



# CARTOONISTS ON THE LINE

Report on the situation  
of threatened cartoonists  
around the world

**2020-2022**





“ What is the reason for a cartoonist to be facing a military court? ”

Emad Hajjaj (Jordan)<sup>1</sup>

◀ Marco de Angelis (Italy)

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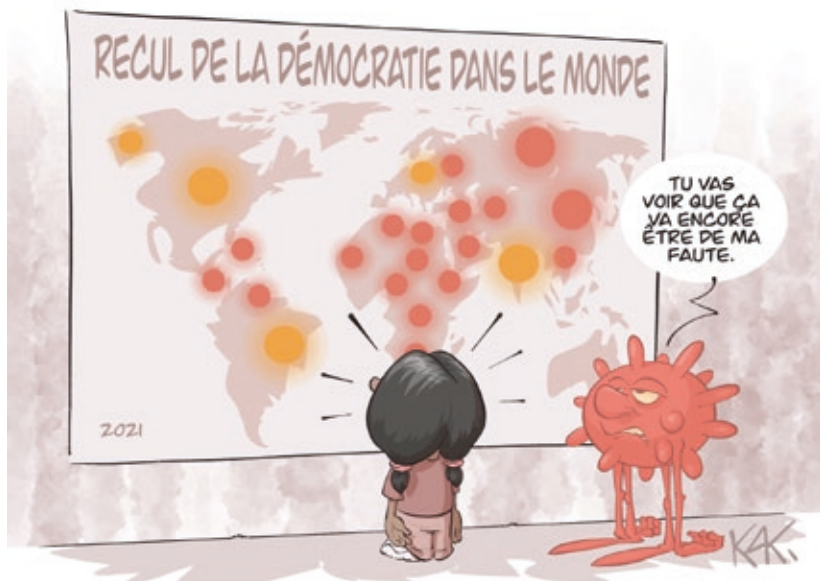
Cover design: Hassan (Iran)  
Back cover design: L'Andalou (Algeria)  
Graphics: Suzanne Grossmann  
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# Introduction



Pandemics, the internet swamp, wars, the threat of terrorism... The period 2020-2022 will have provided autocrats with solid pretexts for tightening their regulations and muzzling dissident voices, including press cartoonists. Russia, Turkey, Algeria, Afghanistan, Iran, Cuba, Hong Kong, Myanmar, Malaysia, the Philippines... And perhaps the most worrying: Narendra Modi's India, the "world's largest democracy", which seems to be closing in on the values of Hindu nationalism by muzzling all forms of criticism. Freedom of expression continues to shrink along with the democratic space.

**Kak,**  
President, *Cartooning for Peace*

◀ **Kak (France)**  
On the map: backward step for democracy  
The character: You'll see it'll be my fault again.

*Cartooning for Peace* has a mission to defend fundamental freedoms and democracy via cartoons as well as freedom of expression of cartoonists.

*Cartoonists Rights Network International* (*Cartoonists Rights* for short) campaigns to protect the human rights of cartoonists and defend those threatened as a result of their work.

Given their shared interest, and reflecting their continuous joint effort to support cartoonists, the two organisations have worked together, through their monitoring and support work, on the production of this report, which identifies the main challenges cartoonists face in terms of freedom of expression.

The report covers a three-year period, from 2020 until 2022 (with a very few exceptions that provide salient and illustrative examples). While this report is based on case studies within the period, it may be developed and expanded upon by further reports in the future.

"Cartoonists on the line" is a joint product of *Cartooning for Peace* (France) and *Cartoonists Rights* (USA) with support from *Freedom Cartoonists Foundation* (Switzerland), *Isocrates Foundation* (Switzerland) and the *UNESCO Global Media Defence Fund* (UNESCO-GMDF).



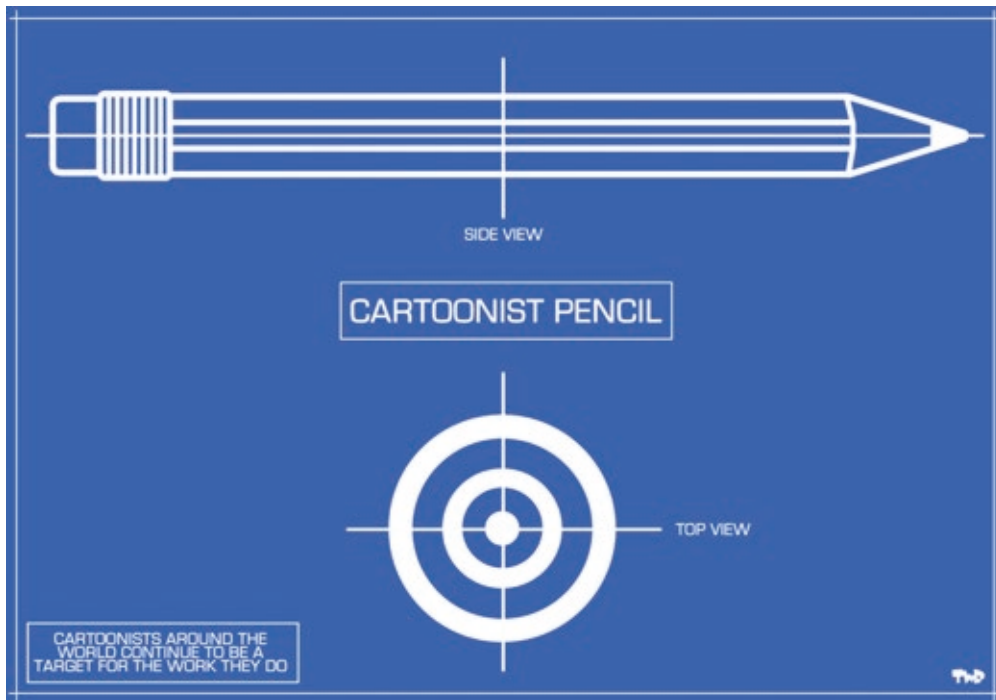
These are not easy times for journalists and the free press, and that goes double for the courageous cartoonists with whom we work, speaking truth to power, many times under the heel of some the most despotic and humourless bullies imaginable. This report shines a much-needed spotlight on these brave individuals who are standing up for the right to free speech and the principle of free expression around the world.

▲ **Matt Wuerker**  
(USA)

I want to give a note of great thanks to Terry Anderson, our Executive Director, as well as to our partners at the *Freedom Cartoonists Foundation* for their continuing support.

**Matt Wuerker,**  
President, *Cartoonists Rights*

# Foreword



► Tjeerd  
Royaards (The  
Netherlands)

Although this report is the result of all the cases of infringement identified and monitored by *Cartooning for Peace* and *Cartoonists Rights*, it makes no claim to be comprehensive. Although the partners regularly monitor the situation and benefit from the invaluable support of their respective networks of cartoonists, media contacts, and partner organisations in identifying convincing cases of infringement of cartoonists' freedom of expression, it is impossible to have assured knowledge of all cases, for a number of reasons. Naturally, and despite our best efforts, some cartoonists simply won't know about us or our respective missions, and we will not know them. Also, some cartoonists will not report their problems, preferring to deal with their situation on their own, often for security reasons. These reasons may also compel us not to openly acknowledge a given cartoonist whom we know to be in danger; in many cases, the public interventions of outsiders, even those with good intentions, are not helpful.

Any such gaps notwithstanding, this collaborative and compilatory work allows us to address recurring trends, offer testimony and add the perspectives of members within our wider community of journalists, artists and human rights defenders.

We will continue to make ourselves available and to provide the most appropriate assistance to any cartoonist requiring support, and to keep

ourselves as well-informed as possible, so that the voice of these "foot soldiers of freedom of expression" is always heard.

The partners also wish to clarify the nomenclature chosen for certain geographical areas. While firmly committed to recognising the African continent as a whole, and making the distinction between Northern and so-called Sub-Saharan Africa presents difficulties, the partners have adopted a classification of countries in line with that used by other partner organisations in their reporting, specifically the MENA (*Middle East & Northern Africa*) zone.

## To contact us:

**Cartoonists Rights:**  
via secure messaging:  
[info@cartoonistsrights.org](mailto:info@cartoonistsrights.org)

**Cartooning for Peace:**  
[contact@cartooningforpeace.org](mailto:contact@cartooningforpeace.org)  
or via secure messaging:  
[cartooningforsupport@proton.me](mailto:cartooningforsupport@proton.me)



◀ Adene  
(France)  
News

# Acknowledgements

## We would like to thank:

The cartoonists, who, through their work, their opinions or their testimonials, have contributed to the development of this document. Without the courage and enthusiasm to keep this profession alive despite the constraints that afflict them, all this would be meaningless.

UNESCO/GMDF, which helped initiate the drafting of this report, produced as part of the "Enhancing legal support to press cartoonists in the digital age (2022-2023)"<sup>2</sup>, as well as the *Isocrates Foundation*, the *World Forum for Democracy* and the *Freedom Cartoonists Foundation*, who contributed entirely to its success.

The many partners who, in addition to unfailing assistance of our day-to-day monitoring, support and advocacy work, have contributed in one way or another to the production of this report.

Our special thanks go to the writers of the contributions that punctuate and enrich the document:

- Kak, cartoonist and President of *Cartooning for Peace*
- Matt Wuerker, cartoonist and President of *Cartoonists Rights*
- Dounia Benslimane, Moroccan cultural operator, member of the executive board of the NGO *Freemuse*
- John Curtis, Managing Director of *Africartoons*
- Emanuele del Rosso (press cartoonist member of *Cartooning for Peace*) and Federica Testi, creators of the *Tough Laugh*, *Tough Law* podcast
- Glez, press cartoonist member of *Cartooning for Peace*
- Alberto Godioli, Associate at the University of Groningen and co-founder of the *Forum for Humor and Law (ForHum)*
- John A. Lent, Editor-in-Chief, *International Journal of Comic Art (IJOCA)*
- Pavol Szalai, Head of the European Union/Balkans desk, *Reporters Without Borders (RSF)*
- Julie Trébault, Director and Alessandro Zagato, Latin America Regional Representative, *Artists at Risk Connection (ARC)*

*Cartooning for Peace* and *Cartoonists Rights* teams for their contribution to the report.

# Overview



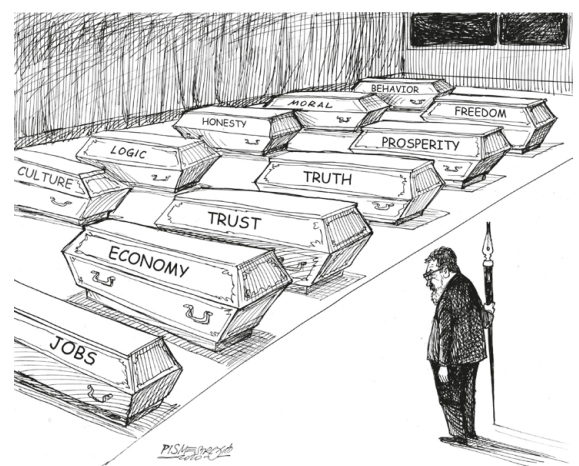
“ When you question authority, when you hold up a mirror to authority, that's what makes you a satirist or a cartoonist. And it is essential that in any healthy democracy that satirists should not face censorship, they should be allowed to make fun of who they want, they should be allowed to question who they want, there should be space for them to thrive. And only a very insecure and very authoritarian government would silence satirists. ”

Rachita Taneja (India)<sup>5</sup>

partners adjudge that the number of relevant cases per year almost doubled.

There are many treatises<sup>6</sup> on cartoonists and why they require dedicated advocacy and we do not propose to rehearse the arguments. Suffice it to say that in the broadest terms, the work of editorial and political cartoonists functions as a mode of criticism. The cartoonists featured in this report have pointed out the foibles of leaders, derided the inadequacies of governments, or the hypocrisy inherent in a particular mode of thought or behaviour. In doing so, they have employed satire, hyperbole and exaggeration or depicted matters considered taboo.

In addition, with only a few exceptions the work discussed herein is concise. The familiar mode of editorial cartoon is capable of much – poignant or subtle expressions of emotion as well as moral outrage and mockery – but it is not an essay, something that lays out a series



▲ Rodríguez (Mexico)

In June 2020, during the earlier months of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in a joint statement<sup>3</sup> with the Netherlands-based platform *Cartoon Movement*, *Cartooning for Peace* and *Cartoonists Rights* declared:

“[...] 2020 could see the global community of cartoonists irrevocably damaged. In part the circumstances are unavoidable; the economic depression will lead to the loss of many, and we have seen that attrition is already underway. But far worse, deliberate repressive action will silence yet more.”

Following “une année noire”<sup>4</sup> for cartoonists in 2019, the pandemic was an extended period of troubling developments, further compounded by the crises in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Russia, and Ukraine. This report shall seek to highlight a number of worrying trends in evidence between 2020 and 2022. A period during which the

► Pismestrovic (Austria)



◀ Shilov (Russia)  
On the sign:  
"No to the war"  
The police agents: "If we don't arrest you, we'll be sent to the frontline"

of detailed arguments. In terms of prose, a cartoon is often more comparable to an opinion columnist's work than that of an investigation journalist<sup>7</sup>. Crucially however, it is not the same as either, but is a unique discipline, at the crossroads between art and journalism.

Given both the immediacy of the form and its exaggerated content, it is little surprise that cartoons so often "offend" others. Of course, "offence" is wholly subjective and informed as much by personal taste as societal mores and local customs. First and foremost, authoritarians and their agents and adherents will take exception to cartoonists that contradict or pick apart their projections of power.

Hence, overarching all that follows in this report, is the prevalence and consequence of CENSORSHIP.



◀ Bonil (Ecuador)



# Censorship: cartooning and power



▲ Khire Alshrif  
(Libya)

In Jordan, a journalism union advise a cartoonist to stop posting work to Facebook<sup>8</sup>. In Palestine, and at the height of the pandemic, a cartoonist is detained twice over, and allegedly ill-treated by police officers<sup>9</sup>. Cuban cartoonists are forced to make false statements, later televised, effectively ending their careers.<sup>10</sup>

Very different stories, but in all three attempts are made to censor cartoonists.

Censorship occurs when a cartoon is published, exhibited, or otherwise disseminated and due to the intervention of a third party:

- the cartoonist is prevented from making more cartoons, or pressured to stop, or;
- the cartoon is withdrawn, deleted, seized, or destroyed, or such demands are made, or;
- the content or form of future cartoons is altered as a consequence, or such demands are made.

► Krauze  
(United Kingdom)

Censorship occurs after the fact and in general flows downward from positions

of power. We recognise the argument that so-called “cancel culture” can have the same effect as censorship. This is a nuanced matter and so we have a separate section concerning ONLINE CHALLENGES.

However, it must be borne in mind that contrary opinions, protests, and boycotts are themselves examples of free expression. It would be wrong to bracket cartoonists facing state-sponsored human rights abuse with those who are simply unpopular.

Mention must also be made of the elusive and troublesome notion of self-censorship i.e., where an opinion goes unexpressed or a cartoon is not drawn. Wherever punitive action against dissent is commonplace, higher numbers of cartoonists will exercise self-censorship. For example, the contrast between cartoonists from mainland China and the (few remaining)<sup>11</sup> in Hong Kong.

“Free speech” is often seen in absolutist terms and few cartoonists will admit to self-censorship, especially those who work in nominally more liberal and tolerant regions. With that said, let us acknowledge one trend that most certainly does lead to unacceptable levels of self-censorship: misogyny.



## Censorship: women at the forefront

Outspoken and expressive women are subjected to gendered abuse online<sup>12</sup>, in person, and via mechanisms of patriarchy<sup>13</sup>. Moreso if their platform is perceived as the reserve of men, as humour and commentary often are.

Women still form a minority among media workers<sup>14</sup>, including cartoonists.

*Draw For Change!* is a six-part documentary film series<sup>15</sup> produced by Clin d'Oeil Films, Belgium, profiling six leading cartoonists – Victoria Lomasko (Russia), Amani Al Ali (Syria), Doaa El Adl (Egypt), Rachita Taneja (India), Mar Maremoto (Mexico), and Ann Telnaes (USA).

In her introduction to the accompanying book of the same name<sup>16</sup>, author Catherine Vuylsteke writes:

“[The cartoonists] confront patriarchal dogmas, authoritarian leaders, reactionary frameworks, religious edicts, and chauvinistic traditions. With humour, courage, and originality, they engage with the world, and often, their graphic statements prove more illuminating than the long, intricate explanations of others. They challenge rigid social conventions, expose the blind spots in our thinking, and assail society’s narrow-mindedness. In other words, they liberate us and offer new perspectives, attempting to ignite debates, introspection, and change.”



Three female cartoonists storm the editorial conference

▲ Wurster (Germany)



▲ Rayma (Venezuela)

“None of them chose an easy path – thus, they stumbled, they got hurt, and even thought of chucking it in. Loneliness, sorrow, controversy, and self-doubt became part of their journey, yet they picked themselves up. In order to go against the current and to tear off the gags to free speech. To find a spot, not just for themselves, but for all those people, whom they see as more vulnerable, less able to come up for themselves. It is an eternal, incomplete attempt – to make the crooked straight. That already is a phenomenal achievement.”

Censorship that discriminates on the identity of the speakers more than the speech is insidious. As Rachita Taneja says, inherent to patriarchy and misogyny is the censorship of women.



◀ Firoozeh (Iran)

## Cartoonist in focus **Rachita Taneja (India)**

Working under the pen name “Sanitary Panels”, Rachita Taneja posts webcomics to social media concerning patriarchy, nationalism, intolerance, misogyny, and authoritarianism in India.

In December of 2020, three cartoons concerning the Supreme Court were the subject of a complaint for contempt of the Supreme Court, lodged by a law student associated with the student wing of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In a decision criticised by both a former Attorney General and a former Solicitor General<sup>17</sup>,



the sitting Attorney General found merit in the complaint and granted permission for prosecution. If found guilty, Taneja could face up to six months prison sentence.

Since then, Taneja and her lawyers are caught in a repeating cycle, periodically checking for

### ◀ Sanitary Panels (India)

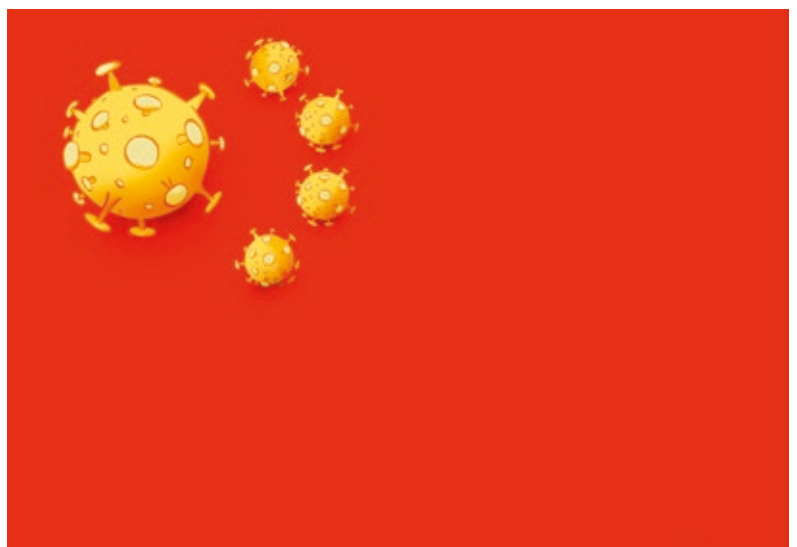
announcements of dates when a hearing is scheduled, only for it to be pushed back to a later date. In the meantime, “Sanitary Panels” continues to comment on society and politics, but with the extra sense of caution imposed by these events.

The tedious and convoluted process is a source of constant anxiety for the accused and sends a repressive message to every other cartoonist [see HATE SPEECH: “online violence is real-world violence”] and all women in the country, chilling their freedom of expression.

# Censorship: from bad to worse

This report encompasses many troubling instances of cartoonist censorship. We would raise the following trends as being of special concern over the period:

- interventions from political leaders, including ambassadors to foreign nations, that act as “dog whistles” for further harassment, whether “trolling” (see ONLINE CHALLENGES below) or other forms of pressure such as the demands made by China’s embassies over cartoons published in Belgium, Denmark (see the cartoon opposite)<sup>18</sup> and The Netherlands at the onset of the pandemic,<sup>19</sup> or in Italy<sup>20</sup> and the Czech Republic over exhibitions by Badiucao in 2021 and 2022.
- the extent to which patently absurd and disproportionate accusations of criminality, supported by inconsistent and vague laws have been accepted uncritically in some quarters (see our sidebars on **Fahmi Reza**, **Rachita Taneja**, and the cartoonists of



*eITOUQUE* for more on cartoonists facing sustained censorious campaigns against them in their own countries).

▲ **Niels Bo Bojesen**  
(Denmark)

- the emergence of (yet more) locations were freely expressed political cartooning either

became markedly more difficult or was rendered impossible at a stroke; in addition to Hong Kong mentioned above we may cite Russia, Myanmar, and the Philippines<sup>21</sup>, but most of all Afghanistan.

But the most pressing threat to the free expression of cartoonists is authoritarianism. In regions all over the world, populist and nationalist governments have sought to conflate acts of protest with crime, even terrorism.<sup>22</sup> Wherever the most natural impulse of conscience – to voice dissatisfaction with one’s own government – is regarded with suspicion and framed as harmful to the fabric of the state, cartoonists’ careers will face an existential threat.

Indeed, the chief anxiety of those in *Cartoonists Rights’* network or regional representatives<sup>23</sup>, and the problem facing the majority of cartoonists featured in *Cartooning for Peace’s* alerts<sup>24</sup> over the last three years is the prospect of legal action. And that possibility increases greatly if their output is mischaracterised as HATE SPEECH.

## LA LIBERTÉ DE LA PRESSE EN RUSSIE



▲ Dilem (Algeria)  
Freedom of expression in Russia  
Please, pretend I'm not here!



▲ Fahmi Reza (Malaisie)

### Cartoonist in focus **Fahmi Reza (Malaysia)**

In terms of sheer volume, few artists can claim as many interactions with police and prosecutors as Mohd Fahmi Reza Mohd Zarin, known as Fahmi Reza, of Malaysia. And few have exhibited such resolute, even gleeful resistance.

First prosecuted and sentenced to jail in 2016 for a cartoon that depicted then Prime Minister Najib Razak as a clown (the sentence being suspended after a successful appeal), in recent years Reza has been repeatedly arrested by police in Kuala Lumpur<sup>25</sup>. At the time of writing there are numerous open investigations naming him<sup>26</sup>. The most serious incident stems from April 2021 when his home was raided, and he was accused of sedition. Reza was also subjected to a travel ban, since lifted.

The basis for prosecution is, for the most part, attributed to specific cartoons that Reza has posted to social media, and allegations have been made of “obscenity” and “insult” to ministers and other figures of authority. The hypersensitivity displayed is almost comical: evidence cited for sedition was the title Reza gave to a *Spotify* playlist.

Taken together the series of arrests, summons, interrogations, and searches can only be interpreted as a campaign of intimidation, a sustained effort to discourage and ultimately terminate Reza’s activities as an activist, artist, and educator.

“ A lot of people are afraid to be called in for questioning by the police, because we have so many cases of people who died in police custody. People always think that the police can do anything, but we do have rights. Every time I get arrested, I will always use that as an opportunity to educate people about their rights and send a message that we should not be afraid. ”

Fahmi Reza (Malaysia)<sup>27</sup>

“ They don't want to exhibit my work, because once they do, they will be accused as racist by the Chinese government—a common tactic deployed by China to discredit criticism of its policies and practices. It's very tricky. And it's working on people, because people do not want to take the risk. I tried publicly funded institutions, museums, private galleries—there is just no way to do that. And it's really hurting me that I cannot showcase my art, that I cannot earn fairly as an artist by having a gallery representing me and selling my works in Australia. ”

**Badiucao (China/Australia)**<sup>28</sup>



◀ **Badiucao (China/Australia)**

## Regional focus

# Asia

**John A. Lent, Founding Publisher/ Editor-in-Chief, *International Journal of Comic Art*, and author of *Asian Political Cartoons***

Asia is not known as a beacon of freedom of the press, and, by extension, the “freedom to cartoon.” While the main culprit denying free cartooning has remained the same – i.e., national governments – control tactics have changed, becoming more indirect and insidious.

Worst of these phenomena, and very common throughout Asia, is self-censorship by cartoonists and their editors. Further, Asian cartooning is plagued with “guided cartooning,” where cartoonists are coerced by authorities to align with them for the betterment of the country, Singapore being an example; media conglomeratisation,

where cartoonists avoid targeting the multiple interests of the mega-corporation that owns their outlet, prevalent in South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and India; and collaborative cartooning, where the subject and slant of cartoons are determined in daily editorial board meetings, with publishers and editors present. Also, cartoonists’ numbers have dwindled drastically, exemplified by Japan, where only *Mainichi Shimbun* of Tokyo’s three huge circulation dailies still retains a staff cartoonist. Fifty major Japanese dailies are supplied cartoons from *Kyodo Illustration*, a cooperative made up of only eight cartoonists.

Other often-used control mechanisms practiced by Asian authorities are: purposely vague and ever-changing “red lines” not to be crossed, keeping cartoonists cautious; maintaining national ideologies that stipulate common

values, such as the Rukunegara of Malaysia, Pancasila of Indonesia, and Communism in China, North Korea, and Vietnam; misusing legislation, such as *Zunar*’s<sup>29</sup> multiple charges under colonial-era sedition law in Malaysia, or declaring martial law, most recently in Myanmar. In China, North Korea, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Singapore, political cartoons are banned.

Punishments meted out to cartoonists have been severe: threatened with rape and death in India; allegedly tortured in Bangladesh; exiled from China; or fired or suspended in Hong Kong. The loss of *Zunzi*<sup>30</sup> after a forty-year run in the *Ming Pao* newspaper illustrates this discouraging trend.

# Hate speech: "online violence is real-world violence"

"MAY GOD SAVE YOU AND PROTECT YOU FROM OUR MEETING BECAUSE AS A MAN YOU WILL HAVE TO DEFEND YOURSELF, DAMNED M.....F....., I KNOW HOW TO DEFEND THE HONOUR OF MY GRANDCHILDREN AND MY FAMILY...."

*Threat sent to the cartoonist Bonil (Ecuador) by Jacobo Bucaram Pulley, son of Abdalá Bucaram Ortiz (president of the country from 1996 to 1997) after he posted a cartoon depicting him.*<sup>31</sup>

Nowadays, cartoonists primarily use the internet to publish their work. There is no better way for a cartoonist to gain visibility, expand their audience, and publish cartoons otherwise rejected by their paper or magazine. But by becoming their own editor-in-chief, cartoonists must deal directly with all the misunderstandings, disagreements and fierce reactions that festoon online platforms – virtual "town squares" where algorithms, a source of many CHALLENGES, encourage polarisation<sup>32</sup>.

The level of abuse varies and is difficult to quantify, especially considering that the vast majority of cartoonists surveyed (over 80%) consider silence the best response, never acknowledging online abuse when it happens. If they acknowledge taking the time to assess the risk inherent in each violent reaction, they have nonetheless reached a stage of weariness that trivialises the violence. But as Maria Ressa, joint 2021 Nobel peace prize-winner with Dmitri Muratov, reminds us, "online violence is real-world violence"<sup>33</sup>. The gunning down of staff at *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015 and the more recent 2020 killing of the teacher Samuel Paty in France demonstrate the devastation wreaked by the spread of deadly ideologies and hatred online. In the United States, the controversy and online violence following the murder of George Floyd have contributed to a decline in the publication of cartoons. Meanwhile, the proliferation of conspiracy theories and unfounded

“*Censorship by algorithm feels more confounding than traditional, state-led censorship (...) With today's more subtle forms of censorship, the powers that be "act like it's open—but it's not, and you get shadow banned and you get the filter bubble. (...) You have to really know how to work the algorithms to get as much reach as you used to get before (...) It's a different internet.*”

*Khalid Albaih (Sudan)*<sup>34</sup>



▲ Hani Abbas (Palestine/Syria)



◀ Jih0 (France)  
According to them, the (social Media) networks make you stupid and hateful!...  
Let them die!

“ It’s sad to say that threats have become quite normal in ‘open’ debate, on social media and internet. Not a week goes by without getting hate mail, mostly anonymous. At first it is threatening, but nowadays it’s merely background noise - which is a bit alarming. If hate mail is considered ‘normal’ behaviour towards cartoonists or journalists, then what is the next step? It’s a slippery slope towards actual violence. ”

Lectrr (Belgium)<sup>35</sup>

speculation concerning COVID-19<sup>36</sup>, trends that raised valid concerns and presented challenges of their own, also meant that some cartoonists were unfairly characterised as peddling racism, antisemitism or misinformation during the pandemic period. Most prominently, any cartoons about China – universally understood to be the point of origin for the virus – were met with outrage from supporters and representatives of the Chinese authorities.

There are endless topics that whip up such emotions. Besides widespread and apparently spontaneous outcry from internet users, we can see a wilful intention to do harm, often in service of a political agenda, when accusing cartoonists of hateful sentiments, obscenity, or disrespect. Such has been the case for **Espé** (France)<sup>37</sup> or

▼ Darío (Mexico)



Xavier Gorce (France)<sup>38</sup>, Bianca Xunise (USA)<sup>39</sup>, Boris (Canada)<sup>40</sup>, Béla Weisz (Hungary)<sup>41</sup>, and Zehra Ömeroğlu (Türkiye - see dedicated section). Without forgetting, of course, what happened to *Charlie Hebdo*<sup>42</sup>.

## Regional focus Middle East & Northern Africa

Dounia Benslimane, Moroccan cultural operator, member of the executive board of the NGO *Freemuse*

### Draw me democracy...

Since the fall of presidents Ben Ali (Tunisia) and Mubarak (Egypt) in 2011, the MENA region has seen a steady stream of revendications, and the buds of the Arab Spring still trying to blossom.

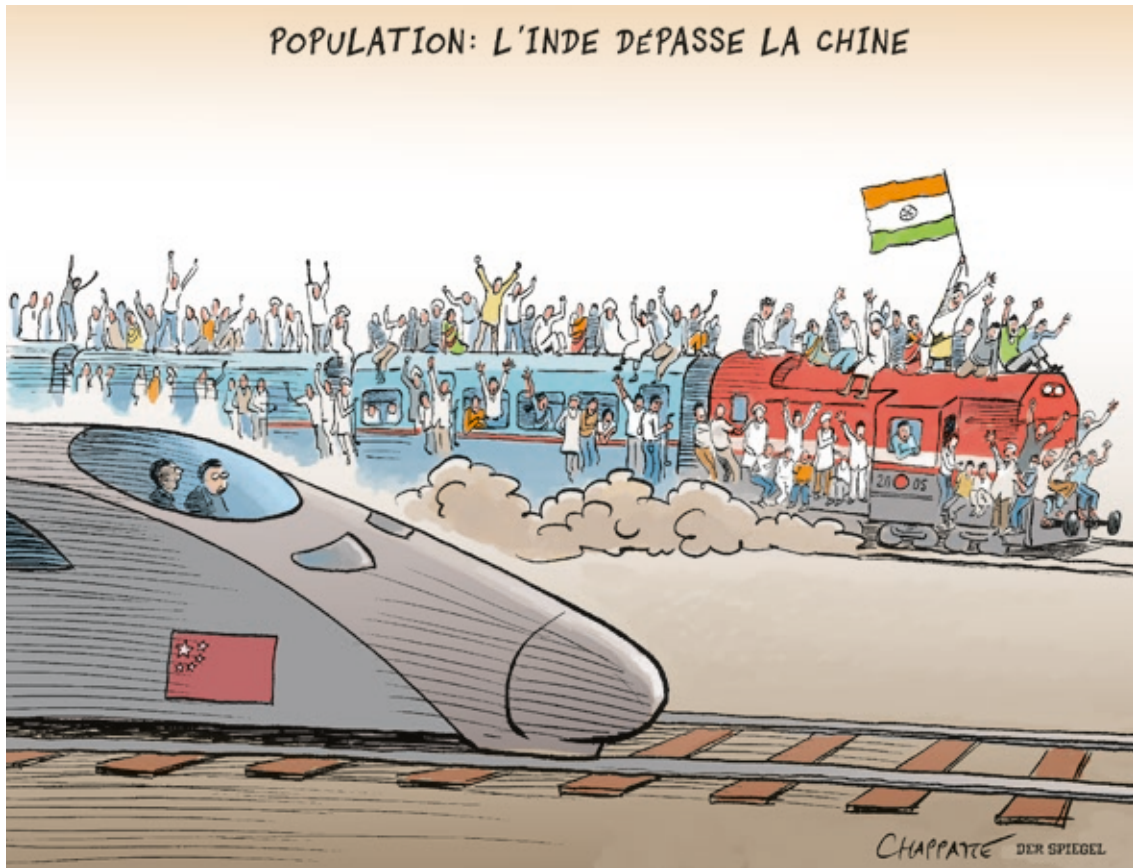
Definitions vary, but between thirteen and twenty-seven<sup>43</sup> countries belong to it. These are multi-ethnic and multi-faith societies.<sup>44</sup> Only a few Gulf countries and Israel are in the

category of nations with a very high Human Development Index (HDI).<sup>45</sup> An unprecedented economic crisis, exacerbated by COVID-19, has marked recent years<sup>46</sup> despite the region’s unique growth potential<sup>47</sup>, rich in resources and young human capital<sup>48</sup>. Political instability and armed conflicts are legion under regimes that are largely non-democratic and often singled out by human rights activists<sup>49</sup> for repression, injustice, and the silencing of dissident voices.

Artists and media, and cartoonists at the crossroads of the two disciplines, try to resist all forms of repression, from censorship to executions, and to fight against corruption, discrimination, injustice and radicalism. Whether it’s **Nime** and **Dilem** in Algeria, the **Hajjaj brothers**

in Jordan, **Reza Aghili** in Iran, **Saabaaneh** in Palestine, **Khalid Albaih** in Sudan, or **Ashraf Hamdi**<sup>50</sup> in Egypt, at least they face censorship but some of them are victims of the infernal machine of repression, sometimes backed by liberticidal laws. Censored or blacklisted, accused of treason, of undermining state security, the head of state, religion or the values of the nation, some go into exile while others dream of it. Economic insecurity, fear for oneself and one’s family, isolation and deteriorating health are just some of the reasons that hamper the freedom of the region’s cartoonists.<sup>51</sup> Many continue to wield their pens for greater justice, dignity and freedom in their communities.

## Hate speech: "this cartoon is racist"



► Chappatte  
(Switzerland)  
Population: India  
overtakes China

In April 2023 a cartoon by Patrick Chappatte for *Der Spiegel*, drawn as India's population exceeded China's, was decried as racist. Including a purportedly outmoded stereotype about India (an over-crowded locomotive speeding past a bullet train) and appearing in a German outlet, the argument was made that the cartoon betrayed a fading colonialist power's anxiety over competitors in the Global South. And, once it was noted that the cartoonist was born in Pakistan, this was seized upon as proof of a prejudiced outlook.

The media furore was intense, lasting two weeks. Most disturbingly, the German ambassador called the cartoon "neither funny nor appropriate"<sup>52</sup> and equated Germany and India's "freedom of press".

This recent incident illustrates a trend over the period; accusations of hateful content triggered by cartoons, amplified and exaggerated by social media activity.

Cartoonists inside India receive a huge amount of pushback whenever any criticism – explicit

or inferred – is made of President Modi and his government. The cases covered elsewhere in this report and in Chappatte's own essay<sup>53</sup> on the matter make it very clear such reactions are driven by partisan, sectarian, and nationalist sentiment.

It should therefore come as no surprise when the same ideological response is activated by a cartoon from an outsider, with the added opportunity to cast accusations of xenophobia, racism, colonialism, and any other rhetorical flourishes intended to shut down discussion.

Regardless, cartoonists working in the international press must be at liberty to make observations about others without being lambasted as racists. Their work is hampered, and reputations placed at risk after interventions from politicians.

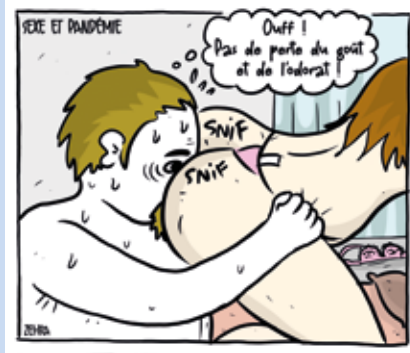


## Cartoonist in focus

# Zehra Ömeroğlu (Türkiye)

On October 5, 2022 the cartoonist Zehra Ömeroğlu appeared before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Istanbul District Court to face a criminal case of obscenity brought by the Istanbul Public Prosecutor for the publication of a cartoon in the satirical magazine *Le Man* on November 25, 2020.

Initially scheduled for December 17, 2020 her court date has been repeatedly postponed, flouting the cartoonist's right to a fair trial, and the case now depends upon the production of a report from the Obscene Publications Commission ("Muzır Neşriyat Kurulu"), linked to the Ministry of Family and Minors' Protection Services. The report, due on October 24, 2023 shall determine whether or not the cartoon is obscene. And if so, Zehra Ömeroğlu



### ▲ Zehra Ömeroğlu (Türkiye)

Sex and Pandemics

Phew! No loss of taste or sense of smell !

faces between six months and three years in jail as well as a possible fine. The media exposure of her case in *Charlie Hebdo* has been followed by a vast campaign of harassment, replete with death threats against her on social media following another one of her cartoons.

No matter the verdict of the trial, the cartoonist has determined that she will no longer be able to fully

express herself. If she is given a conditional sentence, she will live with the overhanging threat of later accusations carrying stronger repercussions.

Zehra's case is but one example of censorship among many others. The constant threat of criminal proceedings in Türkiye silences political cartoonists over the long term.

Since 2017, we have counted eight cartoonists brought to court for their work. Among them four cartoonists, alongside four *Charlie Hebdo* contributors, have been prosecuted for "insulting the president". This crime is indiscriminately used in Türkiye as a means to muzzle freedom of expression. According to official court statistics, more than 31,000 people were indicted for allegedly insulting the president in 2020, with 36,000 in 2019. Ten years prior there were only four such cases.<sup>54</sup>

## Regional focus Europe

Pavol Szalai, Head of the European Union/Balkans Desk at *Reporters Without Borders (RSF)*

While the European Union has the highest standards on press freedom in the world, cartoonists are not immune from physical violence, intimidation, and SLAPP proceedings.

In France<sup>55</sup>, the extremism behind the 2015 attack that cost life to eight editorial staff at *Charlie Hebdo* struck again twice over in 2020. In September, two employees<sup>56</sup> of production companies unrelated to the magazine were injured outside *Charlie Hebdo's* former offices when the "Mohammed cartoons" were republished ahead of the trial of the 2015 co-conspirators<sup>57</sup>. And in October, a school teacher was

murdered after showing them in class. Condemnations of the magazine by religious leaders and calls for violence were repeated<sup>58</sup> in January 2023, following new cartoons of the Iranian Supreme Leader.

In Sweden<sup>59</sup> threats<sup>60</sup> suffered by cartoonist **Mahmoud Abbas** in April 2020 were likewise fuelled by a third country's intolerance of humour. The Palestinian-born cartoonist received thousands of hostile messages on social networks after posting a cartoon on Facebook mocking the Crown Prince of the Saudi kingdom, Mohammed bin Salman.

In Northern Cyprus<sup>61</sup> (politically influenced by Türkiye, the only country to formally recognise it as a state) two journalists from the *Afrika* daily newspaper, **Sener Levent** and **Ali Osman Tabak**, were finally acquitted on appeal in October 2023, after long years of legal proceedings<sup>62</sup> over

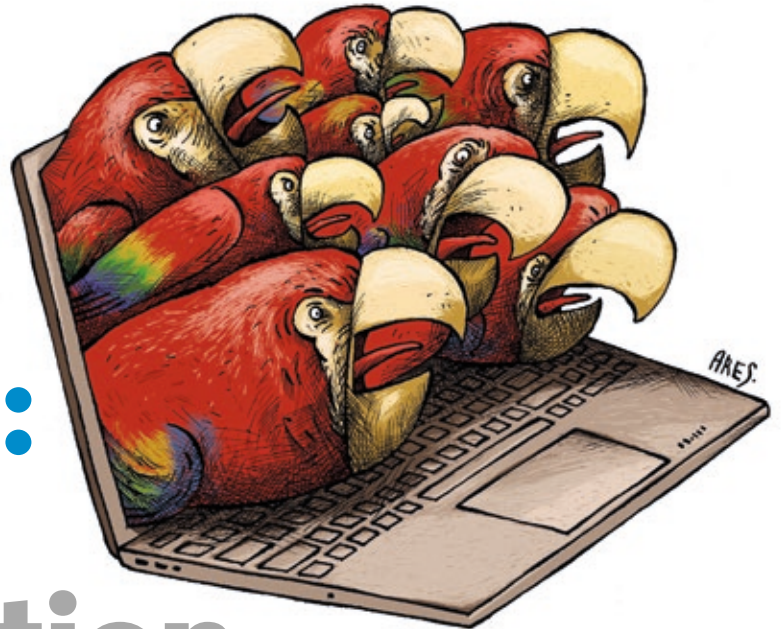
a caricature of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Authoritarian tendencies, purportedly protecting conservative values, have targeted cartoonists in Hungary<sup>63</sup> and the neighbouring country which aspires to enter the EU, Serbia<sup>64</sup>. In 2020, an exhibition of socially critical cartoons was destroyed<sup>65</sup> near Belgrade, with local authorities reportedly indifferent to the vandalism. Hungarian cartoonist **Gábor Pápai** was fined<sup>66</sup> for offence to religious sensibilities for his drawing in the daily *Népszava* in 2020, which criticised the government's handling of the coronavirus crisis and depicted the figure of Jesus Christ.

The right to freely criticise systems of thought, and the decriminalisation of blasphemy are far from being established everywhere in Europe.

“ Hate speech and hate mail is often used as a political tool. I have also had the honour of experiencing this when right-wing extremists in my country tried to silence me by slandering my work, up to the point that they tried to get me fired from the newspaper I work for. This, of course, didn't work. The accusations they made were purely falsified – but the thing about lies on the internet is that they often stick regardless of the truth. This is called Brandolini's Law: it takes more effort to refute a lie than to create it. Damage is done even if a lie is refuted. ”

Lectrr (Belgium)<sup>67</sup>



▲ Ares (Cuba)

# Online challenges: trolling, disinformation and manipulation

In addition to the natural and emotional but often polarised reaction, the internet can also be manipulated for disinformation or destabilisation purposes. The consortium *Forbidden Stories*<sup>68</sup> has stated that “in general, the (disinformation) campaigns that succeeded in provoking internet user reactions were, as is often the case on social media, the ones that used messages aimed at a person’s emotions, like anger, disgust or, on the rare occasion, empathy”. Press cartoons appeal to our emotions, and it is easy to use them to accuse the author of misconduct and hold them hostage to a political agenda.

On several occasions, **Abecor** (Bolivia) has been the target of mass trolling by anonymous accounts which contributed to the closure of the paper at which he worked<sup>69</sup>, itself under attack. Elsewhere, **Mahmoud Abbas** (Sweden/Palestine) received thousands of hateful messages and death threats in record time for a viral cartoon about Saudi Arabia<sup>70</sup>.



◀ Abecor (Bolivia)  
On the sign: no fraud

▼ Khalid (Palestine)



“ So, for an artist to receive constant harassment and trolling online, they might tend to think twice about doing the work that they want to do, you know, to say the thing that they want to see through their work, and they might end up being careful or consciously or subconsciously editing the way that they do their work. And a lot of people call this self-censorship. I personally don't like that term, the term self-censorship because I think that if there is an external force that is making you behave a certain way, is making you doubt the work that you're doing or to be more careful or to be more vigilant that is a form of censorship. So, I don't think that counts as self-censorship I think it's censorship plain and simple.”

Rachita Taneja (India)<sup>71</sup>

## Regional focus Latin America

Julie Trébault, Director and Alessandro Zagato, Latin America Regional Representative at Artists at Risk Connection (ARC)

Information gathered by ARC on freedom of artistic expression in Latin America<sup>72</sup> highlights how, across the region, diverse forms of vulnerability stemmed from factors including governmental actions, policy implementations, and the enforcement of public health measures.

The pandemic's disproportionate impact relegated cultural endeavours to the margins, exacerbating disparities between established and independent artists. Those blending activism and art face heightened visibility and risk, especially in authoritarian contexts, often subjected to arbitrary punishment.

In Nicaragua, humour has become a potent tool against Daniel Ortega's authoritarian rule. Cartoonists like Pedro X. Molina, Cako, and Lafito expose the regime's violence. In 2021, Molina's work earned him the prestigious *Gabo* Award for Excellence, celebrating his visual

style and insightful reflections on events spanning Nicaragua and beyond.

Cuban cartoonists endure severe restrictions<sup>73</sup>. Despite the fear of retaliation, they continue to denounce human rights violations, employing humour as a powerful tool for resistance.<sup>74</sup> [Sidebar: see *eITOUQUE* case study.]

Rayma Suprani<sup>75</sup> offers powerful critiques of the corruption and tyranny that drove her exile from



▲ Boligán (Mexico)



▲ Pedro X. Molina (Nicaragua)

Venezuela and exposes the hostile terrain that political cartoonists often navigate.

Since 2019, Chile's social landscape was transformed amid widespread protests challenging inequality and systemic issues. This sparked a surge in creative expressions<sup>76</sup> on Santiago's streets, turning public spaces into potent channels of defiant artistic expression, often of a satirical nature.

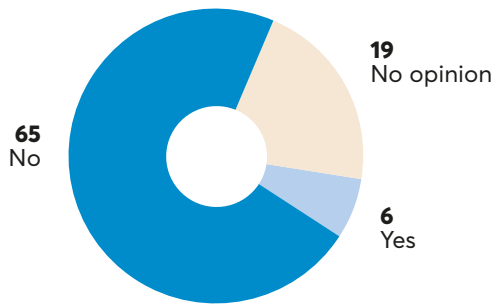
As Latin America continues to weather these complexities, new strategies will be required to reinforce existing networks, enabling artists to confront threats effectively. Strengthening mental health support and creating accessible channels for reporting and assistance are essential steps.

One development on the rise is the falsification of cartoons: a cartoon by **Mechaín** (Peru)<sup>77</sup> was twisted into an attack on the press, elsewhere there are the cases of false **Charlie Hebdo**<sup>78</sup> front covers created by Russian propagandists.

Faced with such manipulations, cartoonists consider themselves insufficiently supported by the social media giants. In a paradoxical twist, the automated moderation used by the platforms, which are not programmed to compensate for satirical intent, frequently lead to the suppression of posts bearing cartoons or the suspension of accounts on the basis of nudity, obscenity, or incitement to hate, all on the pretext that they do not fit in with “community standards”, exemplified by the cases of **Görg Mallia** (Malta)<sup>79</sup> and **Clay Jones** (USA)<sup>80</sup>.

Pushed to the extreme, these distortions and misapprehensions can lead to the CRIMINALISATION of cartoonists and their outlets.

**Feeling of being protected by social networking platforms** (90 answers)



Answers to a question asked in a survey produced by Cartooning for Peace (2023)



▲ On the left: the original cartoon of Mechaín / On the right: altered cartoon

# Criminalisation: the new normal

When making reference to criminalisation, we propose to be broad, encompassing civil offenses as well (see also the section on “misuses and abuses of the law” below) as the consequences of both can inhibit free expression – encompassing arbitrary arrests and detention, as well as investigations, law suits, and court proceedings against cartoonists. It should be remembered that it is not necessary for a cartoonist to have committed a crime for the repressive juggernaut of legal action to be unleashed. For **Nime** (Algeria, see cartoon on page 20)<sup>81</sup> and **Opptertus Fwema** (Tanzania)<sup>82</sup>, court proceedings were used to retroactively legitimise the arbitrary detention of these political cartoonists. Similarly, as pointed out by the Council of Europe, “the opening of preliminary investigations by police and judicial authorities have a particularly chilling effect”<sup>83</sup>. Lastly, by prolonging the procedure over years, pressure can be maintained on the person, as in the case of **Rachita Taneja**<sup>84</sup>, **Bala**<sup>85</sup> or **Swathi Vadlamudi**<sup>86</sup> in India.

An analysis of the surveyed cases shows increasing use of digital security laws to



▲ Hani Abbas (Palestine/Syria)

persecute cartoonists, along with other laws restricting freedoms, and we have seen a number of cartoonists prosecuted for specifically digital offences over the period. **Fahmi Reza** alone was questioned by police and investigated nine times between March 2021 and the end of 2022, as well as twice being the subject of legal proceedings. His compatriots **Zunar**<sup>87</sup> and **Amin Landak**<sup>88</sup> also underwent interrogations and investigations. This makes Malaysia



► Lectrr (Belgium)

### Cartoonist in focus **El Toque (Cuba)**

According to *Reporters without Borders*,<sup>89</sup> Cuba remains the worst Latin American country for freedom of the press. The country finds itself at 172 out of 180 in the 2023 Press Freedom Index.<sup>90</sup>

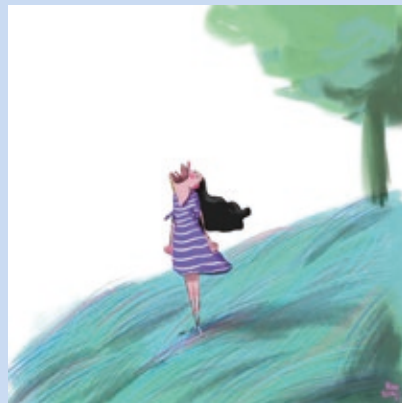
Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the silencing of independent or critical voices has only increased in Cuba. The independent multimedia platform *eITOQUE* is a perfect example. The paper was the target of a virulent intimidation and defamation campaign led by the Cuban government.

Since September 2022, repression has greatly intensified. Due to pressure from the security arm of the Cuban state, *eITOQUE*'s cartoon supplement, *Xel2*, was forced to close and several members of the paper's team were made to quit.

Among those who resigned were three cartoonists who worked for *Xel2*: Iran Hernandez, Wimar Verdecia and Mary Esther Lemus Cordero. All three were forced to recant in public. Wimar and Mary Esther were subjected to hours of

interrogation, which was filmed, at the hands of Cuba's security forces. Besides trying to psychologically destabilise them, the interrogations were also used as an opportunity to blackmail them, extorting resignation statements recorded for broadcast later, with admissions of making false information and pushing them to renounce to any future work for independent media.<sup>91</sup>

These events played out during the preparation of the new Cuban Criminal Code<sup>92</sup>; it was enacted in May 2022 and entered into force on December 2, 2022. The amended criminal code greatly enhanced the legal arsenal restricting freedom of expression in Cuba.



▲ Mary Esther Lemus Cordero (Cuba)



▲ Ramsés (Cuba)  
Democracy, tyranny, democracy, freedom, democracy, tyranny, democracy, freedom

Even after the cartoonists' exit from *eITOQUE* the spectre of jail time still hangs over them. The video statements, used in the first instance to discredit them on national television, could be used as evidence for prosecuting them in future. This campaign of defamation and psychological torture sought to ensure that these artists' critical voices were lost, ending their careers and thereby forcing them to choose between prison or exile.

“ The use of laws to criminalise speech or to intimidate journalists through civil claims, is one of the most important methods authoritarian governments and non-state actors use to suppress journalistic work. Cartoonists are also vulnerable to allegations that through their work they have engaged in sedition - encouraging people to rebel against the state - or insult - directed at the monarchy, the government, or religion. International law is not always properly equipped to address some of these laws, such as laws relating to insult, where the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable speech can be blurred. This is an important grey area which cartoonists should be mindful of. ”

Pádraig Hughes, Legal Director at Media Defence<sup>93</sup>

one of the principal countries resorting to the criminalisation of cartoonists during the period, with Türkiye and India running close behind.

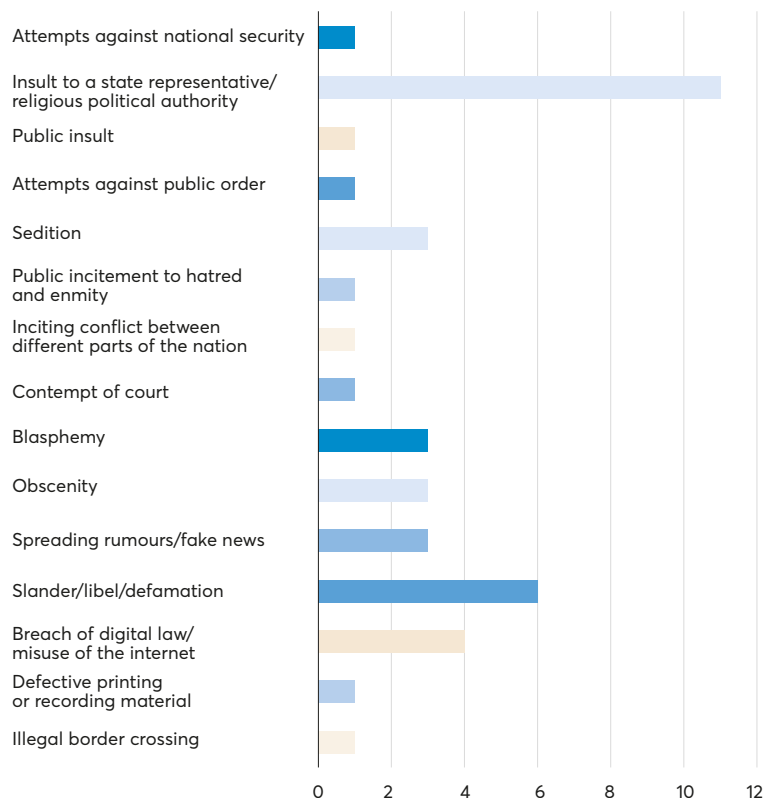
Among the causes used jointly with digital laws are the insult of state officials, the spreading of rumours, fake news, or defamation. **Ahmed Kabir Kishore**<sup>94</sup>, in Bangladesh, was arrested and detained for ten months for “spreading rumours and misinformation on Facebook in relation to the coronavirus” and for “insulting the image of the father of the nation, the national anthem or national flag” in contravention to the Digital Security Act 2018.

Following its invasion of Ukraine, Russia enacted Article 207.3 of the Russian Criminal

Code, which forbids the public and intentional dissemination of false information on the Russian armed forces and on the actions of Russian public powers carried out abroad<sup>95</sup>. To our knowledge, five cartoonists were forced to leave Russia in 2022 for fear of repression but they might probably be more today.

Faced with the unbearable weight of criminalisation and imprisonment, alongside the serious physical or psychological damage that can occur during or after such events, many cartoonists have made the difficult choice of leaving their home and taking on the enormous challenge of DISPLACEMENT.

#### Grounds for prosecution invoked and number of occurrences (2020-2022)



Note: Data compiled from information collected by partners over the period.



▲ Nime (Algeria)  
The chosen one

## Regional focus Africa

John Curtis, Managing Director of *Africartoons* with Glez, cartoonist (Burkina Faso)

Africa is both the second largest and most populous continent, with more than a quarter of the world's nations, yet political cartoonists whose commentaries can overcome the continent's low levels of literacy are sadly underrepresented.

“ There are so many ways to gag the rare breed of political cartoonists that the use of legal coercion or violence is not often needed... ”

Damien Glez (Burkina Faso)

Pre-pandemic, the little space that cartoonists had was already under threat, with two big hitters, *Gado*<sup>96</sup> (Tanzania-Kenya) and *Zapiro*<sup>97</sup> (South Africa) both losing positions held for decades.

In 2019, Kenyan cartoonist and journalist *Patrick Gathara*<sup>98</sup> decried

political and corporate pressures, political correctness, and social media outrage as being the biggest threats to cartooning freedom and, he noted, to democracy itself.

Lockdowns brought increased pressures. The sudden drop in advertising revenue (income already ravaged by the “Big Tech” platforms), gave many outlets a convenient excuse to “let go” their cartoonists.

In South Africa, six cartoonists' positions were made redundant by two leading broadcasters pleading poverty, with six more lost before the pandemic ended. Tellingly, once advertisers' confidence returned the cartoonists were neither rehired nor replaced.

African cartoonists responded enthusiastically to the societal challenges presented by the pandemic and the efforts to counter it, employing their talents to ensure fellow Africans got the information they needed via multimedia public awareness campaigns in the mediums of cartoons, comics and animation. Their sense of social responsibility was counter-balanced by more typical cartoons<sup>99</sup>, tackling government corruption and ineptitude. Some

▼ Glez (Burkina Faso)



pursued a course of denialism and scepticism and were cancelled as a result, but they weren't the only ones silenced.

Censorship is hardly a foreign concept in Africa<sup>100</sup>, and tightened media laws (justified as protecting the public against fake news) further restricted free expression. Growing authoritarianism, disputed elections, and coups and wars in Western and Central Africa further restrict cartoonists' freedoms when in fact, these crises are the very reasons that Africa needs more cartoonists, with greater freedoms.

“ Satirists have to be pretty careful at the moment, particularly in a region of the world with authoritarian, dictatorial regimes that have been strengthened by the pandemic (...) history shows us us that it is at times like these that all sorts of things can happen (...). We must continue to focus on the police and the authorities and continue to speak the truth to those in power. ”

*Gado* (Tanzania-Kenya)<sup>101</sup>



▲ Zapiro (South Africa)

## Criminalisation: misuses and abuses of the law



▲ Tjeerd Roylaards (The Netherlands)

By Alberto Godioli, Associate Professor at the University of Groningen and cofounder of the *Forum for Humor and the Law (ForHum)*<sup>102</sup>

The vital role of satire and cartooning in public life has been acknowledged by judicial bodies worldwide<sup>103</sup>. Yet, cartoonists are often unduly targeted through criminal and civil actions, in violation of international human rights standards. The legal tools most frequently wielded against cartoonists include:

**Laws criminalizing defamation, insult or contempt of authorities.** Recent examples include the charges against Fahmi Reza in Malaysia (2022), Rachita Taneja in India (2021-ongoing), or Opptertus Fwema in Tanzania

(2021). In its General Comment 34<sup>104</sup>, the UNHRC stressed that “imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty” for defamation. Despite widespread calls to decriminalize defamation and public insult, 160 countries worldwide still had defamation laws in 2021<sup>105</sup>.

**Unfounded civil defamation suits**, like the one filed against Mario Natangelo<sup>106</sup> by Arianna Meloni (sister of Italy’s Prime Minister) in 2023. While less severe than criminal charges, these actions effectively inhibit political satire, in contrast with the UNHRC’s stance against the misuse of defamation laws (Resolutions 39/6<sup>107</sup> and 45/18<sup>108</sup>).

**Vague provisions addressing hate speech, sedition or misinformation** – e.g., those used against Zunar in Malaysia and Kishore in Bangladesh (2021). In the Rabat Plan of Action (2013)<sup>109</sup>, the UN clarified that an expression cannot be sanctioned as incitement to hatred, discrimination, violence or public unrest, unless it is likely to cause imminent, actual harm to its target.

**The same applies to anachronistic laws on ‘religious insult’ or obscenity**, whether criminal or civil – see the cases of Zehra Ömeroğlu (Türkiye, 2020-ongoing), Osama Hajjaj<sup>110</sup> (Jordan, 2021) and Gábor Pápai (Hungary, 2021-ongoing).

These abuses have increased in the digital age, due to the higher visibility and closer scrutiny that cartoons are subject to. Another worrying trend lies in governments pressuring online platforms to remove unwanted content, outright bypassing free speech provisions (as happened to Manjul and Bala<sup>111</sup> in India, 2021). At the same time, digital interconnectedness can enhance awareness-raising and much-needed international coordination to defend the rights of cartoonists, as shown by the CFP-UNESCO/GMDF project *Enhancing legal support to press cartoonists in the digital age (2022-2023)*<sup>112</sup>.



# Displacement: the last resort

► Anas Lakkis  
(Lebanon)

We recognise the resilience and bravery of exiled and refugee cartoonists and view their needs with the utmost seriousness.

There have been a number of successful relocation stories in recent years – examples include the relocation of **Hossien Rezaye**<sup>113</sup> from Afghanistan to The Netherlands, and of **Wimar Verdecia Fuentes** from Cuba to France<sup>114</sup> – and for obvious reasons these grab attention, inflating a perceived success rate.

Truthfully it is extremely challenging to move a cartoonist safely, legally, and swiftly from danger onward to another country. Often, artistic residencies and other emergency programmes provide temporary respite (potentially life-saving in crisis situations) but not permanent relocation. Such actions are impossible without partnership (sometimes very long chains of partners working in sequence



## Cartoonist in focus **Gábor Pápai (Hungary)**

On April 27, 2020 early in the coronavirus pandemic, the newspaper *Népszava* published the cartoon seen right by Gábor Pápai depicting Cecilia Müller, the chief medical officer of Hungary.

As explained by Gábor himself<sup>115</sup>, “The cartoon was a reference to a prior statement by Cecilia Müller’s which minimised the impact of the virus by stating that deceased victims were “predisposed” to die due to pre-existing pathologies. (...)”

The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs replied to the Council of Europe’s Platform for Journalism and Safety of Journalists statement regarding the threats against Gábor Pápai<sup>116</sup>.



After a widespread, politicized campaign accusing the cartoonist and newspaper of “blasphemy” the Budapest Metropolitan Court handed down a verdict in second instance on June 3, 2021 finding under Article IX(5) of the Hungarian Fundamental Law that the cartoon infringed Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP) Deputy Leader Imre Vejkey’s right to human dignity as a Christian, and ordered the newspaper to pay HUF 400,000 (€1,140) in damages, to reimburse legal costs, and to publish a message of condemnation and an

## ◀ Gábor Pápai (Hungary)

Alapbetegsége Függőséget okozott – “His underlying condition caused addiction”.

In Hungarian the word “függőség” means addiction and comes from the root “függ” which means both hanging and depending.

apology. The apology was published on June 25, 2021 (hand written by Gabor and put in place of the daily cartoon).

Since then, the newspaper has appealed to the highest Hungarian court (Kúria) which rejected grounds for protection saying the cartoon “is not sufficiently intelligible to the public [and] it does not, in principle, contribute to public debate”. The newspaper is now appealing to the European Court of Human Rights.



or simultaneously) and at least one of these will necessarily be a national government or its representative.

◀ Osama Hajjaj (Jordan)

For every outcome that is publicised, there are several others that are not. We are aware of cartoonists whose cases have languished for years with over-subscribed and under-resourced multi-national agencies.

In most Western nations, refugees are a marginalised if not vilified group. Therefore, those who arrive exchange one set of problems for another, remaining highly vulnerable. In general, and at least to begin with, they cannot legally work, and many suffer poor housing conditions. Significantly, a displaced cartoonist may find safety in a new location but not opportunity, either because there is a more competitive market, or they are excluded by language barriers or cultural differences.

### Cartoonist in focus Emad Hajjaj (Jordan)

Perhaps Jordan's most widely known cartoonist, and a former long-serving president of their national association, Emad Hajjaj was arrested under "cybercrime" law in August 2020 and held for several days.

He was initially accused over a cartoon about an agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and depicting UAE leader Crown Prince Mohamed Ben Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ for short),

but ultimately three cartoons were cited, each carrying charges of both "cybercrime" and "prevention of terrorism" violations. It was initially alleged that his cartoons "harmed relations" between Arab nations, later downgraded to "slander and libel".

Passed from court to court in a dispute over jurisdiction, all proceedings were suspended without trial at the end of the year. It has been made clear to Hajjaj that his case could be reactivated at short notice, leading to another arrest. He has continued to draw cartoons<sup>117</sup> but always under a shadow of potential reprisals.

The most disturbing interpretation of these events that was provided is that Hajjaj was used as a pawn to placate a discomfited neighbour. In the same week that he was arrested, Prince Ali bin Hussein of the Jordanian royal family – someone whose status absolutely precludes criminalisation – had made social media posts criticising MBZ.<sup>118</sup>

“ I was sent to the jail the same night. Same night. It was a horrific time for me. The first time put in jail, the first time spent without my family. The first time you see things that you see in movies and now you are living them in real time, was really difficult. ”

Emad Hajjaj (Jordan)<sup>119</sup>



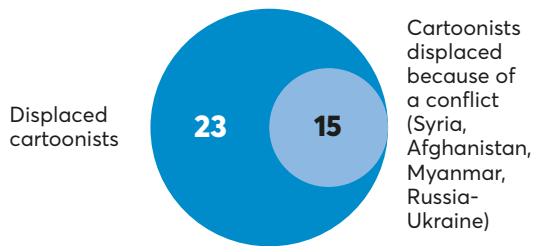
◀ Emad Hajjaj (Jordan)

Title: Israel asks the United States not to sell F35s to the United Arab Emirates

► Vladimir Kazanevsky (Ukraine)



**Number of displaced cartoonists within the period (2020-2022)**



Note: The number of displaced cartoonists (23) includes cartoonists who fled crises arising from conflict (15, meaning 65%). The compiled figures are based on available data gathered by the partners; naturally, unreported displacement cannot be taken into account and nor are other cartoonists whom we know wish to flee but are unable to do so.

“ My heart, soul, head are in Ukraine all the time, and my only wish is to help and, especially, fight Russian propaganda. ”

Vladimir Kazanevsky (Ukraine)<sup>120</sup>

The numbers requesting aid in relocation have increased in the last three years and will continue to do so. The reality is that any organisation concerned with the human rights of artists and journalists will need to take on some responsibility toward refugees, sooner or later. Our RECOMMENDATIONS follow.

# Conclusions & recommendations

“ I used to say as a cartoonist that I don't give a damn about red lines, and I draw without thinking. Now, I do think about them many times before I draw. And when I draw my cartoons these days, unfortunately I have to tell you that sometimes I send my cartoon to my lawyer to see it, just in case it has any problem. ”

Emad Hajjaj (Jordan)<sup>121</sup>

While emphasis has been given in this report to the threats faced by cartoonists in countries that offer them little or no protection – and it is from this perspective that we advocate for their innate human rights – it cannot be ignored that cartooning as a profession is being diminished across all regions.

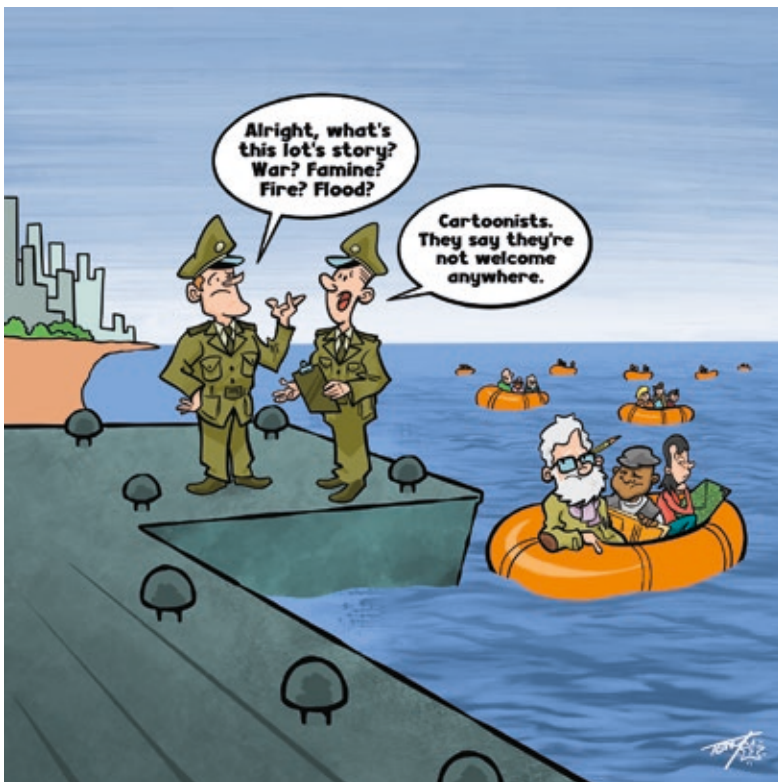
Increasingly, the tacit message from the owners and managers of news platforms is that cartoonists are dispensable.<sup>122</sup> That might not be such a problem if cartoonists could confidently rely on self-distribution instead. However, as we have explained, cartoons often cannot be distributed via social media networks where terms and conditions and content moderation curtail satire, or algorithms bury such material entirely. And, in many parts of the world, doing so exposes the cartoonist to prosecution under digital communications and “cybercrime” laws, or to the predations of politically motivated trolls.

Lone, self-employed cartoonists will not have the resource to defend themselves as rigorously as those who enjoy the patronage of a news organisation.

With all the foregoing in mind, we recommend the following:

- all parties concerned must contribute to promoting and protecting the freedom of expression of press cartoonists. From this point of view, the media have an essential role to play in promoting their publication and the defence of cartoonists.
- where and whenever possible, and to combat isolation, cartoonists must avail themselves of the protection of a trade association or union – whether for journalists and media workers, or for visual artists – and failing these join a dedicated membership organisation for cartoonists.
- cartoonists’ organisations should also make every effort to speak as one, and collaborate with press and artistic freedom organisations in advocating for and supporting cartoonists, in full recognition of their specificity.
- these organisations must endeavour to engage with governments, impressing upon them the nature of cartooning as an indicator of both truly free expression and a plural, independent and reliable press.

▼ Terry Anderson (United Kingdom)





◀ Ares  
(Cuba)

“ The culture of solidarity is important [because] people need to know that they’re not alone. There are others behind them that will support them. ”

Fahmi Reza (Malaysia)<sup>123</sup>

- governments must clarify the often vague legal texts and restrict the scope of certain repressive legal instruments in order to guarantee the protection and freedom of expression of cartoonists. They must recognise the unique nature of satire and respect international human rights instruments, such as the Addis-Ababa declaration for the recognition of press cartooning as a fundamental right.
- social media platforms must ensure that human beings cognisant of irony are put in charge of decision-making regarding pictorial content, to ensure that cartoons are not miscategorised as “hate speech” and moreover that cartoonists cannot be subjected to campaigns of politicised harassment. The same platforms must also work with the authorities to ensure full and transparent management of these phenomena.
- recognising that the numbers of displaced cartoonists will only continue to rise, any national or international effort advocating for cartoonists must make special provision for the needs of peers and colleagues made

refugees my crises overseas. To respond to the urgency of certain situations, the mechanism of artistic and journalistic residencies must be promoted and the organisations that offer them supported.

- finally, particular attention should be paid to the psychological impact of online hatred, censorship in its various forms, and exile on the cartoonists concerned. All these interconnected phenomena have a disastrous impact on the victims. Specific psychological support and a response to the recommendations listed here will help to reduce the harmful effects and encourage cartoonists to express themselves freely and in peace.

These arguments will carry even more weight if a quantitative analysis of the denuded state of cartooning can be presented. Hence, it is the priority of the authors to follow this brief narrative report with a further, more expansive, and analytical report in 2025.



▲ Lectrr (Belgium)

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▲ Joep Bertrams  
(The Netherlands)



▲ L'Andalou (Algeria)

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*Cartooning for Peace*  
Tel: +33 1 40 23 24 03  
Email: [contact@cartooningforpeace.org](mailto:contact@cartooningforpeace.org)

*Cartoonists Rights*  
Email: [info@cartoonistsrights.org](mailto:info@cartoonistsrights.org)