

BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL INERTIA AND SYSTEMIC VULNERABILITY: UNDERSTANDING INVISIBLE THREATS TO JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

Anda Rožukalne

Faculty of Social Sciences, Rīga Stradiņš University, Riga, Latvia
Conceptualisation, data curation, investigation, methodology, project administration,
supervision, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing

Alnis Stakle

Faculty of Social Sciences, Rīga Stradiņš University, Riga, Latvia
Conceptualisation, data curation, investigation, writing – original draft

Ilva Skulte

Faculty of Social Sciences, Rīga Stradiņš University, Riga, Latvia
Conceptualisation, data curation, investigation, writing – original draft

ABSTRACT

Research on journalists' safety reveals two intertwined dimensions: physical risks in conflict zones and less tangible risks to performance in comparatively safe environments. In Latvia, as elsewhere in Europe, journalists face online humiliation, harassment, hate speech, and attacks on their professional credibility. This raises two central questions: how do journalists perceive safety risks, and are media institutions equipped to provide adequate support? This paper examines the perceptions of Latvian media professionals regarding work-related safety issues and the mechanisms available to mitigate stress and risks. A mixed-methods design was applied, combining literature analysis, a two-round Delphi expert survey (25 and 23 participants from national and regional media, non-governmental organisations, and journalism-related organisations), eight semi-structured interviews with solicitors and media law specialists, case studies of court decisions, and three focus group discussions (with legal experts, media managers, and investigative journalists). The results highlight a complex threat environment in which multiple risks coexist, while support structures remain limited. Women, regional reporters, Russian-language journalists, and freelancers emerge as the most vulnerable groups, revealing safety risks shaped by both *group invisibility* — where their professional identities are insufficiently recognised — and *concerns of invisibility* — where persistent threats are normalised or dismissed. While institutional shortcomings are partly due to resource constraints and insufficient legal or psychological expertise, reluctance and reactive practices further weaken organisational responses. A lack of effective action from law enforcement and courts, combined with the rise of strategic lawsuits against public participation, reinforces a “culture of impunity”. A paradox emerges: online humiliation and harassment are omnipresent and thus routinised, making them effectively invisible despite their persistence. By contrast, cyberattacks and strategic lawsuits against public participation cases are highly visible, as they directly affect media companies' legal and financial interests. This asymmetry of visibility exacerbates the erosion of journalists' professional integrity and their societal role.

KEYWORDS

journalism safety risks, online harassment, strategic lawsuits against public participation, institutional theory, Latvia

ENTRE A INÉRCIA INSTITUCIONAL E A VULNERABILIDADE SISTÊMICA: COMPREENDER AS AMEAÇAS INVISÍVEIS À SEGURANÇA DOS JORNALISTAS

RESUMO

A investigação sobre a segurança dos jornalistas evidencia duas dimensões interligadas: os riscos físicos em zonas de conflito e os riscos menos tangíveis que afetam o desempenho em contextos considerados relativamente seguros. Na Letónia, como noutros países europeus, os jornalistas são alvo de humilhações online, assédio, discurso de ódio e ataques à sua credibilidade profissional. Perante este cenário, colocam-se duas questões centrais: quais são as perceções dos jornalistas relativamente aos riscos para a sua segurança? Estarão as instituições de média preparadas para prestar o apoio adequado? Este artigo analisa as perceções dos profissionais dos média letões relativamente a problemas de segurança associados ao trabalho e aos mecanismos disponíveis para mitigar o stress e os riscos. Foi seguida uma metodologia mista que integrou análise da literatura, um painel de Delphi em duas rondas a especialistas (25 e 23 participantes de média nacionais e regionais, organizações não governamentais e entidades ligadas ao jornalismo), oito entrevistas semiestruturadas com advogados e especialistas em direito dos média, estudos de caso de decisões judiciais e três grupos focais (com especialistas jurídicos, gestores de média e jornalistas de investigação). Os resultados revelam um ambiente de ameaças complexo, onde coexistem múltiplos riscos, mas as estruturas de apoio permanecem limitadas. Mulheres, repórteres regionais, jornalistas de língua russa e *freelancers* surgem como os grupos mais vulneráveis, enfrentando riscos de segurança influenciados tanto pela *invisibilidade de grupo* — quando as suas identidades profissionais não são devidamente reconhecidas — como pela *preocupação com a invisibilidade* — quando ameaças persistentes são normalizadas ou desvalorizadas. Embora algumas insuficiências institucionais resultem de restrições de recursos e da falta de competências jurídicas ou psicológicas, a relutância em agir e as práticas reativas fragilizam ainda mais as respostas organizacionais. A ausência de ação eficaz por parte das autoridades policiais e dos tribunais, a par do aumento das ações judiciais estratégicas contra a participação pública, reforça uma “cultura de impunidade”. Deste modo, emerge um paradoxo: a humilhação e o assédio online são onnipresentes e, por isso, normalizados, tornando-se efetivamente invisíveis apesar da sua persistência. Em contrapartida, os ciberataques e os processos estratégicos contra a participação pública são altamente visíveis, uma vez que afetam diretamente os interesses jurídicos e financeiros das empresas de média. Esta assimetria de visibilidade agrava a erosão da integridade profissional dos jornalistas e do seu papel social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

segurança no jornalismo, assédio online, ações judiciais estratégicas
contra a participação pública, teoria institucional, Letónia

1. INTRODUCTION

As security threats escalate, journalism is becoming increasingly uncertain and complex. Journalists' activities are more visible and accessible with modern communication, making them easier targets for various forms of attack (Miller & Lewis, 2022). Assaults and threats against journalists are shifting from areas affected by military conflicts to peaceful and prosperous countries (Baroni et al., 2022). The primary source of security threats is the online environment, both public and private, which regularly exposes journalists to harassment and violations of their professional identity and personal

integrity. Security threats affect the work of media professionals and influence the overall development of democracy in many societies.

The security situation for journalists in Latvia reflects broader European trends. According to the *Worlds of Journalism Study*, while killings or imprisonment are rare, about one-third of Latvian journalists have faced name-calling or public discrediting (Lauerer et al., 2025). *Worlds of Journalism Study* data show that 78% experienced humiliating or hate speech, 72% had their work publicly discredited, 14% faced harassment, 48% reported attacks on their professional integrity, 23% had their data misused, and 24% faced legal actions. Around 26% admit to self-censorship to avoid attacks, while 63% receive organisational support, yet 64% fear impunity for perpetrators.

Journalists enjoy high autonomy but report political and commercial pressures on editorial independence (Rožukalne & Skulte, 2024). Most are well-educated (81%) but poorly paid, with 52% earning below the national average. The workforce is predominantly female (66%).

The current security conditions for Latvian journalists are influenced by the securitisation of socio-political discourse and ongoing politicised attacks on professional journalists that create self-censorship, particularly following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Rožukalne et al., 2024), along with the geopolitical tensions that have arisen in response to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Latvia's geographical location and linguistically divided media audience (35% of the population is Rusophone; Juzefovičs & Vihalemm, 2020), along with the female composition of the journalistic workforce, present unique factors for expanding research on journalistic safety.

Based on the conceptual model of journalistic safety (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023) and institutional theory, this study aims to examine how Latvian media editors, journalists, and media managers perceive invisible challenges related to journalistic safety and what coping mechanisms media institutions and professional organisations develop to address security risk-related stress. Since visibility and invisibility in the social environment characterise the representation and intersections of power (Mohabeer, 2021), this perspective provides a valuable lens for explaining how journalists' safety risks are perceived as visible or invisible (Räber, 2023) by different stakeholders, including journalists, editors, media managers, non-governmental organisations and representatives of law enforcement institutions.

The following research questions (RQ) guide the study:

- RQ1: what are the foremost journalists' safety-related objective risks (objective manifestations of risks) and perceived risks (subjective awareness of risks; Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023) that remain invisible to actors and stakeholders involved in ensuring the safety of journalists in Latvia?
- RQ2: to mitigate journalists' security risks, what key problem-based responses are employed at the institutional (mezzo) level (media outlets, professional organisations, law enforcement institutions)?

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on the journalism safety model (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023) and institutional theory (Glynn & D'Aunno, 2023; Lowrey & Woo, 2010) to interpret data. Institutional theory, which views media as political and cultural institutions, enables the analysis of organisational and power influences on media behaviour and content (Napoli, 2014).

Journalistic safety is defined as “the extent to which journalists can perform work-related tasks without jeopardising their physical, psychological, digital, and financial integrity and well-being” (Slavtcheva-Petkova et al., 2023, p. 1214). Threats are distinguished between objective risks and perceived risks, and our study considers both, examining attacks, harassment, court cases, and institutional decisions to assess their impact on journalists’ ability to fulfil democratic functions.

We adapt the model to include physical, psychological, and legal risks, excluding individual financial risks, though organisational-level financial pressures from costly lawsuits are acknowledged. This approach captures risks at both the individual level — protecting journalists’ professional activities — and the institutional level — safeguarding the sustainability of media organisations. Institutional theory informs our analysis of risk perceptions and prevention mechanisms, highlighting how organisational culture and decisions shape understanding of safety risks and the measures implemented to mitigate them.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since journalism as a profession has become increasingly dangerous (Krøvel et al., 2023; Orgeret & Tayeebwa, 2020), it has been studied not only in relation to crises and wars (Høiby & Ottosen, 2019; Hoxha et al., 2024) but also as a systemic threat in relatively peaceful societies. The development of internet platforms has provided many new opportunities for journalists but has also created a public environment where they are attacked, harassed, and humiliated (Holton et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2020; Waisbord, 2024), particularly affecting women journalists (Chen et al., 2020; Posetti et al., 2021). Digital attacks on journalists are becoming an increasingly complex problem, driven by the actions of malicious actors who employ technologically sophisticated methods (Waisbord, 2022). Through politically motivated strategic and structural violence, these actors can challenge the foundational values of professional, ethics-based journalism (Mesquita & de-Lima-Santos, 2023), ultimately undermining its credibility and authority in the eyes of the public (Carlson, 2017). We argue that one of the most insidious threats to democracy and freedom of expression is the self-censorship practised by journalists and their sources, often triggered by perceived risks (Grøndahl Larsen et al., 2020). This study contributes to the broader discussion by examining how journalism interacts with other actors in the public communication environment — actors whose activities not only question journalism’s societal role but also pose a threat to the very boundaries of the profession and to the legitimacy of journalistic authority (Villagrán Sánchez & López Pan, 2024) as debated in meta journalism discourse.

3.1. THREATS TO THE SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

The World Press Freedom Index 2024 analysis (Reporters Without Borders, 2024) concluded that the independence and safety of journalists are most threatened by those who are supposed to protect them. When discussing the actors involved in journalistic security risks, high-level politicians and political communicators are frequently mentioned in studies. The communication campaigns of populist politicians and parties (Panievsky, 2022) employ various methods to target individual journalists and the media as a democratic institution. Journalists increasingly face attacks and threats from far-right politicians, but the situation varies from country to country (Baroni et al., 2022). Attacks target journalists investigating corruption, human rights, environmental crimes, drugs, political wrongdoing, other forms of organised crime, or engaging in investigative journalism. Since 2013, due to the rise of online communication, these attacks (verbal aggression, cyberattacks, physical assaults, and stalking) have become more visible and coordinated (Ferrier, 2018). A study which analysed data from 125 countries confirmed that journalists underestimate attacks in the digital environment and that these assaults become more dangerous when they transition to offline settings (Trappel & Tomaz, 2021).

Harassment and threats correlate with gender (47%), age (30%), ethnicity (6%), or sexual orientation (3%; Baroni et al., 2022), highlighting female journalists and media professionals who represent ethnic and sexual minorities as more vulnerable groups. Women in Belgium are significantly more likely to experience gender-related attacks (67% of women compared to 4% of men). In Denmark, journalists of both genders are increasingly facing assaults, though some violations go unrecorded. In Sweden, where the public broadcaster SVT has a cybersecurity team, journalists reportedly experience attacks an average of 35 times daily. In some instances, editorial offices have been evacuated after receiving threats.

Journalism students also acknowledged in the study that they had heard about the attacks but did not realise how frequent and hostile they were (Ivask, 2024). In the United States, disdain for the media is expressed through phrases like “fake news” or “lamestream media”, while in Germany, the term *Lügenpresse* (or “lying press”), known since the era of the Third Reich, has been used to demean journalists. This term has resurfaced in public discussions, particularly as German media began reporting on the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Koliska & Assmann, 2021).

3.2. TARGETING WOMEN JOURNALISTS

While all journalists face attacks both online and offline, women endure threats, discrimination, and harassment to a far greater degree (Chen et al., 2020). Nearly half (48%) of female journalists surveyed have experienced violence, and 44% have faced online harassment. They frequently encounter sexist comments that criticise, marginalise, stereotype, objectify, and threaten them based on gender or sexuality. Deepfakes and pornographic content are also weaponised against them. Assaults include threats of physical and sexual violence, sometimes extending to loved ones. Some women have faced

physical attacks following online threats (Posetti et al., 2021). In Ferrier's study (2018), two-thirds of female journalists reported online threats or attacks, with 40% ceasing to publish on specific topics as a result. Women often endure sexual harassment, which provokes anger but also fear, leading to feelings of shame and continued harassment (Miller, 2023).

The attacks experienced often become an individual issue for journalists, as only 25% of respondents have reported cases of online violence to their employers. One in 10 respondents has not received any response to their requests for assistance from their employer. Indecency, rudeness, and verbal aggression directed toward an individual represent a distinct form of sexualised and misogynistic hate speech, according to Maria Edström (2016). These attacks leave deep scars: mental health declines and self-censorship rise. Stress and decreased work quality create a hostile environment in newsrooms (Chen et al., 2020; Miller & Lewis, 2022).

3.3. REGULATION OF SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS AND LEGAL RISKS

In 2021, the European Commission (2021b) developed one of the most comprehensive documents concerning the protection and safety of journalists and media professionals in the European Union. The document outlines key principles that should be implemented in the practices of member states: impartial, independent, and timely investigations and prosecutions of all attacks on journalists; protection for investigative journalists and those working on sensitive topics who have reported threats; and exceptional support for female journalists, members of minorities, and their family members. Another essential document is the European Commission's directive to safeguard journalists and rights defenders against strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP; European Commission, 2021a), which aims to protect journalists and human rights defenders from strategic legal actions. SLAPP activities can create a so-called "chilling effect"; they are designed to limit the work of critical media outlets and drain their resources by forcing them into costly lawsuits (Liepa, 2023). The nature and extent of the impact of SLAPPs on journalism have not yet been sufficiently studied (Kerševan & Poler, 2023), while the "chilling effect" may relate to entirely different processes that are challenging to detect and measure. The deterrent effect is more commonly associated with criminal cases, which can lead to self-censorship, particularly in publications related to sensitive topics. A study evaluating the situation in Slovenia indicated that SLAPPs affect the entire media industry and the content available to the public (Kerševan & Poler, 2023). SLAPP activities demonstrate how legal tools intended to safeguard freedom of expression and regulate public actions can be used against journalists.

Media companies are relatively passive in implementing protection mechanisms. Collaboration with social media platforms to combat attackers and safeguard journalists is ineffective. However, governments must enhance the awareness of safety issues and relevant legal norms and provisions among police and prosecutors (Trionfi & Luque, 2019; Waisbord, 2022).

3.4. RESPONSES TO JOURNALISTS' SECURITY RISKS

Attacks on journalists can be prevented on at least two levels: supporting them in media editorial offices and highlighting the issue within media policy. The European Commission's (2020) European Democracy Action Plan includes recommendations for improving safety.

Journalists typically rely on the protection and support of their employers, but experiences vary widely, highlighting perceived areas of visibility and invisibility (Alloa, 2023) in terms of journalists' safety risks. In some countries, journalists have received guidelines for action, along with legal and psychological support (Baroni et al., 2022). Support networks should involve participants from media companies, governments, and non-governmental organisations (Kantola & Harju, 2023; Waisbord, 2022).

In the United Kingdom, media organisations have established anti-harassment measures, including privacy protections, blocking policies, and threat reporting mechanisms. In Sweden, all attacks on journalists are reported to the police by editorial offices and security consultants are engaged. In Belgium, journalists are required to undergo mandatory training in responding to threats and harassment. However, many media organisations only provide support after journalists have experienced harassment and attacks, while freelancers often lack institutional assistance (Baroni et al., 2022). Online and offline attacks increase stress and impact the quality of work (Miller & Lewis, 2022), leading to a negative assessment of working conditions.

4. METHODOLOGY: METHODS, THEIR INTERRELATIONS, DATA SETS

This research (conducted from September to December 2024) utilised a thorough mixed-methods strategy to explore the safety concerns of journalists in Latvia. The research design integrated literature analysis, a two-round Delphi expert survey, case study analysis of court decisions (Appendix A), semi-structured interviews (Appendix B, Table B1), and focus group discussions (FGD; Appendix B, Table B2, Table B3 and Table B4). This methodological triangulation enabled us to capture both breadth and depth in understanding the multifaceted challenges to journalist safety in contemporary Latvian media.

The initial phase involved analysing literature, secondary data, and recommendations from international institutions (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, European Parliament, Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) to identify key journalist safety issues. The findings from this analysis informed the development of subsequent research instruments.

The core of our empirical research utilised the Delphi method, a structured and intensive expert group inquiry technique designed to achieve a collective understanding of complex issues. As Linstone and Turoff (1975) note, the Delphi method is particularly suitable for investigating "complex and multidimensional questions" where expert opinions may significantly differ. This method typically involves "repeated surveys" in which experts provide assessments and comments, with participants allowed to review views "based on group feedback" after each round (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). During the survey, experts did not engage directly with one another; instead, they operated solely with aggregated data

from previous rounds. This approach fosters a clearer understanding of the topic and facilitates consensus on key issues.

The survey featured closed-response options for evaluating threats, complemented by open-comment sections for more detailed opinions and analyses. The first round of the Delphi survey included 25 respondents from national and regional Latvian media outlets (10 from regional media) and journalism-related organisations. The second round included 23 respondents with similar representation. As required by the Delphi method, the same experts participated in both rounds; however, in two cases, no responses were received in the second round.

The survey consisted of five categories, each containing multiple statements that respondents evaluated based on their professional experience and knowledge. Responses were analysed using quantitative measures for closed-ended questions and thematic analysis for open-ended comments. Conclusions from the first phase informed the design of the second phase, which consisted of three categories. Data from the Delphi survey served as the foundation for semi-structured interviews (Grisham, 2009; Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004) with eight experts, including solicitors and legal specialists in media regulation. The interviews underwent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with themes and sub-themes identified through coding. They explored solutions for implementing European Union recommendations in Latvia as well as possible regulatory modifications, with several focusing on SLAPP.

Using the case study method (Priya, 2021), we developed a framework to analyse five court decisions and related media discussions, identifying SLAPP characteristics. These findings guided the creation of interview and FGD questions and proposals for regulatory changes. Data from both Delphi phases, interviews, and European Commission recommendations were used to generate FGD scenarios. A total of 12 participants from diverse sectors, including lawyers, media managers, and investigative journalists, formed three focus groups. Discussions examined experiences of SLAPP and offered proposals to strengthen journalist safety and regulation.

4.1. DATA INTEGRATION AND ANALYSIS

Following data collection, we performed a comprehensive analysis of all methodological elements. This approach encompassed cross-method triangulation, iterative coding (involving the creation and refinement of coding frameworks through multiple reviews of qualitative data), stakeholder validation (presenting initial findings to key stakeholders to verify their accuracy and relevance), and contextual interpretation (situating the findings within the broader Latvian and European legal and media contexts).

5. JOURNALIST SAFETY SITUATION IN LATVIA — PROFESSIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

This subsection outlines the findings from the first and second rounds of the Delphi survey, which are contextually related to interviews conducted with three FGDs.

5.1. TYPES OF SAFETY PROBLEMS: ATTACKS, DEFAMATION, HARASSMENT, AND THREATS TO JOURNALISTS

The most significant categories highlighted by Latvian media professionals as problematic are public discrediting of journalistic work, threats made online and in person (often in private and work emails and various messaging applications), and offensive and hate speech directed against journalists' professional activities. Anonymous threats, the use of journalists' private data, and targeted disinformation attacks have become daily problems for many journalists. These types of threats negatively impact not only their professional condition but also their private lives, creating constant feelings of fear, pressure, and vulnerability.

Online attacks on journalists in Latvia typically follow two main patterns. First, populist political figures often portray professional media and journalists as sources of societal problems. Independent journalists seeking balanced reporting are targeted with defamation, online harassment, and threats, sometimes framed as undermining national security, particularly in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. Efforts to discuss geopolitical issues are occasionally misrepresented as support for the aggressor.

Second, journalists covering sensitive topics — such as ethnic relations, contested historical narratives, Russian propaganda, State language policy, human rights, minority protections, migration, and domestic violence — face personal attacks aimed at humiliating or discrediting them. These attacks generally involve violations of personal integrity and attempts to humiliate or discredit the journalist publicly: “to harm journalists, the media they represent, social networking sites, accounts, even publications are created. The police do not know how to act when they receive all kinds of complaints about the “damages caused” by journalists” (Delphi survey, Respondent 1, October 16, 2024). High-ranking politicians and officials frequently initiate delegitimising actions through public criticism or legal complaints (Rožukalne et al., 2024), while attacks from emotionally reactive members of the public are generally easier for journalists to manage.

Investigative journalists are disproportionately affected, as they often explore politically sensitive and complex topics in depth. These include investigations into political corruption, the accountability of public officials, and systemic challenges in social policy, such as healthcare access, the quality of education for minority groups, and the funding and dissemination of disinformation.

There are specific groups of journalists who are more vulnerable. Regional journalists are particularly susceptible to local pressure. They face limited legal resources and insufficient institutional support, which are worsened by funding limitations for essential protection measures.

Female journalists are disproportionately targeted by online harassment, which includes sexualised threats and gender-based intimidation aimed at discrediting them. The often-anonymous character of these attacks makes accountability challenging, severely affecting both their mental health and professional performance. The same is true for other minorities (sexual, ethnic, etc.). Political discrimination of journalism creates additional threat vectors, while Russian-language media professionals face intensified risks amid

current geopolitical tensions and securitisation of public discourse, including heightened exposure to hate speech on digital platforms. Also, freelancing journalists as a group are less protected, since they are not clearly included in systemic protection models.

5.2. INDIVIDUAL VERSUS ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS

Media organisations play a vital role in protecting journalists from increasing physical and digital threats. While newsrooms typically offer support after incidents, such assistance often falls short against adversaries with more resources, revealing gaps in editorial strategies and legal safeguards. Organisational involvement is particularly significant when publications initiate legal action. Most media outlets have established protection frameworks, and legal representation is usually available; however, authorities often choose not to investigate complaints of defamation, threats, or harassment. Effective protection frameworks should include financial, legal, and psychological support, especially after physical violence, conflict reporting, or ongoing threats, requiring organised editorial protocols to ensure both safety and recovery.

Expert analysis indicates that journalists' personal traits and organisational capabilities are crucial for safety. Colleagues frequently provide primary support, yet journalists often hesitate to ask for help, fearing it may worsen the situation. This can lead to avoidance, silence, or a reduced digital footprint, frequently associated with professional burnout and a decreased motivation to seek legal remedies. While professional organisations raise awareness of systemic threats, they cannot provide direct protection, leaving journalists to seek help mainly when threats also impact their family members.

Journalists who participated in the study acknowledged that prolonged harassment had led them to avoid topics that could provoke further attacks. Many confessed to feeling partially silenced and resorting to self-censorship as a coping mechanism. This tendency is further supported by accounts from editors and news producers, who reported instances where it was not possible to fully prepare news programmes because journalists chose not to cover specific topics. In some cases, high-level experts also declined to provide commentary on sensitive issues, limiting the scope of journalistic reporting. Meanwhile, media managers who strive to support their editorial staff recognise that they are not always able to detect self-censorship in the work of individual journalists.

These trends present significant dangers. Avoidant behaviours contribute to self-censorship, which erodes the freedom of expression vital to journalism. Moreover, burnout reflects a drain on psycho-emotional resources. This situation, along with insufficient organisational safeguards, perpetuates impunity for wrongdoers.

5.3. STRATEGIC LAWSUITS AGAINST PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Experts concur that investigative journalists can anticipate potential SLAPP cases, while also acknowledging that prolonged litigation can have a negative impact on employer-employee relations. In Latvia, eventual SLAPP cases are characterised as protracted

and financially burdensome, prompting media organisations to gradually abandon topics carrying litigation risk. Institutional actors usually drive these initiatives (Ostrovskis, 2023).

The cases analysed about possible SLAPP features (Liepa, 2023) mainly concern freedom of expression and the scope of restrictions on these rights. The majority of claims are filed for defamation of honour and dignity. When analysing the profile of the plaintiffs, each of them (except for the individual case of a journalist regarding online harassment) is characterised by a resource of power that could be significantly greater than the resources of the media outlet. Two aspects mostly correspond to the features of SLAPP — the disproportionate amount of the requested compensation (Case 2: Opera and Ballet Theatre *vs* Tvnet, compensation amount €129,873) and the duration of the proceedings (e.g., seven years, five years), which creates an additional burden, requiring the defence of the media organisation over several years and in several court instances. Regarding the high cost of legal proceedings, the media law expert involved in the study noted that “even when a media organisation wins a case after several years, it ultimately loses financially, as Latvian legislation does not provide full compensation for court expenses” (Informant A). In several cases (1, 2, 3, 4), the conflicts assessed indicate that the coverage of socially significant issues, particularly those that are controversial and sensitive, may be constrained, revealing a “deterrent effect” and reducing media pluralism.

These cases involve topics that shape the political agenda and can be considered polarising or potentially threatening to the rule of law and societal security. For example, the legality of actions taken by insolvency administrators (Cases 1 and 4; both come as a reaction to investigative articles series); the consequences of Putin-led Russia’s cultural influence in Latvia (Case 2); and the interpretation of painful episodes in Latvian history by a politician aiming to appeal to Latvia’s Russophone minorities during a live media broadcast (Case 3). The potential SLAPP cases examined in this study were initiated by powerful actors: an insolvency administrator serving as a public official (Case 1), members of the National Opera and Ballet’s board (Case 2), a judge (Case 4), and the National Electronic Mass Media Council (Case 3), whose strict sanctions against media organisations may signal an institutionalised form of SLAPP.

The study participants paid special attention to the practice of the National Electronic Mass Media Council in initiating administrative cases regarding media content, demanding the highest possible fines, referencing a recent case (e.g., NEEMC *vs* Tvnet regarding a live interview; Kreijere, 2024) as an example. This is one of several cases where the media regulatory body is observed acting like SLAPP cases and using its power against a media organisation. This and other cases led to experts’ recommendations to create a SLAPP case monitoring system in Latvia and to develop guidelines for assessing claims against the media by identifying SLAPP features before the case is considered.

When assessing the possibilities for a journalist to take legal action, the analysis reveals conflicting assessments from different court instances regarding the same circumstances, laying the groundwork for case law on the harassment of journalists in the online environment. This also demonstrates that journalists must defend their rights without their employer’s support. Secondly, it is unclear to what extent the professional duties of

the journalist have been considered during the examination of the case. The situation assessed in this case exemplifies a “culture of impunity” (Alley, 2010; Mitchell, 2025; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2012a, 2012b), highlighting the risk that public harassment of journalists may compromise their professional performance.

All lawyers involved in the study have observed that in Latvia, there is a lack of understanding of the nature of SLAPP in the professional environment, no appropriate regulation, and no professional discussions about such cases. Considering the process of implementing the European Union SLAPP directive, it is necessary to assess which national legal acts that apply to national-level court proceedings should introduce requirements for SLAPP.

All the lawyers could name several cases in their practice that show signs of SLAPP.

Informant 2: “how it manifests itself: completely unfounded claims; no proof that harm has been caused” (October 19, 2024).

A significant feature of SLAPP is the multiple claims or threats that often arise in practice when initiating a new claim for a journalist’s latest publication, particularly when considering an existing claim.

Informant 3: “strategic litigation in civil cases would be worth clarifying how the court acts if the same person repeatedly addresses one journalist” (October 8, 2024).

Legal experts believe that the existing regulation is generally sufficient and that minor amendments and additions are needed rather than significant changes.

5.4. PROTECTION FRAMEWORKS AND PROTECTION PROBLEMS

Experts’ analysis underscores the equal significance of systematic harassment and challenges to journalists’ moral legitimacy. The increasing frequency of sustained harassment manifests in multiple forms: surveillance practices, stalking behaviours, non-consensual information sharing, and threats that traverse both physical and digital environments. The psychological consequences of such sustained harassment illustrate longitudinal impacts of considerable importance.

During the FGD with media managers and journalists, criticism of law enforcement institutions’ work was mentioned in connection with numerous cases known in the professional environment, where journalists’ repeated applications regarding harassment and hate speech on the internet were not considered a basis for initiating an investigation. This has created distrust of media professionals in law enforcement institutions. There is a perception among journalists that the police mostly do not react to such signals at all or react situationally. Both journalists and interviewed lawyers interpret passivity and disinterest as stemming from the lack of police officers and the overload of police officers, as well as a lack of understanding of the journalists’ work, which would allow for the precise identification and classification of law violations.

A journalist offered this important critique regarding institutional obstacles:

let us be honest, a police officer with 600 cases has no time for journalistic submissions and registers them, puts them aside and waits for the statute of limitations to expire. That is the reality. Every specific problem needs a “Rusiņš” [sadistic murderer] case for something to move forward. Applying the law requires much detail, and there is no time for that. (Informant 2, October 21, 2024)

The overload and lack of staff were also acknowledged in the interview by a representative of the State police: “the reality is that there is a shortage of police officers and many work overtime and are on the verge of burnout”. In such a situation, “there is no time to think about whether this is a journalist” (Informant 8, October 24, 2024).

These explanations indirectly suggest that both parties involved have agreed to disregard the issue of journalist safety as worthy of serious consideration or solution. Moreover, journalists claim that police even hinder their work:

in our practice, we have experienced only threats. The State police very clearly hinders journalists from performing their work duties. In general, control over journalistic materials is too great and mostly unjustified; it is carried out by officials and services, not by seeking a solution as to what can be revealed and how, but simply by not disclosing information. (Delphi survey, Respondent 2, October 21, 2024)

The one problem is the inability to understand the role of journalists and their professional work. Experts advocate for customised training for law enforcement and judiciary officials to enhance journalist protection and establish targeted regulations. Widespread scepticism surrounds the effectiveness of existing regulatory frameworks, particularly concerning the quality of their implementation.

This highlights the need to develop a collaborative protection model. To create an effective system of protection, some propose developing a national contact point (NCP) focused on journalist safety (jam, 2024) to monitor incidents and facilitate information exchange with relevant organisations. Experts emphasise the importance of legal counsel and mental health support for media workers facing safety challenges.

However, to date, NCP plans mainly coordinate legal assistance, oversee programs to prevent online attacks and offer safety consultations. An immediate response function for urgent aid is considered crucial. Experts emphasise that effective implementation requires collaborative partnerships between non-governmental organisations, professional associations, and state institutions.

Assisting vulnerable journalists entails a range of diverse strategies, including tailored support programs, free legal consultations, security training, quick response systems, mentoring initiatives, psychological support, and a deeper institutional awareness of the unique needs of minority journalists.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the journalist safety landscape in Latvia, contextualising local findings within broader European and global trends. The triangulated methodological approach reveals that Latvian journalists face threats similar to those of their European counterparts but with distinctive characteristics shaped by the regional socio-political environment.

6.1. INVISIBLE CONVERGENCE OF PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL THREATS

Our research highlights a worrisome overlap of traditional and new threat vectors targeting journalists in Latvia. While physical safety continues to be a significant concern, especially for investigative journalists and those tackling sensitive issues, digital harassment has surfaced as a widespread and increasingly sophisticated attack method. This shift aligns with international trends observed in earlier studies (Baroni et al., 2022; Miller & Lewis, 2022) but exhibits unique regional characteristics in Latvia. The significant connection between online threats and their offline equivalents — demonstrated by the case of investigative journalism centre RE: Baltica journalist (*Žurnālistes Sprinģes Vajāšanā Apsūdzētajam Sondaram Piespriests Cietumsods*, 2022), where online harassment escalated to physical intimidation — illustrates how digital platforms can incubate more severe forms of aggression. This consistency suggests systemic, transnational factors play a role in journalist intimidation rather than purely local concerns. However, the increased vulnerability of local media workers in Latvia to pressure from local municipalities underscores how local power dynamics can amplify global threats, creating additional risks for journalists across various regions in Latvia.

6.2. GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF HARASSMENT

The stark gender gap in harassment experiences is a vital finding that aligns with global research (Chen et al., 2020; Ferrier, 2018; Posetti et al., 2021). In Latvia, female journalists face disproportionate targeting through gendered and sexualised attacks designed not only to intimidate but also severely undermine their professional credibility. This trend reflects broader societal gender biases but is particularly pronounced in journalism due to the profession's high public visibility. Interestingly, while Latvian media comprises more women (Šulmane & Uzule, 2018), this creates a paradox where a female-majority field still grapples with gender-based harassment. This situation indicates that increased female representation in the workforce does not guarantee fair treatment or safety. Gendered harassment against female and minority journalists is rooted in social and cultural biases and is therefore often invisible to institutions and the public. It underscores the urgent need for gender-sensitive protective measures that consider both the frequency of incidents and the specific nature of the threats that women journalists encounter.

6.3. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE DEFICIENCIES

Our analysis reveals notable differences between the theoretical models for journalist protection and their actual implementation in Latvia. Despite extensive European guidelines and recommendations (Council of Europe, 2020, 2023; European Commission, 2021a, 2021b), the protection mechanisms accessible to journalists in Latvia remain insufficient. There is institutional inertia (Maijanen et al., 2019) among various actors involved in assessing digital threats and developing coping mechanisms. This increases the impact of these risks, particularly by fostering psychological risks that involve self-censorship.

Data indicates that law enforcement frequently opts not to investigate complaints about defamation, threats, or harassment aimed at journalists. This creates a culture of impunity. This gap in implementation exposes broader issues in translating supranational directives into effective national protection systems. The inconsistent enforcement of existing legal frameworks suggests that the challenge may arise more from institutional attitudes regarding journalist safety and freedom of expression rather than regulatory deficiencies. Experts stress the need for specialised training for law enforcement and judiciary personnel, recognising that protection frameworks require appropriate legal instruments and cultural and attitudinal transformations within the implementing institutions.

6.4. STRATEGIC LAWSUITS AGAINST PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AS AN EMERGING THREAT VECTOR

Identifying SLAPP as a significant concern in the Latvian media landscape, particularly for investigative journalists, aligns with the growing European awareness of this threat. Our finding that eventual SLAPP cases in Latvia are characterised by prolonged and financially burdensome litigation suggests that these legal mechanisms serve primarily as resource-depleting deterrents rather than genuine legal remedies, consistent with international characterisations (Liepa, 2023; Verza, n.d.). Experts' contrasting views on SLAPP prevalence and impact likely stem from the differing circumstances of regional versus national media. Regional outlets tend to do less investigative journalism on sensitive topics, showcasing how vulnerability to SLAPP varies within the media landscape — journalists who focus on holding powerful entities accountable face heightened risks.

6.5. ORGANISATIONAL PROTECTION CAPACITY

The data highlights the complex interplay between individual and organisational factors in journalist protection. While media organisations generally provide support post-attack, this assistance often proves inadequate against adversaries possessing superior resources and capabilities. The finding that journalists prioritise support from

colleagues while taking individual responsibility for managing post-attack consequences reflects a professional culture that regards exposure to threats as a standard aspect of the job. This routine acceptance of threats, coupled with limited organisational resources, often discourages journalists from seeking help and fosters self-limiting behaviours that undermine both their autonomy and the quality of their work. Moreover, the tendency to request support only when threats extend to family members sets a troubling threshold for intervention, leaving journalists vulnerable to persistent low-intensity harassment designed to remain below that threshold while still exerting a deterrent effect.

6.6. TOWARD INTEGRATED PROTECTION FRAMEWORKS

Our findings show that the visibility and invisibility of journalists' safety risks are hierarchical, reflecting power relations and their dynamics (Mohabeer, 2021). Invisibility primarily concerns professional identities that remain insufficiently recognised by law enforcement institutions. Police officers and prosecutors often do not regard journalists as a distinct professional group requiring protection; thus, they request more precise definitions and guidelines to recognise journalists. Moreover, the boundary between journalistic and non-journalistic communicators has become invisible, as transformations in the media ecosystem and media usage patterns no longer sustain the visibility of journalists' professional integrity.

This invisibility operates in two areas (Alloa, 2023). First, as an invisible professional group, journalists' integrity is often overlooked, and threats such as online harassment are not recognised as disruptions to professional activity. Second, there is the invisibility of concerns, where stalking, harassment, and intimidation are normalised. By contrast, SLAPP cases and potential cyberattacks are more visible to media executives, as they directly affect organisational resources and reputations. Far less visible are journalists' own concerns about how persistent security threats undermine both their well-being and the quality of content provided to the public.

The findings indicate strong expert support for developing integrated protection frameworks that combine legal, psychological, and security dimensions. The proposed NCP for journalist safety (jam, 2024) could be a viable solution to coordinate these varied responses and reduce the current fragmentation of protection resources.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This study offers empirical evidence on the safety challenges faced by Latvian journalists, highlighting significant gaps in current protection frameworks. The threat environment is complex, encompassing professional, digital, legal, gender-related, and institutional vulnerabilities, often with inadequate support systems in place. However, many safety-related invisibilities arising from ongoing shifts in the media ecosystem remain undetected and are therefore difficult to address within policy and strategy discourse.

Key findings indicate that journalist safety in Latvia extends beyond physical safety, encompassing professional autonomy, mental well-being, legal safeguards, financial security, and digital protection. Existing protection measures are inconsistently applied, with institutional responses often failing to address the seriousness and complexity of risks. At-risk groups, including women, investigative and regional reporters, Russian-language media professionals, and freelancers, face heightened vulnerability, requiring targeted protection strategies.

The analysis reveals differences in perceptions of risks and responses across institutions. The media organisations generally acknowledge threats but tend to focus on legal and physical risks due to resource limitations, while their responses to digital threats remain fragmented and reactive. Law enforcement lacks clear definitions and procedures for assessing digital threats, leaving journalists feeling unprotected and showing that attackers often have a greater capacity to create risks than media professionals have to mitigate them. The findings underscore the need for a national journalist protection framework in Latvia, which should encompass preventative measures, rapid response capabilities, and ongoing support systems. Policy development must focus on specialised training for law enforcement and judicial personnel, as well as legal and psychological support for at-risk journalists, protection protocols for vulnerable groups, and mechanisms to monitor and counter SLAPP litigation. Media organisations should strengthen internal protection strategies through clear security protocols, staff training, and resource allocation for legal defence. Enhancing journalist protection is vital not only for individual safety but also for preserving the democratic role of independent journalism in a challenging information environment. Aligning Latvia's protection systems with European standards requires addressing both structural and perceptual gaps to ensure comprehensive, adequate safeguards.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study offers valuable insights into journalist safety in Latvia, but several methodological and conceptual limitations must be recognised. The Delphi survey may introduce selection bias, as it mainly includes journalists willing to discuss safety, while those who left the profession due to harassment are not represented. The study's duration limits observation of long-term changes in threats, especially in the rapidly evolving digital landscape. Additionally, the lack of standardised metrics for assessing SLAPP cases complicates cross-country comparisons. Future research should incorporate longitudinal studies, quantitative assessments of self-censorship, comparative analyses of Baltic protection frameworks, and evaluations of new legislation, such as the European Union Directive on SLAPP protection, to inform policy enhancements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study is funded by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, under service contract No. 2.5-15-2 (Ministry of Culture), and No. 3-L-9/43/2024 (Rīga Stradiņš University), dated August 23, 2024.

REFERENCES

- Alley, R. (2010). The culture of impunity: What journalists need to know about international humanitarian law. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 16(1), 78–95.
- Alloa, E. (2023). Invisibility: From discrimination to resistance. *Critical Horizons*, 24(4), 325–338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14409917.2023.2286865>
- Baroni, A., d'Haenens, L., & Lo, W. H. (2022). Protecting journalists from harassment: Comparing existing protection mechanisms and the effects on democracy. In J. Trappel & T. Tomaz (Eds.), *Success and failure in news media performance: Comparative analysis in the Media for Democracy Monitor 2021* (pp. 59–77). Nordicom. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855589-3>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Carlson, M. (2017). *Journalistic authority: Legitimizing news in the digital era*. Columbia University Press.
- Chen, G. M., Pain, P., Chen, V. Y., Mekelburg, M., Springer, N., & Troger, F. (2020). 'You have to have a thick skin': A cross-cultural perspective on how online harassment influences female journalists. *Journalism*, 21(7), 877–895. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918768500>
- Council of Europe. (2020). *How do we protect journalists and other media actors?* <https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/8283-how-to-protect-journalists-and-other-media-actors.html>
- Council of Europe. (2023). *How to protect journalists and other media actors? Extended*. <https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/11645-how-to-protect-journalists-and-other-media-actors-extended.html>
- Dalkey, N., & Helmer, O. (1963). An experimental application of the Delphi method to the use of experts. *Management Science*, 9(3), 458–467.
- Edström, M. (2016). The trolls disappear in the light: Swedish experience of sexualized hate speech in the aftermath of Behring Breivik. *International Journal for Crime, Justice, and Social Democracy*, 5(2), 96–106. <https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v5i2.314>
- European Commission. (2020, December 3). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Democracy Action Plan*. COM (2020) 790. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0790>
- European Commission. (2021a, April 11). *Protecting journalists and human rights defenders from strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs)*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/democracy-eu-citizenship-anti-corruption/democracy-and-electoral-rights/protecting-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders-strategic-lawsuits-against-public-participation_en

- European Commission. (2021b, September 16). *Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists*. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/recommendation-protection-safety-and-empowerment-journalists>
- Ferrier, M. (2018). *Attacks and harassment: The impact on female journalists and their reporting*. TrollBusters & International Women's Media Foundation.
- Glynn, M. A., & D'Aunno, T. (2023). An intellectual history of institutional theory: Looking back to move forward. *Academy of Management Annals*, 17(1), 301–330. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2020.0341>
- Grisham, T. (2009). The Delphi technique: A method for testing complex and multifaceted topics. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 2(1), 112–130. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538370910930545>
- Grøndahl Larsen, A., Fadnes, I., & Krøvel, R. (Eds.). (2020). *Journalist safety and self-censorship* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367810139>
- Høiby, M., & Ottosen, R. (2019). Journalism under pressure in conflict zones: A study of journalists and editors in seven countries. *Media, War & Conflict*, 12(1), 69–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635217728092>
- Holton, A. E., Bélair-Gagnon, V., Bossio, D., & Molyneux, L. (2021). “Not their fault, but their problem”: Organizational responses to the online harassment of journalists. *Journalism Practice*, 17(4), 859–874. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2021.1946417>
- Hoxha, A., Andresen, K., & Mulliqi, G. (2024). Solidarity, safety and journalism: Collaboration between Ukrainian and Kosovar journalists in times of war. *Journalism*, 26(4), 843–861. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849241303112>
- Ivask, S. (2024). Teaching safety of journalists: Student responses and solutions to occupational risks and hostility. *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, 79(3), 306–322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776958241248731>
- jam. (2024, December 4). *Aicina ziņot par naida runu un vajāšanu pret žurnālistiem un mediju darbiniekiem*. Latvijas Žurnālistu Asociācija. <https://latvijaszurnalisti.lv/aicina-zinot-par-naida-runu-un-vajasanu-pret-zurnalistiem-un-mediju-darbiniekiem/>
- Juzefovičs, J., & Vihalemm, T. (2020). Keeping channels open or screening out? The digital practices of Baltic Russian-speakers during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. *Russian Journal of Communication*, 12(3), 262–283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19409419.2020.1851454>
- Kantola, A., & Harju, A. A. (2023). Tackling the emotional toll together: How journalists address harassment with connective practices. *Journalism*, 24(3), 494–512. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884921105293>
- Kerševan, T., & Poler, M. (2023). Silencing journalists in matters of public interest: Journalists and editors assessments of the impact of SLAPPs on journalism. *Journalism*, 25(12), 2485–2503. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231210695>
- Koliska, M., & Assmann, K. (2021). Lügenpresse: The lying press and German journalists' responses to a stigma. *Journalism*, 22(11), 2729–2746. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919894088>
- Kreijere, D. (2024, April 11). *Sods medijām par nepietiekami precīzu un neitrālu informāciju. Saruna ar advokāti. LSM*. <https://lri.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/mediju-anatomija/sods-medijam-par-nepietiekami-precizu-un-neitralu-informaciju.-s.a190843/>

- Krøvel, R., Palumbo, F., & Orgeret, K. S. (2023). Introduction: Understanding roots and betweenness defining safety of journalists as a sub-field of research. Reading between the lines. *Journalism Studies*, 24(7), 825–837. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2206494>
- Lauerer, C., Grünwald, M., Hanitzsch, T., Godole, J., Zguri, R., Godole, B., Amado, A., Bongiovanni, M., Rotelli, N., Luque, F., English, P., Hanusch, F., Löhmann, K., Meier, R., Mitterstainer, R., Preibisch, K. D., Riedl, A., Seethaler, J., Standaert, O., ... Alakooa, A. (2025). *Worlds of journalism study wave 3 (2021-2024). Consolidated dataset* [Dataset]. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15280739>
- Lewis, S. C., Zamith, R., & Coddington, M. (2020). Online harassment and its implications for the journalist–audience relationship. *Digital Journalism*, 8(8), 1047–1067. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1811743>
- Liepa, L. (2023). *Iespējamās izmaiņas Latvijas Republikas tiesību aktos, kas sekmētu ES direktīvas priekšlikuma mērķu sasniegšanu Latvijā, paredzot mediju augstāku aizsardzību pret SLAPP pazīmēm atbilstošām tiesvedībām*. <https://ej.uz/juridatzinums>
- Linstone, H. A., & Turoff, M. (Eds.). (1975). *The Delphi method: Techniques and applications*. Addison-Wesley.
- Lowrey, W., & Woo, C. W. (2010). The news organization in uncertain times: Business or institution? *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 87(1), 41–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769901008700103>
- Maijanen, P., von Rimscha, B., & Głowacki, M. (2019). Beyond the surface of media disruption: Digital technology boosting new business logics, professional practices and entrepreneurial identities. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 16(3), 163–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2019.1700095>
- Mesquita, L., & de-Lima-Santos, M. F. (2023). Blurred boundaries of journalism to guarantee safety: Approaches of resistance and resilience for investigative journalism in Latin America. *Journalism Studies*, 24(7), 916–935. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2185078>
- Miller, K. C. (2023). The “price you pay” and the “badge of honor”: Journalists, gender, and harassment. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 100(1), 193–213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990221088761>
- Miller, K. C., & Lewis, S. C. (2022). Journalists, harassment, and emotional labor: The case of women in on-air roles at US local television stations. *Journalism*, 23(1), 79–97. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919899016>
- Mitchell, T. S. (2025). *Human rights, impunity and anti-press violence: How journalists survive and resist*. Taylor & Francis.
- Mohabeer, R. N. (2021). A method to analyse invisibility: Navigating the dissonance between woke and safe. *Current Sociology*, 70(7), 1031–1047. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921211017605>
- Napoli, P. M. (2014). Automated media: An institutional theory perspective on algorithmic media production and consumption. *Communication Theory*, 24(3), 340–360. <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12039>
- Okoli, C., & Pawlowski, S. D. (2004). The Delphi method as a research tool: An example, design considerations, and applications. *Information & Management*, 42(1), 15–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2003.11.002>
- Orgeret, K. S., & Tayebwa, W. (2020). Introduction: Rethinking safety of journalists. *Media and Communication*, 8(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i1.2873>

- Ostrovskis, T. (2023, May 23) *Kādēļ NEPLP sodīja TVNET ar 8500 eiro: Mediju un varas patiesās attiecības Latvijā*. TVNET. <https://www.tvnet.lv/7780378/kadel-neplp-sodija-tvnet-ar-8500-eiro-mediju-un-varas-patiesas-attiecibas-latvija>
- Panievsky, A. (2022). The strategic bias: How journalists respond to antimedia populism. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27(4), 808–826. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211022656>
- Posetti, J., Aboulez, N., Bontcheva, K., Harrison, J., & Waisbord, S. (2021). *Online violence against women journalists: A global snapshot of incidence and impacts*. ICFJ – UNESCO.
- Priya, S. P. (2021). Case study method of research. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 10(4), 324–328.
- Räber, M. (2023). Struggles over recognition under conditions of hypervisibility: Honneth, Rancière, and Ellison on the politics of perception. *Critical Horizons*, 24(4), 389–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14409917.2023.2286869>
- Reporters Without Borders. (2024). *2024 World press freedom index – Journalism under political pressure*. <https://rsf.org/en/2024-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-under-political-pressure>
- Rožukalne, A., Kažoka, A., & Siliņa, L. (2024). “Are journalists traitors of the State, really?” — Self-censorship development during the Russian–Ukrainian war: The case of Latvian PSM. *Social Sciences*, 13(7), Article 350. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13070350>
- Rožukalne, A., & Skulte, I. (2024). *Monitoring media pluralism in the digital era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the European member states and candidate countries in 2023. Country report: Latvia*. CMFP. <https://cadmus.eui.eu/server/api/core/bitstreams/36bc977a-45ac-5b65-895d-b8276b6f298e/content>
- Slavtcheva-Petkova, V., Ramaprasad, J., Springer, N., Hughes, S., Hanitzsch, T., Hamada, B., Hoxha, A., & Steindl, N. (2023). Conceptualizing Journalists’ safety around the globe. *Digital Journalism*, 11(7), 1211–1229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2162429>
- Šulmane, I., & Uzule, L. (2018). Latvijas žurnālisti un mediju darbinieki. In V. Zelče (Ed.), *Latvijas mediju vides daudzveidība* (pp. 93–116). LU Akadēmiskais Apgāds.
- Trappel, J., & Tomaz, T. (Eds.). (2021). *Success and failure in news media performance: Comparative analysis in the Media for Democracy Monitor 2021*. Nordicom.
- Trionfi, B., & Luque, J. (2019). *Newsroom best practices for addressing online violence against journalists: Perspectives from Finland, Germany, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom*. IPI.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2012a). *Implementation strategy 2013–2014: UN plan of action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity*. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/official_documents
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2012b). *UN plan of action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity*. <https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-actionsafety-journalists>
- Verza, S. (n.d.). *SLAPP: The background of strategic lawsuits against public participation*. European Centre for Press & Media Freedom. <https://www.ecpmf.eu/slapp-the-background-of-strategic-lawsuits-against-public-participation/>

- Villagrán Sánchez, Á., & López Pan, F. (2024). Beyond journalism about journalism?: Assessing the impact of metajournalistic discourse on journalism studies. *Journalism Studies*, 26(2), 161–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2024.2414349>
- Waisbord, S. (2022). Can journalists be safe in a violent world? *Journalism Practice*, 16(9), 1948–1954. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2022.2098524>
- Waisbord, S. (2024). Mob censorship: Online harassment of US journalists in times of digital hate and populism. In O. Westlund, R. Krøvel, & K. S. Orgeret (Eds.), *Journalism and safety* (pp. 30–46). Routledge.
- Žurnālistes Sprinģes Vajāšanā Apsūdzētajam Sondaram Piespriests Cietumsods. (2022, March 3). *DELFI*. <https://www.delfi.lv/news/national/criminal/zurnalistes-springes-vajasana-apsudzetajam-sondaram-piespriez-cietumsodu.d?id=54141874>

APPENDIX A

List of court cases analysed:

- Case 1: State official vs JSC “Cits Medijs” (publisher of the magazine *lr*);
- Case 2: National Opera and Ballet vs SIA “Tvnet”;
- Case 3: administrative case of National Electronic Mass Media Council vs SIA “TVNET GRUPA”;
- Case 4: State official, insolvency administrator claim against JSC “Cits Medijs”;
- Case 5: journalist vs private individual. ECLI:LV:RAT:2023:1031.C30375222.10.S.

APPENDIX B

This appendix provides information about the study informants, offering lists of semi-structured interviews (eight; Table B1) and focus group discussion (three; Table B2, Table B3 and Table B4) participants. The research participants are anonymised; their contribution is described in notes about their professional affiliation or position.

	PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATION/POSITION	INFORMANT NUMBER
1	Representative of the Ministry of Culture	Informant 1
2	Sworn lawyer 1	Informant 2
3	Sworn lawyer 2	Informant 3
4	Media lawyer	Informant 4
5	Prosecutor	Informant 5
6	Practising media lawyer	Informant 6
7	Representative of the ombudsman of the Republic of Latvia, lawyer	Informant 7
8	Representative of the State police	Informant 8

Table B1. List of informants for semi-structured, in-depth interviews

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 1 — EMPLOYEES OF THE LEGAL SERVICE OF MEDIA ORGANISATIONS OR EXTERNAL LEGAL CONSULTANTS		
1	Practising lawyer involved in media activities related to court cases	Informant A
2	Media organisation lawyer 1	Informant B
3	Media organisation lawyer 2	Informant C

Table B2. List of informants — participants in focus group discussion of legal professionals

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 2 — MEDIA MANAGERS, MEDIA PROJECTS' LEADERS		
1	Investigative journalist, investigative journalism project manager	Informant D
2	Regional media editor-in-chief, representative of the professional media organisation	Informant E
3	National media editor-in-chief	Informant F
4	News department manager	Informant G

Table B3. List of informants — participants in focus group discussion of media management representatives

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION 3 — NEWS AND INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS, EDITORS, PRODUCERS		
1	Investigative journalist, representing a national media outlet	Informant H
2	Analytical journalist, representing a national media outlet	Informant I
3	Investigative journalist	Informant J
4	Regional studio representative, producer	Informant K
5	Representative of the professional journalists' organisation	Informant L

Table B4. List of informants — participants in focus group discussion of media professionals

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Anda Rožukalne is a professor and senior researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Rīga Stradiņš University in Latvia. Rožukalne holds a doctoral degree in Media Sociology and has extensive experience as a journalist, editor, and scholar in the fields of mass communication, journalism, and media studies. Her fields of expertise include research of journalism, media and communication effects, media literacy, media regulation and self-regulation, and media audience studies. Since 2011, her research interests have focused on developing innovative, artificial intelligence-aided tools for audience and media research, including the Internet Aggressiveness Index. Rožukalne is the author of many educational and academic publications on various public communication issues, journalism, and media. She represents Latvia in the EC Media Pluralism Monitor, Euromedia Ownership Monitor and in the global *Worlds of Journalism Study*. Anda Rožukalne is one of the founders of the Association of Latvian Journalists, a member of the Latvian Media Ethics Council, and a member of Academia Europaea.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5474-4222>

Email: anda.Rozukalne@rsu.lv

Address: Rīga Stradiņš University, Faculty of Social Sciences, 16 Dzirciema str., Rīga, LV 1007, Latvia

Alnis Stakle is an assistant professor of Communication Studies at Rīga Stradiņš University. He teaches photography, visual content analysis, and visual literacy, and he is the author of several academic and peer-reviewed articles. His current research interests include visual culture, photojournalism, media literacy, and visual arts. As an artist specialising in photography, he critically explores visual representation themes such as collective and personal trauma, loss, memories, and the physicality of photography as a medium. Working both documentarily and conceptually, his works reveal how sociopolitical ideas can be explored through the interplay of fact and fiction, as well as collective and subjective experience.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0962-0076>

Email: alnis.stakle@rsu.lv

Address: Rīga Stradiņš University, Faculty of Social Sciences, 16 Dzirciema str., Rīga, LV 1007, Latvia

Ilva Skulte is an associate professor at the Faculty of Communication, Rīga Stradiņš University, Latvia. Her research interests include communication theories, media literacy, cultural journalism, analysis of media and political discourse, analysis of (literary) text and media as well as media literacy and children studies.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4589-6600>

Email: ilva.skulte@rsu.lv

Address: Rīga Stradiņš University, Faculty of Social Sciences, 16 Dzirciema str.,
Rīga, LV 1007, Latvia

Submitted: 29/03/2025 | Accepted: 03/10/2025



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