



## City Research Online

### City, University of London Institutional Repository

---

**Citation:** Scott, M., Bunce, M. & Myers, M. (2020). Shining a Spotlight on Media Freedom: Media Coverage of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom. London, UK: [pressfreedom.co.uk](http://pressfreedom.co.uk).

This is the published version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

---

**Permanent repository link:** <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/25161/>

**Link to published version:**

**Copyright:** City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

**Reuse:** Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

---

---



# Shining a spotlight on media freedom?

Media coverage of the Global  
Campaign for Media Freedom

**Martin Scott, Mel Bunce, Mary Myers**



# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. The big picture: Media coverage of media freedom</b>	<b>8</b>
Volume of coverage	8
Changes over time	10
Concentrated coverage	11
<b>2. Media coverage of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom</b>	<b>13</b>
Volume of coverage	13
Focus of coverage	14
Coverage of individuals, countries and institutions	17
<b>Appendix: Boolean search terms</b>	<b>22</b>
References	26

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This **report** assesses the **extent** to which the GCMF has achieved its first aim – to **raise** the **profile** of **media freedom**.

The Global Campaign for Media Freedom (GCMF) was launched in 2019 by the UK and Canadian governments. It includes a coalition of 37 countries seeking to promote media freedom, a High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom and a Global Media Defence Fund, administered by UNESCO.

The overarching goals of the GCMF are to: 1) shine a global spotlight on the issue of media freedom and 2) increase the costs for those who attack media freedom (FCO 2019a).

This report assesses the extent to which the GCMF has achieved its first aim – to raise the profile of media freedom. It analyses online, English-language news coverage and social media commentary of media freedom generally, and the activities of the GCMF specifically, from July 2019 to July 2020.

We find that:

1. In its first year, the GCMF has helped to shine a spotlight on media freedom, generating a significant amount of new, online, English-language news coverage and social media commentary. Notably, it generated more attention than most other international media freedom initiatives.
2. However, this spotlight was fleeting. Media attention was primarily focussed on the inaugural Global Media Freedom Conference in London in July 2019. The GCMF's other initiatives generated very little online news coverage.
3. The GCMF did not appear to raise the profile of media freedom issues beyond its own campaign activities. For example, the campaign hashtag - #defendmediafreedom – was not used widely beyond the conference.
4. Media attention focused on well-known personalities associated with the campaign especially Amal Clooney and the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary (at the time) Jeremy Hunt.
5. Disappointingly, George Clooney was also frequently mentioned in online news stories about the Global Campaign for Media Freedom (25%) – more mentions than even Jamal Khashoggi or the United Nations - despite not being involved in the campaign.

In its first year, the **GCMF** has helped to shine a **spotlight** on **media freedom**... However, this spotlight was **fleeting**

6. The GCMF has been more successful at shining a spotlight on media freedom issues among its own members states, than it has on the countries the GCMF is targeting. Critical, English-language news coverage of the GCMF has focussed on threats to media freedom in the US, while critical Twitter commentary has focussed on the treatment of Julian Assange in the UK.
7. In general, media freedom receives more attention online than many other international human rights issues. However, both news coverage and internet searches on the subject have been in decline in recent years.
8. Online news coverage of media freedom is highly episodic and restricted largely to annual days / events and individual cases in which journalists are targeted or harmed.
9. News coverage of international media freedom initiatives is very uneven. Some initiatives such as 'The International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists' appear to receive very little news coverage at all, while others such as the GCMF have been relatively successful at attracting coverage.
10. Media coverage of specific cases of journalists being arrested or harmed focus overwhelmingly on a small number of high profile cases.

For further information about our research, please visit  
[www.pressfreedom.co.uk](http://www.pressfreedom.co.uk)

**Dr Martin Scott** - Senior Lecturer in Media and International Development, University of East Anglia, School of International Development.

✉ Email: [martin.scott@uea.ac.uk](mailto:martin.scott@uea.ac.uk)

🐦 Twitter: [@martinscott2010](https://twitter.com/martinscott2010)

**Dr Mel Bunce** - Reader in Journalism at City, University of London

✉ Email: [melanie.bunce.1@city.ac.uk](mailto:melanie.bunce.1@city.ac.uk)

🐦 Twitter: [@meljbunce](https://twitter.com/meljibunce)

**Dr Mary Myers** - Development Communications Consultant, affiliated researcher with the University of East Anglia, UK

✉ Email: [marysophiamyers@gmail.com](mailto:marysophiamyers@gmail.com)

🌐 Website: <http://www.marysophiamyers.org>

# INTRODUCTION



On 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019, the UK and Canadian governments hosted the inaugural conference of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom, in London. It was the first ever, global ministerial gathering on the subject of media freedom and was attended by over 1500 delegates from 100 countries - including 60 government ministers.

The **GCMF** aims to shine a global **spotlight** on the issue of **media freedom** and **increase** the **costs** to those who attempt **to restrict** it

According to the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the aim of the conference was, 'to shine a global spotlight on media freedom, to change political calculations and increase the costs to those abusing it, as well as to encourage a greater appreciation of the value of an independent media' (FCO 2019b). In an interview with us in May 2020, the former UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt, who oversaw the launch of the GCMF, explained that he hoped this conference would,

*Serve as a pilot process of raising the price [of restricting media freedom] by attracting a lot of publicity. I always thought that, because the media care about media freedom, they would give a lot of publicity to this particular issue, and they did.*

The estimated cost of hosting the conference was £2.4 million. This amounted to nearly half the funds set aside by the UK Foreign Office for the campaign (House of Commons 2019).

This conference also marked the start of a wider 'Global Campaign for Media Freedom' (GCMF), led by the UK and Canadian governments. This campaign involves multiple initiatives, alongside an annual conference, including:

1. A Media Freedom Coalition of (currently 37) member states, that have pledged to lobby against those who harm journalists.
2. A High- Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom - overseen by Lord Neuberger and the UK's former Special Envoy on Media Freedom, Amal Clooney- focussed on improving legal protections for journalists and promoting legislation that supports media freedom.
3. A Global Media Defence Fund administered by UNESCO, designed to ensure effective legal assistance and support to civil society and journalists, including training for journalists.

We evaluate the **level of attention** the GCMF has received in **English-language** news and on Twitter

Collectively, these initiatives aim to, ‘**shine a global spotlight on the issue of media freedom**’ and ‘increase the costs to those who attempt to restrict it’ (FCO 20191). One of the key commitments in the Global pledge on media freedom, for example, is to ‘shine a light on violations and abuses of media freedom, bringing them to the attention of the global public’.

In this short report, we consider the extent to which the GCMF has – in its first full year – begun to meet this objective. Specifically, we evaluate the level of attention the GCMF has received in English-language news and on Twitter and consider whether it has helped raise the profile of media freedom issues more generally.

The GCMF is working to raise awareness of media freedom issues in a range of public and organisational contexts, beyond the media – from multilateral summits, to closed-door diplomatic meetings. Moreover, the campaign has a long-term time scale: aiming to raise attention to these issues over many years. Thus, this report should only be seen as a partial and preliminary assessment of its work.

This evaluation is part of a wider, fully independent study of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom, funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This wider study involves interviews with all relevant stakeholders and case studies of the impact of the GCMF in the Philippines and Sudan. Other aspects of the GCMF, including the extent to which it has successfully ‘increased the costs’ to those who attempt to restrict media freedom, will be assessed in future publications. For further information about our research, please visit [www.pressfreedom.co.uk](http://www.pressfreedom.co.uk)

The data presented in this report comes primarily from keyword searches of the Meltwater media monitoring database. Meltwater has one of the largest digital news source bases, with over 320,000 sources, spanning 191 countries. The analysis focuses specifically on mentions of the GCMF and its various initiatives over a period of a year within:

1) English-language news coverage worldwide

and

2) English-language Tweets.





It looks at Twitter, rather than any other social media platform, because, on current evidence, this is the platform that political elites prefer to use when providing commentary on unfolding events and debating policy (E.g. Steir et al 2018); and it is a particularly important platform for politicians when they seek to reach other elites, journalists and opinion leaders, especially in the Global North. We also used Google Trends to identify changes over time in the volume of news coverage and Google searches related to ‘freedom of the press’ in general, since 2004.

In order to capture the first full year of the GCMF’s activities – starting with the London conference - the sample period for the analysis presented in this report is from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020, unless stated otherwise.

The **first section** of this report provides context for the analysis, by assessing the extent to which media freedom is covered in the media – compared to other human rights issues. It also examines the extent to which media attention has changed over time and the character of such coverage.

The **second section** assesses the visibility of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom and its various strands – and compares it to other, similar international initiatives in this area.

The **appendix** at the end of the report provides further details of our methodology, including the search terms used.

# 1. THE BIG PICTURE: MEDIA COVERAGE OF MEDIA FREEDOM



**Media freedom** receives **more coverage than** most **other** international human rights issues – but is certainly **not the most frequently covered** issue.

Many commentators believe that media freedom is under-reported, compared to other democratic and human rights issues. For instance, Wiebke Lamer (2018:116) claims that, ‘the media themselves are not very focused on promoting press freedom’. This, she suggests, is because journalistic commitment to the principle of objectivity prevents news outlets from advocating or campaigning for a particular cause – even if it concerns an issue that is central to their own existence.

However, the assumption that media freedom receives relatively low levels of news coverage is largely un-tested. Therefore, in order to gain some indication of the level of attention media freedom receives, we compared the amount of coverage given to different UN initiatives. The results show, perhaps surprisingly, that initiatives relating to media freedom received relatively high levels of attention in the news and on Twitter, compared to many similar or related issues.

## Volume of coverage

Media freedom receives more coverage than most other international human rights issues – but is certainly not the most frequently covered issue. Table 1 shows that, within our year-long sample period, World Press Freedom Day received more English-language news coverage (5,810) and mentions on Twitter (64,412 – including retweets) than most other UN-designated international days. Indeed, it received more news coverage than World Malaria Day, World Humanitarian Day and World Teachers’ Day, combined.

However, some UN-designated days received considerably more news coverage – including World Mental Health Day (18,500 news items) and World AIDS Day (13,600 news items). Table 1 also shows that the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, World Television Day and the International Day for Universal Access to Information receive relatively little attention.

Similarly, Table 2 shows that, during our 12 month sample period, the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression (the UN's leading figure on media freedom issues) was mentioned in more news items (3,450) and tweets (6,670) than most other related Special Rapporteurs, including the Rapporteurs for Freedom of Religion or Belief and for Peaceful Assembly and of Association. However, the relatively high levels of news coverage (5,120) and tweets (70,700) mentioning the Special Rapporteur for Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment once again suggest that there is significant scope for issues relating to media freedom to receive more coverage.

**Table 1:**

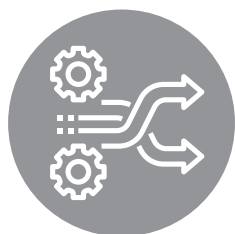
Level of online, English-language news and twitter coverage received by different UN-designated international days (July 2019 to June 2020).

International days	Date	News items	Tweets
World Mental Health Day	10-Oct	18,500	223,000
World AIDS Day	01-Dec	13,600	131,000
Human Rights Day	10-Dec	10,900	318,000
World Book Day	23-Apr	7,850	173,000
International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women	25-Nov	7,660	92,100
World Refugee Day	20-Jun	6,580	32,300
<b>World Press Freedom Day</b>	<b>03-May</b>	<b>5,810</b>	<b>64,412</b>
World Toilet Day	19-Nov	2,300	17,700
World Malaria Day	25-Apr	1,900	7,820
International Day of UN Peacekeepers	29-May	1,400	9,290
World Humanitarian Day	19-Aug	1,370	26,700
International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples	09-Aug	1,280	13,500
International Literacy Day	08-Sep	1,100	8,620
International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation	06-Feb	1,040	19,400
International Day of Democracy	15-Sep	1,030	21,100
World Teachers' Day	05-Oct	1,000	29,800
<b>World Radio Day</b>	<b>13-Feb</b>	<b>922</b>	<b>18,000</b>
International Migrants Day	18-Dec	880	7,460
International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict	19-Jun	571	17,000
<b>International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists</b>	<b>02-Nov</b>	<b>521</b>	<b>6,310</b>
<b>World Television Day</b>	<b>21-Nov</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>3,470</b>
<b>International Day for Universal Access to Information</b>	<b>28-Sep</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>2,420</b>

**Table 2:**

Level of online, English-language news and twitter coverage received by different UN Special Rapporteurs (July 2019 to June 2020)'

UN Special Rapporteurs	News items	Tweets
Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	5,120	70,700
Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary executions	3,510	4,340
<b>Freedom of Opinion and Expression</b>	<b>3,450</b>	<b>6,670</b>
Freedom of Religion or Belief	1,060	2,700
Peaceful Assembly and of Association	637	1,200
Human Rights Defenders	382	3,310
Independence of Judges and Lawyers	380	2,620
Violence against Women	316	1,860
Privacy	313	1,870



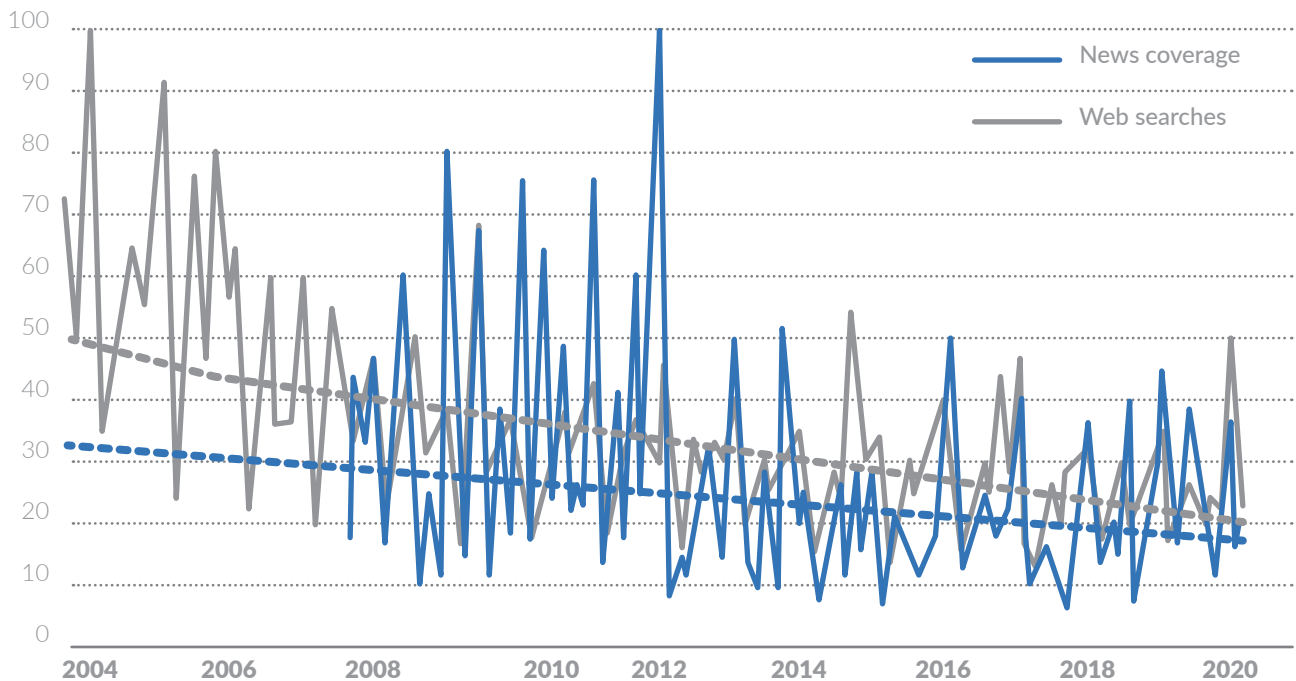
## Changes over time

The trend-lines in Figure 1 reveal that, despite numerous peaks and troughs, there has been a clear decline in both news coverage and Google searches related to 'freedom of the press', over the past 16 years. Within news coverage, there appears to be a relatively steep decline in articles discussing media freedom from July 2012 onwards. Within Google searches, this decline over time has been steadier.

There is some indication, also in Figure 1, that both news coverage and Google searches for these terms may have increased slightly since the GCMF began. However, given the extreme variations in coverage, the data is not conclusive. Moreover, even if there were such an increase – it is not possible to attribute any change in news coverage or searches to the GCMF - from this information alone.

**Figure 1:**

Relative interest over time in the topic of ‘freedom of the press’ according to Google searches and news items (2004-2020) (Google Trends).



### Concentrated coverage

Figure 1 also helps illustrate that news coverage and Google searches about media freedom routinely follow a pronounced cycle throughout the year – with sharp peaks on particular days. In almost all cases, these peaks correspond with either World Press Freedom Day (3 May) or, to a lesser extent, the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (2 November). This indicates that these particular days play a vital role in drawing attention to an issue that ordinarily receives little attention.

Table 3 shows the number of news items and tweets mentioning the ‘10 Most Urgent’ press freedom cases, as defined by the One Free Press Coalition, on July 2020. It shows clearly that a small number of cases receive the vast majority of coverage. Indeed, the case of Jamal Khashoggi was mentioned in more than eight times as many news items as all the other nine cases combined.

In summary, these results suggest that although the issue of media freedom receives a reasonable quantity of news coverage, this coverage is highly episodic. It is also in decline over time.

**Table 3:**

Mentions in online English-language news and Twitter of the One Free Press Coalition's July 2020, '10 Most Urgent' press freedom cases (July 2019 to June 2020)

Journalist(s)	Country	Case	News coverage	Tweets
Jamal Khashoggi	Saudi Arabia	Calls for continued investigation into journalist's death at the hands of the government.	91,000	293,906
Maria Ressa	Philippines	Filipino-U.S. dual citizen sentenced in cyber libel case.	9,080	109,000
Solafa Magdy	Egypt	Nearly four months without updates from imprisoned journalist in deteriorating health.	465	1,400
Samuel Wazizi (Samuel Ajiekah Abuwe)	Cameroon	Officials reveal journalist died in custody last August.	322	8,040
Mohamed Monir <sup>1</sup>	Egypt	Journalist in poor health being held in pre-trial detention without court date.	243	144
Abdulkhaleq Ahmed Amran, Akram Saleh Al-Walidi, Al-Hareth Saleh Hamid and Tawfiq Mohammed Al-Mansouri	Yemen	Four journalists detained five years, now sentenced to death.	211	434
Azimjon Askarov	Kyrgyzstan	Award-winning human rights reporter imprisoned 10 years.	202	1,090
Jean Bigirimana	Burundi	Four years pass without information regarding journalist's disappearance.	124	396
Norma Sarabia Garduza	Mexico	Investigation idling in case of journalist murdered at her home one year ago.	96	257

1 Note, the case of Mohamed Monir had only been running for a month when the analysis was carried out (the case opened June 2020, the analysis was in July 2020) whereas the other cases in Table 1 have all been running for at least a year.

## 2. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR MEDIA FREEDOM



### Volume of coverage

On **Twitter**,  
**32,700**  
unique **users**  
**posted**, in  
English, about  
the **Global**  
**Campaign**  
**for Media**  
**Freedom**, and  
its various  
strands, over  
the **first 12**  
**months**.

The various strands of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom (GCMF) were mentioned in 6,300 different English-language news items and 56,700 tweets, within the 12 months from July 2019 to June 2020. This represents a significant amount of coverage when compared to other international media freedom initiatives (Table 3). Only Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) World Press Freedom Index received more English-language news coverage over this 12-month period. And only the RSF's World Press Freedom Index and the 2020 World Press Freedom Day were mentioned in more tweets (and almost twice as many original tweets) than the GCMF.

What is perhaps most striking about the results in Table 4, though, is how little coverage some international initiatives related to media freedom receive. For example, the International Initiative on Information and Democracy (and the related Forum for Information and Democracy) were mentioned in only 44 English-language news items and 58 original tweets during our 12-month sample period<sup>2</sup>.

On Twitter, 32,700 unique users posted, in English, about the Global Campaign for Media Freedom, and its various strands, over the first 12 months. This included 36,400 retweets, 15,400 quoted tweets, 4,190 original tweets and 676 replies. Collectively, these tweets created 633 million impressions (the total number of times they were seen). The UK (29%) was by far the most common source of these tweets – followed by the US (15%), Canada (14%) and Australia (12%).

The GCMF hashtag - #defendmediafreedom - was used 78,100 times on Twitter, during the 12 months, although its use was heavily concentrated during the two-day conference in London.

<sup>2</sup> The International Initiative on Information and Democracy received even less coverage in French – appearing in just 7 news items and 43 tweets.



**Table 4:**

Mentions of different international media freedom initiatives in online, English-language news and on Twitter (July 2019 to June 2020)

	No. of news items	Tweets (Original tweets in brackets)
RSF's World Press Freedom Index	9,440	63,704 (3,430)
<b>Global Campaign for Media Freedom (all strands)</b>	<b>6,300</b>	<b>56,700 (4,190)</b>
World Press Freedom Day	5,810	64,412 (8,320)
International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists	521	6,310 (607)
UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity	200	187 (55)
The Freedom Online Coalition	190	520 (105)
Sustainable Development Goal 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms	91	467 (95)
The International Initiative on Information and Democracy	44	526 (58)



## Focus of coverage

### Strands of the campaign

There are five key 'strands' to the GCMF's work (see table 5). Of these, The Global Media Freedom conference in London received the most attention, by a significant margin. 83% of all English-language news articles about the GCMF, and 79% of tweets, referred explicitly to this conference. Overall, 69% of all mentions of the GCMF - in both news coverage and on twitter - occurred within 2 weeks of the London conference (Figure 2).

In total, the London conference was mentioned in 4,090 different news items and 36,300 tweets, during the 2 weeks surrounding the conference. This level of news coverage compares relatively favourably to conferences for other, recent FCO-led initiatives. For example, the London Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference on 11 to 12 October 2018 was mentioned in just 2,620 different online news stories, over a similar two-week period. However, some have received more coverage - the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, for example, on 10-13 June 2014, was mentioned in 5,240 news items, over 14 days.



**Pledges and statements** made by members of the **Media Freedom Coalition** sometimes generated **significant twitter coverage**, but they **rarely** made the **news**

In addition, 20,800 unique Twitter users posted about the Global Media Freedom Conference during the two-week sample period. These posts included 26,000 retweets 7,000 quoted tweets, 2,800 original tweets and 400 replies. Collectively, these tweets created 407 million impressions. A majority of tweets were sent from the UK (21%), Canada (21%) or the United States (17%).

Outside the conference, there was only one significant spike in coverage. This was linked to a statement made by the Media Freedom Coalition on World Press Freedom Day on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2020. Following this statement, the Global Campaign for Media Freedom was mentioned in 181 different news items and 4060 tweets (Figure 3).

Table 5 shows that the other major strands of the campaign – including the Global Media Defence Fund, the High Level Legal Panel on Media Freedom and the Global Campaign for Media Freedom itself – were rarely mentioned either in the news or on Twitter.

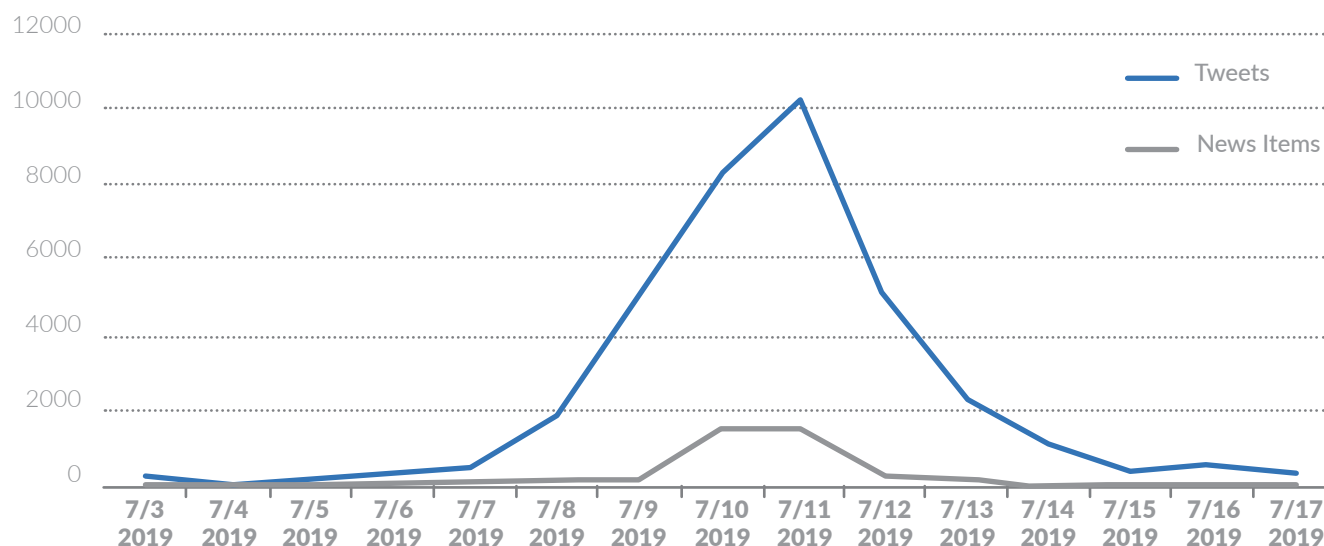
Pledges and statements made by members of the Media Freedom Coalition sometimes generated significant twitter coverage, but they rarely made the news. For example, a tweet by the UK Foreign Office quoting the Sudanese Prime Minister, Abdullah Hamdok's pledge at the 2019 UN General Assembly that 'never again in the new Sudan will a journalist be repressed or jailed' had a reach of 92,000. It was also retweeted 340 times. However, English-language news coverage of this statement and of Hamdok's signing of the Global Pledge to Defend Media Freedom consisted of just 20 articles.

**Table 5:**  
Mentions of different strands of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom in online, English-language news and on Twitter (July 2019 to June 2020)

	News items	Tweets (Original tweets in brackets)
Global Media Freedom Conference	5,280	45,000 (3,720)
UK Special Envoy for Media Freedom, Amal Clooney	3,460	5,880 (356)
Media Freedom Coalition	368	7,170 (153)
Global Media Defence Fund	266	180 (45)
High Level Legal Panel on Media Freedom	48	605 (35)
Global Campaign for Media Freedom (in general)	45	40 (13)
Total	6,300	56,700 (4,190)

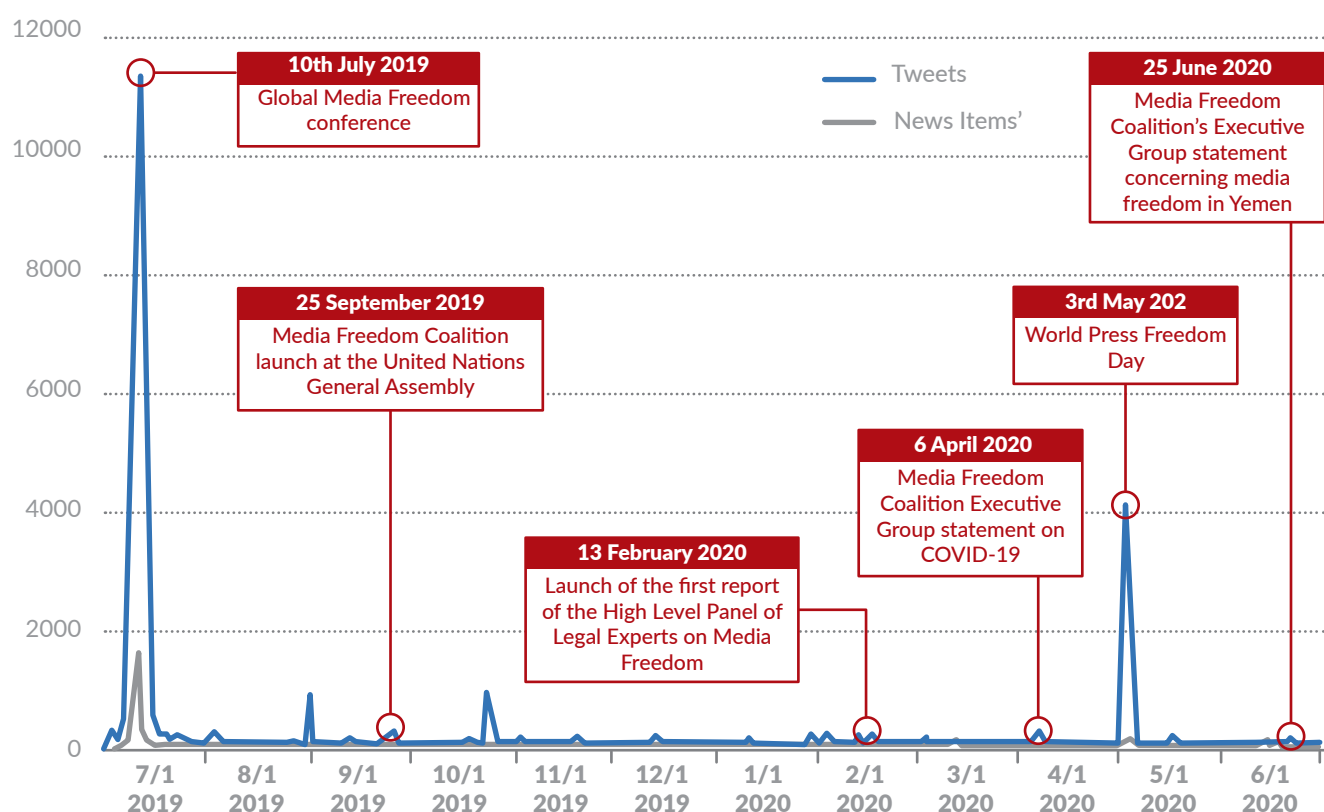
**Figure 2:**

Mentions of the Global Media Freedom Conference in online English-language news and Twitter (1 June 2019 to 20 June 2019)



**Figure 3:**

Mentions of the GCMF in online English-language news and on Twitter over time (July 2019 – June 2020)





## Coverage of individuals, countries and institutions

Within news coverage of the Global Campaign for Media Freedom, the most commonly mentioned individuals were Amal Clooney (50%) and Jeremy Hunt (48%) (Table 6).

Within news coverage of the **Global Campaign for Media Freedom**, the most commonly mentioned individuals were **Amal Clooney** (50%) and **Jeremy Hunt** (48%)

A number of attendees at the London conference who we interviewed suggested that one of Jeremy Hunt's motivations for arranging this media freedom conference might have been to raise his own political profile. Indeed, this conference coincided with the final weeks of his campaign to become leader of the Conservative Party and the UK's next Prime Minister. Hunt did receive significant attention: he was mentioned in over half (57%) of all news coverage about the conference. However, this was not a particularly high figure in historical context. When UK Foreign Secretary William Hague convened the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, alongside Hollywood celebrity and humanitarian activist Angelina Jolie, he was mentioned in 79% of news coverage (Table 8).

Some interviewees suggested that, in addition to her significant legal expertise, one of the advantages of Amal Clooney's appointment as Special Envoy for Media Freedom was that her public profile might help draw attention to the campaign. This was confirmed in the analysis. Amal Clooney was mentioned in a majority of news items about the London conference (Table 7). Moreover, the tweet with the greatest reach (20.6 million) was by the Reuters news agency, and reads, 'Human rights lawyer Amal Clooney defends media freedom at a conference in London'. Vogue magazine also wrote a 400-word article about the London conference entitled, 'Amal Clooney Has Some Choice Words for President Trump'.

However, news coverage of Clooney was very episodic - with 78% of all mentions occurring within 2 weeks of the London conference. In addition, she was not mentioned as frequently as Angelina Jolie was at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, which Jolie attended and promoted in her role as the Special Envoy for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Amal Clooney was named in 62% of news coverage - by far the most mentioned individual within news coverage of the 2019 Media Freedom Conference (Table 7). By contrast, Jolie, was mentioned in 81% of news coverage of the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict (Table 8).



In both cases, it is disappointing to note that Amal Clooney and Angelina Jolie's respective husbands at the time - George Clooney (26%) and Brad Pitt (25%) were amongst the most frequently mentioned individuals – despite neither having any direct involvement in either campaign (Table 6 and 8). Notably, George Clooney was mentioned in more news stories than Jamal Khashoggi or the United Nations. For example, in an article about the London conference, the Mail Online (11/07/2019) described Amal Clooney as, 'the British government's envoy on press freedom... whose husband George is a vocal critic of the president'. Similarly, in an article about the London conference, the Express Newspaper (11/07/2019) wrote, 'Amal Clooney, who is married to George Clooney, looked incredible when she stepped out in a figure-hugging red dress to deliver a speech at a conference in London last night'.

This focus on **criticism of Donald Trump** also explains why the **United States** (64%) was **mentioned more often** than any country **except the UK** (75%), within **news coverage**.

Within the coverage of the GCMF as a whole, the third most commonly mentioned individual – after Amal Clooney and Jeremy Hunt was Donald Trump (Table 6). The US President (43%) was mentioned significantly more often than Canada’s then foreign minister, Chrystia Freeland (32%). Such coverage related almost exclusively to criticism of the US President’s treatment of media in the US. For example, there was extensive news coverage of Amal Clooney’s conference speech where she said that, ‘the country of James Madison has a leader today who vilifies the media, making honest journalists all over the world more vulnerable to abuse’ (Clooney 2019).

This focus on criticism of Donald Trump also explains why the United States (64%) was mentioned more often than any country except the UK (75%), within news coverage. Aside from the US, the only other case of media freedom violations regularly mentioned within news coverage related to Saudi Arabia (31%) and Jamal Khashoggi (25%) (Table 6).

On Twitter, discussion of the GCMF focussed much less on Donald Trump and the US – which were not even in the top 15 most mentioned entities. Instead, as Table 6 shows, Julian Assange (15%) was by far the most frequently discussed individual on Twitter. He was mentioned around three times more often than Amal Clooney (6%) or Jeremy Hunt (5%). The hashtag #freeassange was also the third most commonly used on Twitter in discussions about the GCMF – behind only #defendmediafreedom and #pressfreedom.

These tweets about Julian Assange were critical of the UK government for its handling of the US’s request to extradite the Wikileaks founder. For example, the tweet with the greatest level of engagement – including 1700 retweets and comments – by @CraigMurrayOrg read, ‘My friend Julian is in Belmarsh for nothing but publishing the truth... Perhaps I might be allowed to be sceptical of your commitment, Dominic’. This was written in response to a tweet by Dominic Raab about the Media Freedom Coalition on World Press Freedom Day. Numerous tweets highlighted the apparent irony that the UK was establishing and leading an international initiative on media freedom, while simultaneously undermining free media, the critics asserted, in their handling of Assange. Indeed, ‘irony’ was the 20<sup>th</sup> most common keyword in tweets about the GCMF.

**Table 6:**

The most commonly mentioned entities (individuals, countries and institutions) in online, English-language news and twitter coverage of the GCMF (July 2019 to June 2020)

Top news entities	No.	%	Top Twitter entities	No.	%
United Kingdom	3949	75%	United Kingdom	13962	25%
United States	3372	64%	Julian Assange	8576	15%
London	3130	59%	London	7011	12%
Canada	2734	52%	Canada	6107	11%
Amal Clooney	2631	50%	Amal Clooney	3589	6%
Jeremy Hunt	2554	48%	Media Freedom Coalition	2941	5%
Donald Trump	2283	43%	Jeremy Hunt	2879	5%
Global Conference for Media Freedom	1871	35%	Russia	1951	3%
Chrystia Freeland	1668	32%	Pakistan	1936	3%
Saudi Arabia	1658	31%	BBC	1933	3%
George Clooney	1362	26%	Belmarsh	1728	3%
Jamal Khashoggi	1346	25%	Australia	1657	3%
United Nations	1096	21%	Dominic Raab	1655	3%
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	1011	19%	Media Freedom Conference	1587	3%
British Empire	928	18%	@Jonathan_K_Cook	1402	2%

**Table 7:**

The most commonly mentioned entities (individuals, countries and institutions) in online news coverage of the London Global Media Freedom conference (1 June 2019 to 20 June 2019)

	Keyword/Phrase	Occurrences	% of coverage
1	United Kingdom	2696	66%
2	Amal Clooney	2543	62%
3	United States	2514	61%
4	London	2466	60%
5	Global Conference for Media Freedom	2453	60%
6	Jeremy Hunt	2329	57%
7	Donald Trump	1961	48%
8	Canada	1845	45%
9	Chrystia Freeland	1468	36%
10	Saudi Arabia	1415	35%
11	Jamal Khashoggi	1181	29%
12	George Clooney	965	24%
13	Foreign and Commonwealth Office	883	22%
14	James Madison	822	20%
15	Istanbul	796	19%

**Table 8:**

The most commonly mentioned entities (individuals, countries and institutions) in online news coverage of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict (5 June 2014 to 19 June 2014)

	Keyword/Phrase	Occurrences	% of coverage
1	Britain	4471	85%
2	Angelina Jolie	4261	81%
3	William Hague	4137	79%
4	London	3781	72%
5	United Nations	3243	62%
6	Hollywood	1571	30%
7	Nigeria	1378	26%
8	Brad Pitt	1309	25%
9	John Kerry	1016	19%
10	Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict	976	19%

## APPENDIX: BOOLEAN SEARCH TERMS



Sources included in online news coverage include Newspapers, News agencies, Magazines, Financial news channels, Trade publications, Organisational channels (NGOs etc.), Radio & TV Online, Editorial Blogs, Authorities & Government, Companies' & Organisations' websites, EU-Channels, Industry-specific sources and Newswires. Meltwater has access to the Twitter 'Firehose', meaning that it searches all tweets within the last 18 months, rather than just a sample. The results from Google Trends use the topic of 'freedom of the press' – which includes all groups of terms that relate to the same concept, rather than only exact matches.

- [Abdulkhaleq Ahmed Amran, Akram Saleh Al-Walidi, Al-Hareth Saleh Hamid and Tawfiq Mohammed Al-Mansouri](#): ("Abdulkhaleq Ahmed Amran" OR "Akram Saleh Al-Walidi" OR "Al-Hareth Saleh Hamid" OR "Tawfiq Mohammed Al-Mansouri" OR "Abdulkhaleq Amran" OR "Akram al-Waleedi" OR "Hareth Hameed" OR "Tawfiq al-Mansouri") AND ("Yemen") AND (("journalist") OR ("reporter") OR ("reporters") OR ("journalists"))
- [Abdulumumin Gadzhiev](#): ("Abdulumumin Gadzhiev") AND (("journalist") OR ("reporter") OR ("correspondent") OR ("editor"))
- [Azimjon Askarov](#): ("Azimjon Askarov" NEAR/10 journalist) OR ("Azimjon Askarov" NEAR/10 "reporter")
- [Global Campaign for Media Freedom \(all strands\)](#): (("Global Campaign") NEAR/10 ("Media Freedom")) OR ("Media Freedom Coalition" OR "Global Coalition on Media Freedom") OR ("conference" NEAR/5 ("media freedom" OR "press freedom")) OR (("High level panel" OR "High level legal panel") NEAR/5 ("Media Freedom")) OR (("Special Envoy" OR "Amal Clooney") AND ("Media Freedom")) OR ("Global Media Defence Fund" OR ("Global media fund" AND "UNESCO"))
- [Global Campaign for Media Freedom](#): ("Global Campaign") NEAR/10 ("Media Freedom")
- [Global Media Defence Fund](#): ("Global Media Defence Fund" OR ("Global media fund" AND "UNESCO"))
- [Global Media Freedom Conference](#): ("conference" NEAR/5 ("media freedom" OR "press freedom"))
- [Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict](#): "Sexual violence" AND "Summit" AND "Conflict"
- [High Level Legal Panel on Media Freedom](#): ("High level panel" OR "High level legal panel") NEAR/5 ("Media Freedom")



- **Human Rights Day:** “Human Rights Day”
- **International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict:** “International Day” NEAR/5 “Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict”
- **International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women:** “International Day” NEAR/5 “Violence against Women”
- **International Day for Universal Access to Information:** “International Day” NEAR/5 “Access to Information”
- **International Day of Democracy:** “International Day of Democracy”
- **International Day of UN Peacekeepers:** “International Day” NEAR/5 “Peacekeepers”
- **International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation:** (“International Day” NEAR/5 “Female Genital Mutilation”) OR (“International Day” NEAR/5 “FGM”)
- **International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists:** “International Day” NEAR/5 “End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists”
- **International Literacy Day:** “International Literacy Day”
- **International Migrants Day:** (“International Migrants Day”) OR (“International Day” NEAR/5 “migrants”)
- **Jamal Khashoggi:** (“Jamal Khashoggi”) AND (“journalist”) OR (“reporter”) OR (“correspondent”) OR (“editor”) OR (“columnist”)
- **Jean Bigirimana:** (“Jean Bigirimana”) AND (“journalist”) OR (“reporter”) OR (“correspondent”)
- **Maria Ressa:** (“Maria Ressa” NEAR/10 journalist) OR (“Maria Ressa” NEAR/10 “reporter”) OR (“Maria Ressa” NEAR/10 “Rappler”)
- **Media Freedom Coalition:** (“Media Freedom Coalition” OR “Global Coalition on Media Freedom”)
- **Norma Sarabia Garduza:** (“Norma Sarabia Garduza”) AND (“journalist”) OR (“reporter”) OR (“correspondent”)
- **RSF’s World Press Freedom Index:** (“World Press Freedom Index”) OR (“World Press Freedom ranking”) OR (“Press Freedom Index” NEAR/5 “RSF”) OR (“Press Freedom Index” NEAR/5 “Reporters Without Borders”) OR (“Press Freedom Index” NEAR/5 “Reporters Sans Frontières”) OR (“RSF Index”)

- **Samuel Wazizi:** ("Samuel Wazizi" OR "Samuel Ajiekah Abuwe") AND (("journalist") OR ("reporter") OR ("correspondent"))
- **Solafa Magdy:** ("Solafa Magdy") AND (("journalist") OR ("reporter"))
- **Sudanese Prime Minister's UN General Assembly pledge:** ("Hamdok") AND ("Media Freedom" OR "press freedom") AND ("Sudan")
- **Sustainable Development Goal 16.10:** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms: ("Sustainable development goal" NEAR/5 "16.10") OR ("SDG" NEAR/5 "16.10") OR ("Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms")
- **The Freedom Online Coalition:** "Freedom online" NEAR/5 "coalition"
- **The International Initiative on Information and Democracy:** ("Forum on Information & Democracy" OR "Information and Democracy Partnership" OR "Forum on Information and Democracy" OR "International Initiative on Information and Democracy" OR "Partnership on Information and Democracy" OR "International Initiative on Information & Democracy" OR "Partnership on Information & Democracy") / (Initiative internationale sur l'information et la démocratie) OR (Forum sur l'information et la démocratie) OR (Partenariat international sur l'information et la démocratie).
- **UK Special Envoy for Media Freedom, Amal Clooney:** ("Special Envoy" OR "Amal Clooney") AND ("Media Freedom")
- **UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity:** ("Plan of Action" NEAR/5 "Safety of Journalists")
- **UN Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary executions:** (("Special Rapporteur") NEAR/5 ("Extrajudicial executions")) OR (("Special Rapporteur") NEAR/10 ("Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary executions")) OR (("Special Rapporteur") NEAR/5 ("Extrajudicial killings"))
- **UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression:** (("Special Rapporteur") NEAR/10 ("Freedom of Opinion and Expression" OR "Freedom of Expression")) NOT (("OAS") OR ("Edison Lanza"))
- **UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief:** ("Special Rapporteur") NEAR/10 ("Freedom of Religion" OR "Freedom of Belief")
- **UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights Defenders:** ("Special Rapporteur") NEAR/5 ("Human Rights Defenders")

- UN Special Rapporteur for Independence of Judges and Lawyers: (“Special Rapporteur”) NEAR/10 (“Independence of Judges and Lawyers”)
- UN Special Rapporteur for Peaceful Assembly and of Association: (“Special Rapporteur”) NEAR/10 (“Peaceful Assembly”)
- UN Special Rapporteur for Privacy: (“Special Rapporteur”) NEAR/5 (“Privacy”)
- UN Special Rapporteur for Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment: (“Special Rapporteur”) NEAR/5 (“Torture”)
- UN Special Rapporteur for Violence against Women: (“Special Rapporteur”) NEAR/5 (“Violence against Women”)
- World AIDS Day: “World AIDS Day”
- World Book Day: “World Book Day”
- World Humanitarian Day: “World Humanitarian Day”
- World Malaria Day: “World Malaria Day”
- World Mental Health Day: “World Mental Health Day”
- World Press Freedom Day: (“World Press Freedom” NEAR/5 “day”) OR (“Press freedom day” NEAR/5 “world”)
- World Radio Day: “World Radio Day”
- World Refugee Day: “World Refugee Day”
- World Teachers’ Day: “World Teachers’ Day” OR “World Teachers Day”
- World Television Day: “World Television Day”
- World Toilet Day: “World Toilet Day”

## References

- Clooney, A. (2019). Addressing threats to media freedom: Amal Clooney's speech On day 1 of the Global Conference for Media Freedom, 19 July 2019.
- FCO (2019a). The Global Conference for media freedom: Written evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry into global media freedom (GMF0004). Foreign and Commonwealth Office. 03 April 2019.
- FCO (2019b). The Global Conference for media freedom: Written evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry into global media freedom (GMF0034). Foreign and Commonwealth Office. 03 September 2019.
- House of Commons (2019). "Media freedom is under attack": The FCO's defence of an endangered liberty. Twenty-First Report of Session 2017–19. House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. 9 September 2019.
- Lamer, W. (2018). Press Freedom as an International Human Right. Palgrave.
- Stier, S., Bleier, A. Lietz, H. and Strohmaier, M. (2018) "Election Campaigning on Social Media: Politicians, Audiences, and the Mediation of Political Communication on Facebook and Twitter", Political Communication, 35:1, 50-74.

# **Shining a spotlight on media freedom?**

Media coverage of the Global  
Campaign for Media Freedom

[www.pressfreedom.co.uk](http://www.pressfreedom.co.uk)