**PERSPECTIVE: Assaults on local reporters are a slap in the face of our right to know**

*By* *Karen Hansen, Freedom Forum content managing editor*

When news is overwhelming — as it has been this past year — more [people turn to local news](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/02/local-news-is-playing-an-important-role-for-americans-during-covid-19-outbreak/) than almost any other source.

And for good reason: Local news is often the best place to find what you need to know right now about what’s happening where you live.

You’re more likely to get [just-the-facts journalism](https://www.journalism.org/2019/03/26/americans-give-fairly-high-marks-to-their-local-news-media-especially-when-journalists-are-seen-as-connected-to-the-community/) there than from social media, where most people expect to encounter at least some mis- or disinformation, or from more opinion-based cable shows.

Local news makes it easier to break through information overload. But it’s not always easy to get that news to you — and it’s getting harder.

[One in five local TV stations across the country had news crews attacked on the job](https://www.rtdna.org/article/2021_newsrooms_by_numbers) during 2020, a local news professional group found.

More attacks occurred in bigger cities, and many occurred while covering some of the biggest stories of the last year, like protests. Chances are, though, reporters at one of your local news stations were targets.

The [U.S. Press Freedom Tracker](https://pressfreedomtracker.us/) documented 438 physical attacks on journalists during 2020, and more than 60 through the first half of 2021, including reporters thrown to the ground, pepper sprayed and punched in the face.

Each of these assaults on local reporters is a slap in the face to our right to know what’s going on in our communities.

They are part of a trend that should trouble all Americans who think of our country as an example of freedom to the world: The latest [World Press Freedom Index](https://rsf.org/en/ranking) issued by Reporters Without Borders ranks the United States 44th of 180 nations ranked globally.

That’s up one spot from 2020, but the U.S. has lost ground in five of the past seven years.

Nearly 90% of TV news department managers say they have changed procedures to step up safety for their reporters. Now [journalists are asking for a reset](https://cpj.org/2021/05/audio_assaults_media_protests_black_lives_matter_police/), and some press freedom advocacy groups say more specific [federal laws are needed to prevent and punish](https://nppa.org/news/part-world-press-freedom-day-we-call-congress-strengthen-america%E2%80%99s-right-free-press) these literal assaults on the First Amendment.

Finding out what your city council is spending your tax dollars on, where to find vaccines and which local businesses are hiring is still as simple as opening your local TV station’s news app or the Freedom Forum’s [Today’s Front Pages](https://www.freedomforum.org/todaysfrontpages/) app. As long as getting the news to us takes body armor, though, we’ve got work to do to regain recognition as a truly free country.

*You can reach Karen Hansen at* *mkhansen@freedomforum.org**.*