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Exiled Journalists Need Support, Not Autocrat-Fueled Skepticism

by [Alexander Cooley](#) and [Tatyana Margolin](#)

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Even though this year's Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to two investigative journalists working in two different authoritarian contexts, a and more brash in their crackdown on independent media. A recent [report](#) from the Committee to Protect Journalists, a press freedom wa number of jailed journalists has reached an all-time high this year of 293.

Repression and stigmatization are driving journalists into exile. Authoritarians in Belarus and Turkey are designating journalists as “extr response to their investigations into the corrupt dealings of rulers and their coverage of anti-government protests. Russia's indiscriminat agent” label, once applied to NGOs, is now increasingly extended to journalists. It is designed to put off advertisers from association with pushing journalists to seek the foreign funding they are accused of getting.

Rather than cease journalism altogether, however, a host of Russian reporters and [independent media organizations](#) have been forced to i operations and reporting from outside the country. But even in exile, journalists face daunting challenges. They are regularly monitored a disinformation and vicious smear campaigns. Many of them are physically attacked or harassed, while seeing their family members [intim](#) countries in ruthless efforts to pressure them into ceasing their reporting from overseas.

[Presidential Initiative for Democratic Renewal](#), released amid the Biden administration's Democracy Summit, rightfully recognized supp media as one of the five priority areas where the U.S. will focus its efforts to strengthen democracy. It was the first stated priority on the l acknowledgement of the pivotal role journalism plays in democratic societies. The summit [commenced](#) with a panel on media, probing w international community can support independent media in challenging contexts.

Prevailing Discourse on Relevance

Such coordinated state action is welcome, but it must not overlook support to the growing number of journalists living in exile. So far, th among Western donors about funding exiled media; moreover, there is a prevailing discourse among these donors that exiled journalists i period after their departure, and then they are presumed to lose touch and relevance. Even those journalists who receive initial relocation comes next after these funds run out.

Authoritarians force journalists into exile and then stigmatize them as hopelessly out of touch with local developments. This was a tactic to flee abroad in the Soviet times (think Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn or Vasiliy Aksyonov), and it continues to be tried-and-true today. Wester that accept this framing may inadvertently support this deliberate erasure of dissenting voices. They also advance a dated stereotype that allowed to physically reside within a home country are qualified to break news or conduct detailed investigations.

Today's exiled journalists accept the fundamental insecurity of their profession. They would prefer to do their jobs in their home countrie around among digital publications and start-up platforms abroad as the only way they can still pursue their chosen careers. They are tech exiled increasingly demands a mastery of social media and the command of new digital tools — and are keen to collaborate with colleagu within broader global networks, such as the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project ([OCCRP](#)). One Belarusian journalist work her current circumstances as working remotely, like so many others in the midst of a global pandemic.

Supporting Exiled Journalists

To better support exiled journalists, Western civil society and media partners will have to discard outdated notions about what makes a jc should recognize that digital platforms now blur the once strict lines between walled off exile and local reporters. Overseas media organi Latvia-based group of Russian journalists (also [designated “foreign agents”](#) by the Russian government) – maintain extensive contacts to

their own countries. Their coverage is disseminated in Russia and abroad, making them one of the [10 most-cited](#) internet sources in Russ

Digital tools also allow exiled journalists to pump their own reporting back into closed countries. Indeed, Roman Protasevich, the Belarus [Lithuania](#) whose flight in May from Athens to Vilnius was forced to land in Minsk following a fabricated bomb threat [traced back to Belar](#) labelled a terrorist by the regime of Alexander Lukashenko precisely because the Telegram channel where Protasevich was the editor, [Ne](#) demonstrations and added hundreds of thousands of new followers who wanted to understand the protests. Protasevich remains in deten

Second, philanthropists need new measures of what constitutes “impactful” journalistic work. Western donors have become accustomed “building” model to foreign journalists, supporting their training with the objective of them returning to their home countries. But these a in these increasingly hostile domestic environments. Impactful work for some exiled journalists means conducting complex investigatiot it may mean teaming up with foreign colleagues, as in the case of the OCCRP and the [International Consortium of Investigative Journalis](#) Papers fame). Still for others, it will mean finding a safe space within overseas journalism schools and think tanks that allows them to bot experiences with other reporters confronting similar illiberal tactics – including many in the West itself.

Third, Western media outlets also have a role to play. Large news organizations often work on similar stories as their exiled counterparts. reporting and access their networks. Roman Badanin – the editor of the [now-banned](#) Russian investigative outlet Proekt– conducted an [e](#) [Russian dealings in Africa](#) to the [one by the New York Times](#) that was awarded the Pulitzer in 2020. He [reminds us](#) that even the simple ac source confers visible legitimacy and provides security for the embattled journalists.

Having nearly exterminated all independent media, autocrats are targeting social media platforms next, precisely because they allow diss millions from abroad. Now is the time to help build resilience: platforms should be conferring with exiled journalists and resisting author impending standoff. Without access to these digital tools the important and increasingly relevant voices of even exiled journalists will be

IMAGE: Stepan Putilo, founder of internet channel Nexta, speaks on a cell phone at the Belarusian House Foundation in Warsaw, Poland, on May 26, 2021. NEXTA, a Telegram channel with 2.1 information and shares photo and video content from demonstrations in Belarus. Putilo was a close associate of jailed journalist Roman Protasevich, an exiled Belarusian journalist arrested L diverted a European plane on May 23, 2021, and forced it to land in Minsk and removed him from the plane. (Photo by WOJTEK RADWANSKI/AFP via Getty Images)

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