats pose the greatest occupational risk for journalists in Germany. The majority of the attributable attacks still came from the right-wing political spectrum.

In all parts of the country, hatred of the press is now catching on with a minority that has become alienated from the political system, its institutions and also the media. One can venture the prediction that in the future, attacks will also be recorded in regions that have not been affected by explicit press hatred so far. Regardless of whether Querdenken and similar formats continue to exist, there is little to suggest that the aggression will subside. Should new outrage movements appear on the scene in the future, as some sociologists have already predicted with regard to protests against climate protection measures, it is likely that the acts of hatred from the circle of those alienated from democracy and the media will continue.

Demonstrations will therefore in all likelihood remain danger zones. Politicians, the judiciary and the police must react to this with stronger and faster sanctions against the enemies of the press, and journalists, media companies and press organisations must expand their protective measures. Otherwise, the already incipient withdrawal of media professionals from on-the-spot reporting threatens to become a structural problem of journalism: If (even) more journalists withdraw because the continuing pressure of the enemies of the press threatens their physical and mental integrity, then freedom of the press is in danger.

## Bibliography

### *Scientific sources*

**ECPMF** (2020): Bedrohung als Normalzustand. Eine 5-Jahres-Bilanz, Leipzig. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.ecpmf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FeindbildPresse-IV.pdf>.

Frei, Nadine; Nachtwey, Oliver (2021): Quellen des „Querdenkertums“. Eine politische Soziologie der Corona-Proteste in Baden-Württemberg, Basel

Grande, E., Hutter, S., Hunger, S., Kanol, E (2021): Alles Covidioten? Politische Potenziale des Corona-Protests in Deutschland. Diskussionspapier des Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, Berlin. Online verfügbar unter <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/234470>

Hoffmann, Martin; Betche, Pauline (2021): Feindbild Journalist 5: Alliiert im Pressehass, Leipzig. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.ecpmf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Feindbild-Journalist-5-Alliiert-im-Pressehass.pdf>

Posetti, Julie; Shabbir, Nabeelah; Maynard, Diana; Bontcheva, Kalina; Aboulez, Nermine (2021): The Chilling. Global trends in online violence against women journalists, Sheffield

Reiser, Marion; Küppers, Anna; Hebenstreit, Jörg; Salheiser, Axel; Vogel, Lars (2021): Demokratie in der Corona-Pandemie. Ergebnisse des THÜRINGEN-MONITORS 2021. Zusammenfassung. Universit Jena, Jena. Online abrufbar unter: <https://www.landesregierung-thueringen.de/regierung/th-monitor>

**Seidler, John David** (2016): „Lügenpresse!“. Medien als Gegenstand von Verschwörungstheorien. In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, 66.

**Vorländer, Hans [Hrsg.]** (2021): MIDEM 2021. Corona und Rechtspopulismus. Jahresstudie, Mercator Forum Migration und Demokratie, Dresden.

### *Online sources*

**Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat** (2021): Nancy Faeser: „Viele Querdenker werden radikaler“. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/DE/2021/12/querdenken.html>

Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2021): Neuer Phänomenbereich „Verfassungsschutzrelevante Delegitimierung des Staates“. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/DE/2021/2021-04-29-querdenker.html>

Deutscher Bundestag a) (2021): Demonstrationsgeschehen mit Bezug zur Corona-Pandemie. Drucksache 19/29654. Online verfügbar unter: <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/19/296/1929654.pdf>

Deutscher Bundestag b) (2022): Neuer Phänomenbereich verfassungsschutzrelevante Delegitimierung des Staates. Drucksache 20/774. Online verfügbar unter: <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/007/2000774.pdf>

Kulturbüro Sachsen e. V. (2022): „Monitorium Rechts: Die Freien Sachsen“. Dresden. Online verfügbar unter: [https://kulturbuero-sachsen.de/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Monitorium\\_Freie-Sachsen\\_12s\\_220207\\_WEB.pdf](https://kulturbuero-sachsen.de/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Monitorium_Freie-Sachsen_12s_220207_WEB.pdf)

Ministerium des Innern, für Digitalisierung und Kommunen, Baden-Württemberg (2021): Innenministerkonferenz: Beschlüsse der Herbstkonferenz 2021. Online verfügbar unter: <https://im.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/service/presse-und-oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/pressemitteilung/pid/beschluesse-der-herbstkonferenz-2021/>

**Statistisches Bundesamt: Bevölkerung Bevölkerungsentwicklung in Ost- und Westdeutschland** (zwischen 1990 und 2020): Angleichung oder Verfestigung der Unterschiede?, abgerufen unter: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Querschnitt/Demografischer-Wandel/Aspekte/demografie-bevoelkerungsentwicklung-ost-west.html;jsessionid=6E7E8964D-649F1E647911E05E09071D9.live721>

#### *Press sources*

**Bangel, Christian** (2021, 23. Dezember): Interview mit David Begrich: „Das sind Leute mit Gewalterfahrung“. ZEIT. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2021-12/rechtsextremismus-corona-proteste-ostdeutschland-david-begrich/komplettansicht>

Fuchs, Christian (2022, 13. Januar): Ein inszenierter Aufstand. Wie Rechtsextreme versuchen, die Anti-Corona-Proteste für ihre Zwecke zu instrumentalisieren. ZEIT.

Garbe, Sophie (2022, 12. Januar): „Die Drohungen haben seitdem nicht mehr aufgehört“ Interview mit Alexander Roth. SPIEGEL online. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/corona-demos-was-alexander-roth-in-baden-wuerttemberg-erlebt-a-1139981f-ac54-48fc-9ca2-5e384e6e708a>

Grimm, Imre (2022, 11. Januar): Feindbild Presse: Bedrohungen von Journalisten durch „Querdenker“ nehmen zu. RND. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.rnd.de/medien/warnung-des-djv-bedrohungen-von-journalisten-durch-querdenker-nehmen-zu-IWBF3MQ3ENDLTOMCSRFVHTBPIM.html>

Lenze, Dominik (2021, 12. Mai): Querdenker auf Journalistenjagd. ZEIT online. Online verfügbar unter [https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2021/05/12/querdenker-auf-journalistenjagd\\_30816](https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2021/05/12/querdenker-auf-journalistenjagd_30816)

**Miller, Jonas** (2022, 18. Januar): Wie sich die Corona-Proteste verändert haben. BR24. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/bayern/wie-sich-die-corona-proteste-veraendert-haben,Sunz21X>

Nowak, Peter (2022, 3. Januar): Ausgebrannte Presse – oder wenn der Journalist zum Aktivist wird. Telepolis/heise. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Ausgebrannte-Presse-oder-wenn-der-Journalist-zum-Aktivisten-wird-6316012.html?view=print>

Orth, Christian (2021, 17. Dezember): Gewalt gegen Journalisten 2021 auf Rekordhoch. BR24. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/gewalt-gegen-journalisten-2021-auf-rekordhoch,SrIV-Bbs>

**Schiemann, Nora; Mützel, Daniel** (2021, 30. Dezember): „Querdenker“ attackieren Journalisten: „Wenn das alles vorbei ist, wirst du an einem Baum hängen“. T-online. Online verfügbar unter: [https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/id\\_91397130/-querdenker-hass-gegen-journalisten-wenn-das-alles-vorbei-ist-wirst-du-an-einem-baum-haengen-.html](https://www.t-online.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/id_91397130/-querdenker-hass-gegen-journalisten-wenn-das-alles-vorbei-ist-wirst-du-an-einem-baum-haengen-.html)

Schroeder, Wolfgang (2022, 16. Februar): Pandemiefolge: Autoritätsverlust der Regierenden? Deutschlandfunkkultur. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/pandemiefolge-autoritaetsverlust-der-regierenden-dlf-kultur-5651c1f3-100.html>

Steußloff, Rainer; Geisheimer, Roland (2021): Angriffe auf die Pressefreiheit: Gewalt gegen die Presse, statt Liebe und Frieden. Freelens. Online verfügbar unter: <https://freelens.com/politik-medien/gewalt-gegen-die-presse-statt-liebe-und-frieden/>

Sundermeyer, Olaf (2021, 25. Mai): Das Ende der „Querdenker“, wie wir sie kennen. Rbb24. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.rbb24.de/politik/thema/corona/beitraege/2021/05/analyse-querdenker-bewegung-demonstrationen-berlin-pfingsten.html>

Ulrich, Sarah (2021, 30. Dezember): Das kollektive Burnout war absehbar. die tageszeitung, Nr. 12732; Seite 14. Online verfügbar unter: <https://taz.de/AusgebranntePresse/!5824602&SuchRahmen=Print/>

ZDFheute (2021, 06. Dezember): Fackelzug bei Corona-Protest - Extremismusforscher: „Das war nicht spontan“. Interview mit Matthias Quent. ZDFheute. Online verfügbar unter: <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/panorama/corona-rechtsextremismus-sachsen-fackelaufmarsch-100.html>

## About the authors

Martin Hoffmann, M.A.

Studied cultural studies at the European University in Frankfurt/Oder and in Iasi, Romania and journalism at the University of Leipzig. He has been working as a freelancer for the ECPMF since 2015 and designed the „Feindbild Journalist“ study series, among other things. He is doing his PhD at the European Institute for Journalism and Communication Research and works at MDR in the „Eastern Europe and Documentaries“ editorial department.

Roberta Knoll, M.A.

Studied European studies at the University of Leipzig. She has been working for ECPMF since 2020, first as an intern, now as a freelance researcher for the „Feindbild“ study. She works as a freelance social media editor.

### *Collaboration*

Review: Pauline Betsche, Dr Lutz Kinkel, Neus Vidal

Stats: Antje Schlaf

Layout: Andreas Lamm

### *Suggested Citation:*

Hoffmann, Martin; Knoll, Roberta (2022): Feindbild Journalist. Journalist as enemy stereotype 6 – Hatred on the doorstep. A study by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom, Leipzig.

### *Link to case list*

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AUu\\_vXXrC8F1wC-BmTJd8akMeAtqQnjF/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AUu_vXXrC8F1wC-BmTJd8akMeAtqQnjF/view)

## Study design

### Critical reflection on case recording

The ECPMF has developed a catalogue of criteria for case recording in order to achieve comparability for the recording period. However, the study cannot claim to be complete, as a large dark field must be assumed. This is likely due to various circumstances: Journalists act as gatekeepers on their own behalf when they are affected: They decide whether to publish an attack and thus use their media reach to bring the issue into the public discourse. This decision can be influenced by various motives. For those affected, for example, the desire for anonymity, the wish to be able to work undisturbed by possible follow-up hostilities or the goal of not wanting to put their own professional role at the centre of the reporting stand against media coverage and publication. An ECPMF survey on reporting behaviour from 2017 (Enemy stereotype II) indicates that a relevant proportion of journalists are not interested in reporting the hostilities to the police – or making the cases public – for the reasons mentioned above. If there are no witness statements, videos or other evidence, so many cases could remain in the dark.

It must be weighted that a large part of the attacks repeatedly hit the same media workers. This means that for the first time, less than ten journalists accounted for more than half of the verified attacks. This fact should be taken into account when classifying the development of cases in comparison to previous years.

In addition, there is the possibility that a distortion in the geographical distribution of cases has arisen through mechanisms of media reporting, to the detriment of Saxony. As the state of origin of the Pegida movement with a disproportionate share of political meetings and meeting participants nationwide, it attracted a great deal of media interest, especially in 2015, but also in the following years. As a result, a large number of media personnel attended the demonstrations in the Free State, while others reported less. This resulted in many opportunities for confrontation between press opponents and journalists. The ECPMF has attempted to level out any distortions with a comparably comprehensive case research for all regions.

For the current study, data from the ECPMF partner project MappingMediaFreedom.org was integrated into the survey for the first time. Cases already recorded there were analysed again according to our own research design. This additional source may have illuminated a part of the dark field that had not yet been the focus of research in previous studies. The European monitoring platform „MappingMedia-Freedom“ is run under the leadership of the ECPMF together with the International Press Institute (IPI) and the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ). Additional information: <https://www.mappingmediafreedom.org/>

### Confirmation criteria

Confirmation always refers to explicit evidence. Cases where there is no explicit evidence in the form of, for example, pictures, videos or a legally binding conviction, are only taken into account and assessed as verified under the conditions defined

below. For this to be the case, however, an attack must also have been described without contradiction by other media, witnesses or actors, and the persons affected must be credible. Since the documentation behaviour seems to have changed as a result of the numerous attacks and the sensitisation of many journalists, more evidence has become accessible over the years.

## 1. Criteria for recording cases

The ECPMF chronicle collects all reported assaults on journalists and other media workers in Germany that have been published or brought directly to the attention of the ECPMF. In order to be as complete as possible, an offence is recorded if it is or could be politically related and/or a journalist is attacked for carrying out his or her work. This relatively broad definition makes it possible to record offences regardless of their event context (for example, only in the context of populist demonstrations). This is to avoid distortions by concentrating on a certain political milieu or a certain category of events. A connection with ideology-driven motives – such as „lying press“ accusations – results from the description of the individual event.

A further prerequisite is that the journalists, media workers/creators or technicians were attacked during the exercise of their profession or in connection with it – for example as a result of research or publication. Situations in which, for example, assailants attack journalists and are stopped in time by the police are not recorded. Persecutions or harassment in which no physical violence is used are also excluded.

Possible assaults by police officers on members of the media are not recorded. This is due to the special role of the police: They can secure and restrict journalistic work. In extreme cases, the police are also entitled to use force. If assaults by police officers were recorded, the recording of assaults would be distorted, especially with regard to assembly contexts. The ECPMF cannot provide a forensic or legal assessment of possible cases of police violence. The demarcation thus serves to make the recording comprehensible and does not constitute an assessment of the phenomenon of „police violence“. Nevertheless, the ECPMF recognises police violence against members of the press as a problem – see for example: <https://www.ecpmf.eu/events/police-codex>.

## 2. Claim to completeness

The list attempts to cover all known cases, but does not claim to register all relevant cases in the period under review. This cannot be achieved in practice, as not all cases are brought to public attention by the media or associations, reported to the authorities or otherwise made known. All sources can be traced transparently in the list. If you have more detailed or differing information on individual incidents or if you have become aware of other incidents, please inform us at [info@ecpmf.eu](mailto:info@ecpmf.eu). This information will be included after verification and the list will be continuously updated.

### 3. Who is a journalist?

The list includes attacks on journalists who have fallen victim to them during or as a direct consequence of their work. Since „journalist“ is not a protected term in Germany, ideas and definitions vary widely. A criterion such as full-time activity as a journalist, as provided by the DJV in its admission guidelines, does not work for the present survey: Since the ECPMF is concerned with the constitution of an image of the enemy, which comes to light above all when persons hostile to the press suspect a journalist, administrative aspects (e.g. membership of a journalists' association or possession of a press card) are not the only decisive factor, but rather the assumed function and thus the surface on which journalists are attacked.

Nevertheless, there is a need for qualification: A journalist is whoever reports with the aim of publishing information for a publicly accessible and regularly publishing medium that operates according to the rules of the Press Code, or whoever provides assistance with this reporting, for example as a technician, commentator, or blogger, provided they meet these criteria of balanced reporting linked to standards of craftsmanship. These standards are characterised by the separation of opinion and commentary, the naming of sources for intersubjective verifiability and the presentation of pluralistic opinions. Personal perspectives must be presented as such; assessments and evaluations must be named as such.

In contrast, according to this definition, a journalist is not considered to be a journalist if they place personal assessments of events or the substantiation of certain political goals in the foreground of the publishing activity, e.g., by presenting opinions as facts, giving false sources or repeatedly spreading false information against his or her better knowledge.

### 4. When is an assault political?

All recorded assaults are examined for a possible political context and an assumed ideological motive of the perpetrators. This classification makes it possible to assign them to the phenomenon of „hostility towards the press“, which is the focus of the series of investigations.

In principle, every action can be political. However, since the reason for the recording is the „Lying press“ accusations, the recorded attacks are in an explicitly political context. This consists primarily of targeted political actions. The categories „right-wing“ and „left-wing“ serve as auxiliary constructions to make the public everyday assessment of the political spectrum comprehensible in a shortened form.

A brief explanation of how the study deals with the categorisation of political opinion and the concept of extremism: An unambiguous and selective categorisation of politically motivated attitudes and actions, for example, as right-wing/right-wing populist/right-wing extremist/right-wing radical or left-wing/left-wing extremist/left-wing radical is not useful, as discussions in political science make clear. The equation of the two political milieus by locating them as politically opposite poles,

between which the so-called „social centre“ would lie, cannot be held stringently either. A detailed critique of the extremism model as well as the approach of the dichotomy of constitutional state and „extremism“ has already been made by numerous authors (cf. for example Butterwegge 2011; Feustel 2011; Leggewie/Meier 1995).

However, since a large part of the attacks are politically motivated, practical and at the same time unambiguous and thus comparable terms must be found. For this purpose, the differentiation into „right-wing“ and „left-wing“ seems helpful from the current perspective, which, however, should not be subject to an incremental logic.

The corresponding categorisation depends on who is attacking: If, for example, a right-wing demonstration takes place and a participant attacks a journalist from within this assembly, and further indications speak for a politically motivated act, this act is recorded as „right-wing“ motivated. These additional indications include, for example, the fact that a person is known through party affiliation, tattoos or symbols typical of the scene on clothing or flags. Further indicators can be statements by the perpetrators or the course of the crime. If the political affiliation is not clearly possible, but cannot be ruled out either, the case is noted as „unknown“ or „other“.

## 5. What is categorised according to which criteria?

The following overview refers to the case table in which all attacks are recorded.

### (A) *Datum/date*

The date on which the attack was committed applies according to the pattern YYYY.MM.DD.

### (B) *City/Place (city)*

The city or place in which or at which the attack occurred is listed. If the location of the attack is the internet, this is noted in addition to the location of the attacked person.

### (C) *NEW: Urban area*

The place where the attack took place is counted as an urban area with more than 100,000 inhabitants (Y). If the place has less than 100,000 inhabitants, it is classified as a rural area (N).

### (D) *State*

BB = Brandenburg

BE = Berlin

BW = Baden-Württemberg

BY = Bavaria

HB = Bremen  
 HE = Hesse  
 HH = Hamburg  
 MV = Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania NI = Lower Saxony  
 NW = North Rhine-Westphalia RP = Rhineland-Palatinate  
 SH = Schleswig-Holstein SL = Saarland  
 SN = Sachsen  
 ST = Saxony-Anhalt TH = Thuringia

*(E) Medium*

Indication of the medium for which the person concerned works. TV = Television  
 RADIO = Radio ONLINE = Online PRINT = Print OTHER = Other  
 AGENCY = News agency  
 U = Unknown

*(F) Camera*

A case is rated as „Yes“ (Y) if a cameraman or photographer was attacked, a camera was visible and in use. A case is rated as „No“ (N) if no camera was in use. A case is rated as „Mobile“ (M) if the person concerned documented with a mobile phone.  
 A case is rated as „Unknown“ (U) if there is no evidence for the use of a camera.

*(G) Camera as target of the attack (against camera)*

The violence was also or explicitly directed against the camera (Y). This is the case if a camera was damaged, a camera (including mobile phone cameras used for journalistic purposes) was pushed away, it is clear from the course of events that statements were directed against the use of cameras and an attack therefore took place, or the reporting media people worked for a TV station. If this is not the case, it is rated as „No“ (N), or in the case of unclear facts with „Unknown“ (U).

*(H) Gender of the person concerned (sex of journalist)*

Male = M Female = F Unknown = U

*(I) Gender of the attacker (sex of offender)*

Male = M Female = F Unknown = U

### (J) Scene

ASSEMBLY SCENE (AS) = Assault takes place directly in or out of the assembly area.

ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT (AE) = Attack occurred outside an assembly, i.e., before, after or locally outside (e.g. ambushing on the way home; attack on parked car or similar) of assemblies.

UNKNOWN (U) = It is not possible to trace where the attack took place.

OTHER = Attack took place away from gatherings in public space.

EDITORIAL OFFICE = Attack occurred at/near editorial building, car, outside broadcast van, etc.

PRIVATE = attack occurs in the private sphere, such as also in one's own car/house or similar

Definition of „assembly“: An assembly or gathering is categorised as those gatherings that unite anonymous participants in public without prior notification around a political idea. In contrast, conferences or party congresses are not considered to be an „assembly scene“, as participants register by name and dealings with the press are formalised, for example through accreditation.

### (K) NEW: Registered assembly

If it can be determined whether the assembly at which the attack took place was officially registered, this is noted as „Yes“ (Y).

If the assembly is not registered, but

- was organised elsewhere
- or was initially authorised and then officially terminated (e.g., by the police) and continued anyway
- or was authorised as a fixed rally and then moved illegally as a procession, „No“ (N) is noted.

(It is not always possible to determine whether an assembly is authorised or whether the assembly was (still) authorised at the time of the assault).

### (L) Incident

Brief description: Who/What/When/How?

Every single attack by one or more perpetrators is recorded. This can also be directed against more than one person. If a person commits several attacks in an assembly context, they will be listed individually.

*(M) Number of victims*

Since several people can be affected by an attack, the number of victims has also been recorded since 2017. The persons affected who were directly exposed to an assault are counted. If, for example, a camera team consisting of several people is attacked and a blow is only directed at the reporter, this is counted as an attack on one person. Only the minimum number of verified victims is recorded.

*(N) NEW: Number of injured persons*

The number of injured persons within an assault incident is recorded here. This includes visible injuries, medically certified injuries and injuries that lead to a physical impairment for the person affected. Psychological (consequential) damage is not included.

*(O) Violence*

The „violence“ category includes physical attacks on media workers. This includes hitting the body or property carried on the body (e.g. cameras), kicking, pushing or shoving (obstructing journalistic work by restricting the view is not assault), holding, physical violence with the use of weapons (if a blow is struck with a tool (e.g. flag-pole), this is considered the use of weapons), spitting at, robbery of property carried on the body. Physical assaults that cannot be clearly attributed are classified as „other“ because the type of physical impact is not known or does not fit into any of the existing categories. Assault with extreme loudness on the ear, as well as targeted attacks with objects are classified as assault.

Attempting to physically attack someone (e.g., if the victim can avoid a blow) is not considered assault.

1. Hitting = HIT
2. Kicking = KICK
3. Pushing/pushing = PUSH
4. Holding on = HOLD
5. Using weapons or other objects = WEAPON
6. Spitting on = SPIT
7. Robbery = ROB
8. Other = OTHER
9. Unknown = U

*(P) Material damage*

1. Yes= Y
2. No = N
3. Unknown = U
4. No material damage = NONE

*(Q) Political motivation (right wing/left wing/other)*

1. Right = RIGHT
2. Left = LEFT
3. Other = U

*(R) Coronavirus context*

An event is considered to be „pandemic-related“ if it involves political action formats that explicitly refer to the coronavirus pandemic. The prerequisite for this is that the content of the event is directed against the state's coronavirus protection measures and that it is also fundamentally critical of the political reaction to the crisis situation. The mere fact that the content of the pandemic is discussed is not sufficient for it to be considered a coronavirus-related meeting.

Indications of this are, for example, the motto of a registered demonstration, the speakers and their political contexts, as well as posters and banners carried at a political event. In terms of content, these play down the danger of the Sars-Cov2 virus, deny the existence of a pandemic situation or attract attention with conspiracy myths about a supposedly controlled contamination through compulsory vaccination. What is relevant is the sweeping criticism of state measures to contain the pandemic in order to be counted as a crime context „with a pandemic connection“.

**Political attribution of pandemic-related attacks on gatherings**

The ECPMF checks all known cases for a political reference. Criteria for the assignment to the category „left-wing“, „right-wing“ or „unknown/other“ result from the context of the crime. For this purpose, the perpetrator and the respective demonstration context are first analysed — as far as possible on the basis of the available information.

If the perpetrators can be assigned to a political spectrum through their clothing, typical scene symbols, verbal statements or other characteristics, or if there are corresponding assessments by security authorities that sufficiently justify an assumption of a political location, the case in question is classified as right-wing or left-wing.

If physical attacks occur at or in the vicinity of demonstrations and the perpetrators can be clearly attributed to them as participants, the content-related orientation of

the assembly is a criterion to be taken into account in the classification. A pandemic-related meeting was classified as right-wing, for example,

a) if it was organised by right-wing extremist leaders or politicians, such as Attila Hildmann, and/or if statements were made that were clearly right-wing extremist (e.g., denial of the Holocaust), or if those responsible for the demonstration (organizers, organisers, meeting leaders, stewards, etc.) were clearly right-wing, e.g., through party affiliation,

b) was classified as right-wing in the PMK statistics or sources based on them, such as Kleine Anfragen.

If the assembly at which an attack took place could not be clearly assigned on the basis of the sources and there were no indications for the political assignability of the participant, the case was categorised as „unknown/other“.

Y = The crime occurred at a pandemic-related event.

N = The offence occurred at a non-pandemic event.

U = unknown/other

*(S) NEW: Type of journalist*

If possible, the exact profession of the person concerned is specified here. This includes „journalist“, „camera operator“, „sound operator“, „photographer“ and „social media blogger“. It is not always possible to differentiate exactly which area the people concerned belong to, as sometimes several areas are covered. The term „social media blogger“ covers a number of media professionals who report in a documentary manner and do this through photographic or video accompaniment. One feature of their activity is „live ticking“ on Twitter or other platform media about the event happenings. In some cases, they also publish texts and video contributions on these platforms. Sometimes they also work as freelance journalists for other media.

*(T) NEW: Employment relationship*

As far as can be seen, it is noted here whether the person concerned is a permanently employed media worker or a freelancer. Otherwise, an unknown is noted.

*(U) NEW: Local journalist*

For the purposes of the study and to achieve the greatest possible comparability, a narrow definition of local journalism and local press is applied. A local employment relationship or a (continuous) assignment by a local editorial office for a freelancer determines the characteristic „local journalist“ (Y). Those who report as correspond-

ents or reporters for national media, as specialist journalists or as social media bloggers are accordingly not covered by the definition (N).

*(V) (V, W, X) Sources*

Public sources are listed by the ECPMF in the linked case list. They can also be requested from [info@ecpmf.eu](mailto:info@ecpmf.eu) if the links provided no longer work. This does not apply to sources that have been sent to us directly with a request for confidentiality. These are marked with the source „ECPMF“ in the case recording as feedback from affected persons to be anonymised or otherwise confidential information.

*(W) \*Gida context*

Y = The offence occurred at an event associated with the Pegida movement (or its offshoots).

N = The crime did not take place at an event associated with the Pegida movement (or its offshoots).

U = unclear

*(X) Confirmation*

An incident is recorded as confirmed if either a) there is a „letter of confession“ from the attacker(s), or b) there is evidence of an incident, e.g., a video recording, and/ or c) there is confirmation from the security authorities that there were attacks on journalists and/or d) there is other evidence (e.g. witness statements).

Confirmed = Y

Not confirmed = N

Also recorded is why a case is considered confirmed.

### *Changes in case recording between 2015 and 2020*

In the tabulated case statistics for 2015 and 2016, in addition to violent assaults, cases were recorded where there was no assault. These were serious threats, damage to property or attacks on editorial buildings in which no persons were physically harmed. In the „violence“ column, these were noted as „NONE“. Accordingly, these cases do not appear in the tabulation of physical assaults, but were still included in the published tables for the sake of transparency. There were 17 such cases in 2015 and three in 2016. Since 2017, the ECPMF has only recorded physical attacks. The number of known threats had increased too drastically. As a result, exclusive threats are no longer included in the overall list. Furthermore, the recording of threats in the case of physical attacks is particularly difficult to classify, as practically every attack also carries a threat. The specified threat criteria (clear threat of an act) were subsequently reviewed for the years 2015 to 2018 and corrected where necessary.

Furthermore, the two additional columns for recording violence („V2“ and „V3“) were dissolved into one for clarity.

The following additional and more precise characteristics were subsequently added: Number of victims of an attack („number of victims“, from 2017), the gender of the attackers („sex of offender“, from 2020 retroactively for all years), whether the violence was also or explicitly directed against the camera carried („against camera“, also from 2020 retroactively for all years), „Gida context“ and „Covid-19 context“. For 2021, the following characteristics were added: urban area, registered assembly, number of injured persons, type of journalist, employment status and local journalist.



Eine Studie des Europäischen Zentrums für Presse- und Medienfreiheit  
in Kooperation mit dem Bundesverband Digitalpublisher und Zeitungsverleger  
im Rahmen des Media Freedom Rapid Response



part of the



European Centre for Press & Media Freedom | Article 19 | European Federation of Journalists | Free Press Unlimited  
Institute of Applied Informatics | International Press Institute | Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa

Europäischen Zentrums für Presse- und Medienfreiheit

Menckestraße 27  
04155 Leipzig  
Germany

phone: +49 (0) 341 200 403 13

fax: +49 (0) 341 562 96 63

email: [info@ecpmf.eu](mailto:info@ecpmf.eu)

web: [www.ecpmf.eu](http://www.ecpmf.eu)

Veröffentlichungsdatum: 12.04.2022

© ECPMF - MFRR 2022

*Titelfoto:* Alexander Pohl IMAGO / aal.photo – Unangemeldete Versammlung Impfgegnern in Mittenwald (Bayern) Am 6.1.2022 versammelten sich ca. 71 Impfgegner\*innen und Querdenker\*innen in Mittenwald, Südbayern. Die anwesende Presse wurde teilweise bedrängt und an der Arbeit gehindert. Einem Journalisten wurde in die Kamera gegriffen, einem anderen wurde von hinten Kerzenwachs auf die Jacke gegossen. - On January 6, 2022 about 71 no-vax activists protested in Mittenwald, south Germany. The reporting press in parts was attacked and hindered from working. A protestor grabbed the camera of a journalist and a protestor poured candle wax on a journalist s jacket. Mittenwald Bayern Deutschland.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons  
Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

supported by the

