



#TheTruthWins: New RSF campaign turns lottery numbers into an access code for independent information

Amid Russia's unprecedented attacks on independent media accompanying its invasion of Ukraine, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is launching a new campaign in solidarity with journalists and media that are being subjected to digital repression. To mark the 2022 World Day against Cyber Censorship, "The Truth Wins" campaign will turn universally accessible national lottery numbers into an access code for independent journalism – offering audiences a creative way to circumvent government censorship.

"Even before the current invasion, Putin's regime had been massively extending government control over internet freedom in Russia. But what we're seeing now is an unprecedented assault: within just a few days, leading independent media have been blocked, journalists prosecuted, and telecommunications providers ordered to limit access to global online platforms," said Christian Mihr, Executive Director of RSF Germany.

It is not only in Russia that a repressive government is adapting its media censorship to the digital age. Turkey has also become a global leader of internet censorship, blocking thousands of news articles each year, as well as prosecuting journalists and citizens for their social media posts. Twitter, as a space of political debate and leading channel for online journalism, is under growing pressure as demands for the removal of content, [repressive social media laws](#), [temporary suspensions](#) and attempts to [throttle access to the platform increase](#).

Some political leaders are becoming increasingly personal in their attacks against journalists: they intimidate, threaten and defame those who dare to speak out, drowning out critical voices and forcing reporters to self-censor while at the same time employing these very same channels to spread disinformation. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's attacks are representative of this trend, which can also be observed in India and the Philippines.

With this new campaign, RSF aims to raise awareness of the disastrous impact of online media censorship and calls on global online platforms to resist state censorship in accordance with their corporate responsibility to uphold human rights. "The Truth Wins" uses Twitter, as a beleaguered online space, to highlight the threat to press freedom. To

outmaneuver government censors, the campaign takes advantage of a popular game that is certain to be in the news and is run by the very states we are targeting: national lotteries. National lottery numbers change regularly, are unpredictable, and are not censored in advance. By embedding the latest lottery numbers into the campaign's Twitter accounts and content and updating them regularly, we can always be a step ahead. The user simply types the latest lottery numbers into the Twitter search bar and “The Truth Wins” accounts will appear, showing independent news, censored news articles and first-hand accounts from leading journalists who have been targeted by their governments, including prominent figures such as Can Dündar (Turkey), human rights monitor *OVD Info*'s Denis Shedov (Russia), and Patrícia Campos Mello (Brazil). Information that has been censored is made accessible once more via a decentralized technology called Ethereum Name Service (ENS). With this system, articles are stored on blockchain-based archives in a peer-to-peer storage network – making them resistant to any kind of censorship. The campaign video is available [here](#).

“Particularly in times of crisis, access to independent journalism is essential. More than ever, we need to fight for the right to seek and share information online. Civil society, governments and tech platforms all share responsibility for guaranteeing this right”, Christian Mihr stressed.

Russia

The extent to which control over access to information in social networks and online media has become a battleground in modern-day conflicts is becoming particularly obvious in [Russia's war against Ukraine](#).

With draconian laws, website-blocking, internet cuts and leading news outlets throttled out of existence, the pressure on independent media [has grown steadily in the past ten years](#). As the major TV channels continue to inundate viewers with propaganda, the climate has become very oppressive for those who question the new patriotic and neo-conservative discourse. Vague and discriminatory laws have been used to imprison journalists and bloggers.

The Kremlin seems determined to control the internet, a goal referred to as the establishment of a “sovereign internet”. Journalists are branded as “foreign agents,” a defamatory label already applied to a number of media outlets and leading media freedom NGOs. Crimea (annexed by Russia in 2014), and Chechnya have become “black holes” from which little news or information emerges. Murders of journalists and physical attacks against them continue to go unpunished, and there are numerous instances of their being arrested on trumped-up charges. The website of human rights monitor [OVD Info, featured in this campaign, was blocked in December 2021](#). “Journalists in Russia are facing criminal prosecution, harassment, threats and physical attacks. Many have had to leave the country and go into exile”, states Denis Shedov, a lawyer, data analyst and human rights activist working for *OVD Info*. Click the following link to go to the Russian Twitter channel: <https://russia.thetruthwins.eth.link>

RSF also provides an overview of trustworthy independent information sources through an Ethereum blockchain link [here](#).

Turkey

For Turkish journalists, the risk of imprisonment and the fear of being subjected to judicial harassment is ever-present. The government controls 90% of the national media by means of regulators, while government officials employ clearly discriminatory practices to marginalize and criminalize media that are critical of the regime. Turkey's military operations along the border with Syria and in the Idlib region, its military intervention in Libya, its political manipulation of the Syrian refugee crisis, and its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic have all been used to reinforce its authoritarian policies toward critical media and its use of the judicial system for political ends. In this "New Turkey", internet censorship has reached unprecedented levels. New social media legislation passed in 2020 imposes sanctions including fines and a reduction in bandwidth on platforms that fail to appoint a legal representative in Turkey and to execute orders for censorship imposed by Turkish courts. The Turkish digital rights NGO *İFÖD* has documented [hundreds of cases of individual media outlets being forced to remove news articles](#).

Can Dündar is a Turkish journalist and former editor-in-chief of the oppositional newspaper *Cumhuriyet*. Dündar was arrested in November 2015 for his report on arms deliveries by the Turkish secret service to Islamists in Syria. He has been living in exile in Germany since 2016. There is still an arrest warrant against him in Turkey. "Unfortunately, Turkey has become one of the biggest jailers of journalists in the world, and many media companies are under the control of Erdogan and his government", Dündar says. The Turkish Twitter channel is available via the following link: <https://turkey.thetruthwins.eth.link>

Brazil

Some media outlets are "worse than garbage because garbage is recyclable." This was just one of President [Bolsonaro's many verbal sallies](#) against the press. Faced with increasingly bad news about the Covid-19 pandemic's impact in Brazil, the president opted to go on the offensive and scapegoat the media. These hostile comments echo a broader strategy of silencing critical journalists and media through systematic harassment. Social media, and Twitter in particular, are the main channels used by the "Bolsonaro system", which includes the President, government ministers, and some of the president's family members. Constant insults, false accusations, fake profiles created to discredit journalists, and the publication of private information have become part of everyday life for many well-known journalists. Women are particularly exposed to these threats. [Female journalists experience twice as many attacks](#), a [recent study of 200 Twitter profiles](#) by Revista AzMina, InternetLab and others found.

Patrícia Campos Mello, a veteran journalist with the *Folha de São Paulo* daily newspaper and former war reporter, is one of the favorite targets of the "Bolsonaro system". "Censorship by noise" is how Campos Mello described the Brazilian government's strategy in the 2021

Reuters Memorial Lecture. “To be a journalist in Brazil today is to be the target of a hate machine,” she said. The Brazilian Twitter channel is available via the following link:

<https://brazil.thetruthwins.eth.link>

Projects to circumvent cyber censorship

After the success of “The Uncensored Library” campaign, RSF has found another loophole to circumvent cyber censorship. The Uncensored Library was opened on World Day Against Cyber Censorship 2020. It is the first digital library for press freedom and uses the world’s most popular online computer game, Minecraft, as a back door for disseminating the censored articles of journalists in their home countries.

With the launch of the new campaign, the website www.the-truth-wins.com will also go online. All [donations](#) collected via the campaign website will go directly into RSF projects that aim to circumvent internet censorship, for example, by mirroring news websites that are blocked in Russia.

All content on the Twitter channels is available in English and the native language of the respective journalists. Over the next few months, the three Twitter channels will be regularly updated with independent information.