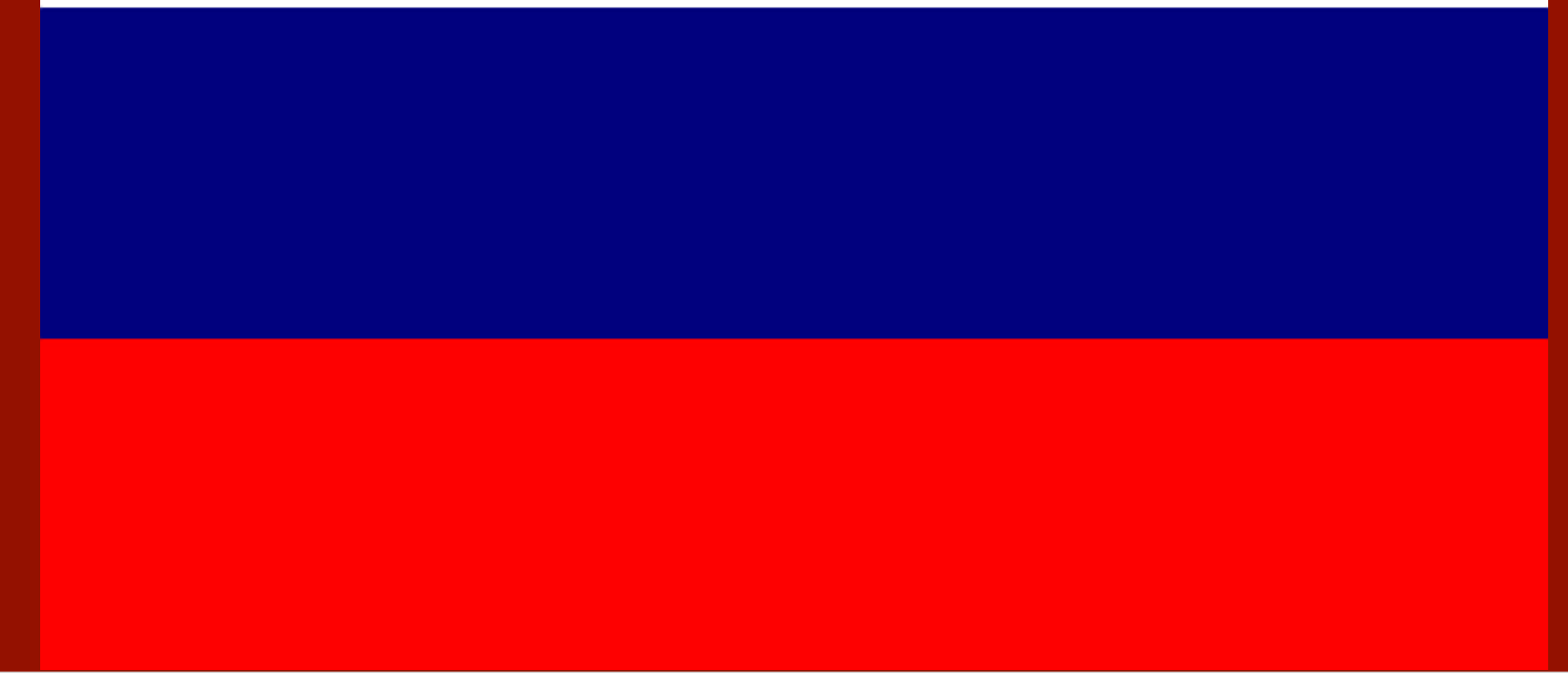


**EASTERN
CONNECTICUT
STATE UNIVERSITY**

Violations of Journalists' Rights in Russia

Katherine Kneser, Biochemistry
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Niti Pandey



Introduction

Journalistic freedom is an important standard of free society. The Russian Federation began the transition to a democratic society in the early 1990s, with the fall of the Soviet Union. Despite initial legislative changes, the freedoms promised by the signing of the European Convention on Human Rights are not reflected in Russian society. Under the current president, Vladimir Putin, journalists' who investigate or publish anything deemed anti-governmental are targeted. Challenges of censorship face every media publication and journalists for "controversial" publications face severe financial burden. Additionally, these journalists face the threat of imprisonment and physical attacks as well. Between 1992 and 2020, at least 58 Russian journalists have been murdered as a result of their job and an additional 7 journalists have been reported missing. Despite having no internal conflict, Russia remains one of the most dangerous countries for those who work in media. This project aims to examine how journalists' rights are being challenged in Russia.

Journalists Attacked in Russia, 1992 - 2020

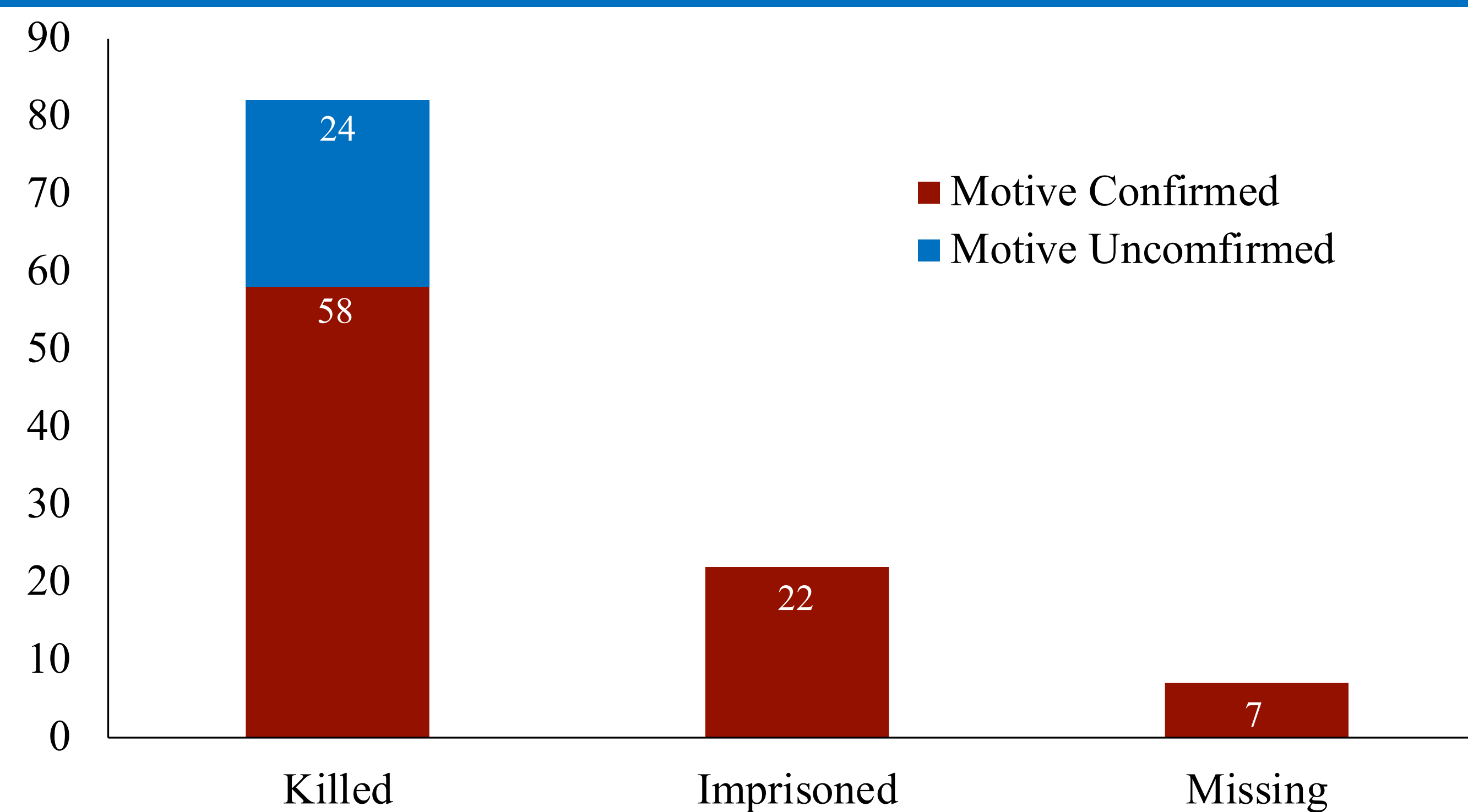


Fig 1. Data from the Committee to Protect Journalists.

Organizations Working to Aid Journalists

International
Federation of
Journalists

UNESCO

Reporters
Without
Borders

European
Convention on
Human Rights

Committee to
Protect
Journalists

Union of
Russian
Journalists

Legislation and Policies Concerning Journalists

International Legislation

- European Convention on Human Rights
 - Article 10: (1) Freedom of expression, (2) Limitations of this freedom regarding interests of national security, public safety, protection of the rights of others

Federal Legislation

- Constitution of the Russian Federation
 - Article 15: (4) International law must be present in federal law, and when it conflicts, the international law stands
 - Article 29: (1) Freedom of speech, (2) prohibition of propaganda, (3) freedom of mass media, (4) freedom to seek/receive information (by any legal means), (5) prohibition of censorship
- Criminal Code of the Russian Federation
 - Article 128: Criminal defamation
 - Article 283: Disclosure of State Secrets
- Russian Mass Media Law
 - Prohibits state censorship
- Internet Blacklist Law
 - Allows for government censorship of internet content, including content that "violates the established order", "incites hatred", "demonstrates clear disrespect" towards the Russian Federation
- "Foreign Agents" Bill
 - Any person publishing any media and receiving funding from a foreign organization or individual must register as a "foreign agent"

"We are common people but my murdered colleagues did something exact and painful for society... If you can be killed because you do something very important, then it is very needed."

- Nadezhda Prusenkova

Head of Press Service, *Novaya Gazeta*

Challenges Journalists Currently Face

- Several levels of censorship
 - State (overt and covert methods)
 - Publication owners
 - Self-censorship
- Financial struggles
 - Independent "controversial" publications face major fines for reporting on specific topics or points of view
 - Delay in journalists getting their wages
- Harassment of journalists who publish "alternative" views
- Imprisonment
- Physical attacks
 - Many journalists have been robbed, beaten, kidnapped, murdered
- Lack of police or government aid



Fig 2. Protest in Moscow demanding internet freedom, April 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/world/europe/russia-foreign-agents-law.html>

Conclusion and Recommendations

Under the current government, Russian journalists are faced with severe censorship, impairing their ability to report openly on issues and conflicts concerning the general public. Although the Russian Constitution (1993) ensures the common rights of journalists, these rights are solely on paper and have failed to be put into action. The use of vague terminology and definitions in legislation prevent a uniform application of these rights, especially in smaller judicial systems. In addition, Putin continues to pass amendments reversing much of the progress that had been made. As law enforcement remains loyal to the Kremlin, there is low motivation to truly investigate crimes against journalists. Since these violations are coming from the government, reform will likely have to be encouraged by outside organizations (as listed previously). These organizations must remain vigilant of the current violations and attacks on Russian journalists, as well as pressure the Russian government to repeal the strict censorship bills passed under Putin's regime. Furthermore, these journalist unions should continue to educate and foster true independent journalism, giving aid to publications as much as they are able. Until the media in Russia truly experiences these freedoms, the Russian Federation will not be a truly democratic society.

References

- Azhgikhina, N. (2007). The struggle for press freedom in Russia: Reflections of a Russian journalist. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59(8), 1245-1262.
- Beschastna, T. (2013). Freedom of Expression in Russia as it Relates to Criticism of the Government. *Emory Int'l L. Rev.*, 27, 1105.
- Committee to Protect Journalists. (2020). Russia. Retrieved from <https://cpj.org/europe/russia/>
- Matsnev, O. (2019, April 11). Kremlin Moves Toward Control of Internet, Raising Censorship Fears. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/world/europe/russia-internet-censorship.html>
- Slavtcheva-Petkova, V. (2019). Fighting Putin and the Kremlin's grip in neo-authoritarian Russia: The experience of liberal journalists. *Journalism*, 20(11), 1530-1546.
- Thomson Reuters Foundation. (2016, August 9). Media Regulation in Russia: A Landscape Analysis of Laws and Trends. Retrieved from <https://www.trust.org/publications/i/?id=4798c68a-eed1-4660-b7e9-fc16a0032cc9>
- Troianovski, A. (2019, December 2). In Russia, an Updated Law With New Restrictions on Freedom of Speech. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/world/europe/russia-foreign-agents-law.html>