

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Bellingham, Washington, showing a dense urban area with a prominent river winding through it. The image is overlaid with large, semi-transparent green text. The text reads "YOU CAN'T GAMBLERAGE PROGRESS" in all caps, with "YOU CAN'T" on the top line, "GAMBLERAGE" on the second line, and "PROGRESS" on the third line. The text is centered horizontally and partially obscures the city and river below.

YOU CAN'T  
GAMBLERAGE  
PROGRESS

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

[bellingscat.org](http://bellingscat.org)



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# foreword

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## Dessi Damianova

*Director of Operations*

Last year, our team continued its efforts to build a solid base from which the work and impact of the organization can expand while sustaining the results and quality achieved so far.

In 2021, we put special focus on our tech team to develop even more novel analytical methods that can help discover insightful stories and publish breaking news. Such methods, which we have long shared freely with the wider community and public, resulted in almost 60 original and high-impact investigative stories last year that were widely republished and reported around the world. In our investigations, we follow our baseline policy: to choose our research topics independently. We also continued diversifying the subject areas we investigate - from NATO bases and the far-right, to the secret operations of rogue states and conspiracy theories - applying our method to search for digital crumbs left by wrongdoing without fear or favor.

Next to our core business of investigations, we also focused on several organizational areas that required strengthening. First, we decided to invest in in-house safety and security, allowing us to better anticipate and address the ever increasing risks our staff and organization face. The growing international reputation and presence of Bellingcat has resulted in a greater number of adversaries. Managing that exposure remains a top priority.



The second area which we developed further was the diversification of our funding base. Bellingcat depends on private donations, institutional funders, large (private or family) foundations, lotteries, and intergovernmental organizations for about two-thirds of its operational costs. It is therefore essential that we have a variety of institutional and individual donors so as to mitigate the consequences of a funder deciding to no longer support our work. Being aware of changing donor priorities is also a must.

Throughout the year, we have been humbled to see a significant increase in small and individual donations, all the important drops that help us exist and sustain our work uncovering evidence and exposing crimes. To these benefactors, and to all the other organizations, companies and individuals standing with us, we have always been and will remain especially grateful.

# foreword, cont.



Our guiding principle of transparency has been rigorously applied, not just in our research, but also in disclosing all of our funding streams to the full. We have not sacrificed that principle, even when in the summer of 2021 the Russian government designated our organization a “foreign agent.” The designation does not stand on solid legal ground and was likely meant to scare us and our supporters away. We salute the courage of our partners and all individuals who stood with us openly, even in the face of possible repercussions.

Our annual accounts show a positive balance for a third year in a row, despite some unplanned expenditures, such as defensive litigation and engaging an external firm to advise in the process of searching for an Executive Director. This financial result is in accordance with our strategy, which is to have a flexible structure (that can expand horizontally or shrink depending on the volume of work we face) and be modest with expenditures as much as is reasonable. We will continue to operate on a lean budget while sustaining the quality and impact we are consistently delivering.

In terms of achievements, 2021 was another year we can be proud of - our community of volunteers and contributors expanded further, we established new partnerships, trained more than 1,200 individuals and grew our audience (including social media presence) across all platforms (our website, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Patreon, Discord and newsletter). Our

work and investigations were awarded no less than five acclaimed international prizes, among them two Emmy awards (for outstanding investigative report and outstanding research) and the Nannen Prize for Investigative Journalism. We have also established an international advisory board of prominent experts to help us improve our work further.

By strengthening our management team and setting up a structure to develop different media products based on the original investigations and research we are producing, we are working to expand our impact - not just to the media and journalistic field, but to consumers and audiences in Asia, Africa and Latin America. An important milestone achieved last year - successfully testing the admissibility of digital evidence in courts - will contribute even further to efforts of seeking justice and accountability beyond the scope of a single publication.

As always, Bellingcat is what it is not because of one individual’s effort or one amazing investigation. It is the team’s and all volunteers’ collaborative work, spirit and consistent ingenuity that are the guiding motivation and creative engine for our discoveries. As always, every gesture of support, big or small, gives us the necessary resource power to make these discoveries possible. Thank you!





# bellingcat

***We are an award-winning independent nonprofit collective of researchers and citizen journalists using verifiable digital information to investigate a broad range of topics, validate facts, and uncover wrongdoing.***

With staff and contributors in more than 20 countries around the world, we operate in a unique field where advanced technology, forensic research, journalism, investigation, transparency, and accountability come together. We apply an evidence-based method and make our findings public to advance justice. We cooperate, share, and train others to leverage and spread our knowledge, build networks, and expand the community of open source researchers.

Bellingcat's approach to using publicly-available data and citizen journalist analysis has been particularly

significant for advancing narratives of conflict, crime, and human rights abuses. We produce investigations on these issues in coordination with a broad coalition of partners and conduct training programs so that a growing corps of citizen journalists is poised to pursue these stories alongside us.

Technology has irrevocably changed the relationship between the media and the public - we aim to always be ahead of the curve, taking advantage of digital innovation and tapping into overlooked open source resources to collaborate, verify and share transparently.



## investigations & research

We conduct open source research to expose wrongdoing. We choose our research topics independently, and actively seek cooperation with journalists, media, human rights organisations, universities, environmental groups, think tanks, legal defence, law enforcement, intergovernmental entities and many others.



## training & community development

We aim to equip a global community to conduct high-quality, transparent open source investigations anywhere in the world. We provide workshops, develop research tools and guides, administer a team of volunteers, and share our knowledge and experience at a variety of events.



## justice & accountability

We contribute to the development of standards for digital open source investigations, working toward a future in which the materials from and results of these investigations are consistently found to be admissible as evidence in court. Our partners use our work to seek justice through international and domestic accountability mechanisms.



# our formula



## COLLABORATION

We work as a team. We believe that the collective is stronger than any individual.



## CURIOSITY

We dig through digital data and choose our research topics independently.



## TENACITY

We value the process in searching for the truth, and we persist.



## DIVERSITY

We attract a variety of people to sharpen our ideas and broaden our investigations.



## INGENUITY

We connect the dots and develop methods to benefit all, not just a few.



## INTEGRITY

We are honest and professional in our work and as individuals.

# by the numbers

2021

9,184,831  
PAGEVIEWS

75

VOLUNTEERS

1,518

PEOPLE TRAINED

## SOCIAL MEDIA

414K  49K  27K   
53K  1.3K 

69 TRAININGS &  
WORKSHOPS

## TOTAL USERS

3,253,028

## TOP USER COUNTRIES

1. UNITED STATES
2. UNITED KINGDOM
3. CANADA
4. GERMANY
5. NETHERLANDS
6. RUSSIA
7. UKRAINE
8. AUSTRALIA
9. FRANCE
10. CZECHIA

17

GUIDES

40 PUBLICATIONS

CONTRIBUTORS 27



# most popular articles



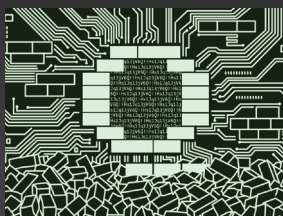
US soldiers expose nuclear weapons secrets via flashcard apps  
**378K**



Woman accused of stealing Pelosi's laptop appears in video making Nazi salute  
**310K**



The journey of Ashli Babbitt  
**256K**



The making of QAnon: A crowdsourced conspiracy  
**126K**



Inside Wagnergate: Ukraine's brazen sting operation to snare Russian mercenaries  
**124K**

# awards & recognition



## EMMY AWARD

For Outstanding Investigative Report in a Newscast



## EMMY AWARD

For Outstanding Research: News



## NANNEN PRIZE FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

With Der Spiegel and The Insider



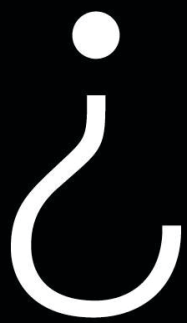
## AMNESTY MEDIA AWARD FOR RADIO AND PODCASTS

For Season 2 of the Bellingcat Podcast



## CZECH MEDAL FOR SECURITY OF THE STATE

Awarded to Christo Grozev



# INVESTIGATIONS AND RESEARCH



# the journey of ashli babbitt

January

As a pro-Trump mob stormed the United States Capitol building starting in the morning of January 6, 2021, images of the event poured onto social media. These images were being captured and shared not only by journalists who were at the scene, but also by members of the mob themselves.

Realizing the scope of the event, Bellingcat quickly mobilized a crowdsourcing effort on Twitter, calling on social media users to submit images and videos from the Capitol riot. The goal of the campaign was to ensure that the evidence was properly cataloged and archived in the event that it was deleted, either by the users who uploaded it or by the social media platforms on which they were shared. When Bellingcat issued this call for visual materials, the riot was still unfolding. This made the task of collecting visual evidence all the more urgent, given

the possibility that the riot might succeed in forcing Congress to overturn the result of the 2020 election and installing Trump as president for another term.

Hundreds of individuals answered Bellingcat's crowdsourcing call, and submitted thousands of hours of video footage and images from the riot. These images aided Bellingcat researchers in the investigation into the killing of Ashli Babbitt, a woman who was shot and killed by U.S. Capitol Police as she climbed through a barricaded door inside the Capitol. Bellingcat was able to trace Ashli's movements inside the Capitol using CCTV footage and other images from the riot, as well as her ideological journey from a supporter of President Obama to a member of the pro-Trump mob.

[read the full story](#)



SECOND (PRINCIPAL) FLOOR PLAN

scale: 0 16 32 48 64 feet  
AS OF JUNE, 1997 NORTH →





# the tiergarten murder

## *March*

On August 23, 2019, Chechen dissident Zelimkhan Khangoshvili was shot dead in Berlin's Kleiner Tiergarten park. Authorities soon arrested a suspect, "Vadim Sokolov," and Bellingcat immediately began to investigate.

Our initial investigation found that the passport on which the suspect traveled was issued by the Russian government, but linked to an inauthentic identity; and that a man with the particulars of "Vadim Sokolov" did not exist in Russian registries prior to 2019. We concluded that this cover identity - which had obtained a full set of matching presence in all kinds of Russian registries, including the tax registry, in 2019 - could only have been issued by the Russian authorities.

Subsequently, we were able to match the suspect to the real identity of Vadim Nikolaevich Krasikov. Our identification was based largely on geographically overlapping use of telephones used by "Vadim Sokolov" and Krasikov as well as on facial comparison of a black-and-white photograph of Krasikov to the arrest mugshots and visa application photos of "Vadim Sokolov."

Based on analysis of telephone metadata, we found that prior to his trip to Berlin, Krasikov had been communicating intensively with members of the Vypel group of companies - comprised primarily of former FSB Spetsnaz officers - and had visited secure FSB training facilities in the immediate eve of his trip to Germany.

In 2021, Bellingcat's Christo Grozev was a key witness in the case against Vadim Krasikov. The prosecution used Bellingcat's research demonstrating the assassin's use of a cover identity and his links to the Russian intelligence services to establish the Russian government's involvement in the murder.

On December 21, 2021, Vadim Krasikov was found guilty of the murder of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, and imprisoned for life. The court's conclusion that the murder was carried out on behalf of Russian state authorities, based on the evidence presented by Bellingcat, made this one of the first successful trials of an alleged state-sanctioned murder on European soil in recent history.

[read the statement](#)



# mahbere dego massacre

April

In early March 2021, a set of five videos appeared on social media showing soldiers executing a group of unarmed men and throwing their bodies off a cliff. The videos were allegedly recorded somewhere in Ethiopia's Tigray region. Determining the exact location where the videos were recorded would be crucial to any hope of holding the perpetrators of the massacre accountable.

Together with partners at Newsy and BBC Africa Eye, Bellingcat worked to determine where each of the five videos was recorded: a cliffside approximately one kilometer south of a town called Mahbere Dego. Analysis of the video showed that the soldiers carrying out the killings were wearing Ethiopian Army uniforms, and that the videos had been recorded in two separate locations a short distance apart. By matching the victims seen in videos from the two sites, we were able to determine that the five videos showed the



same group of soldiers and civilians, and that they were recorded on the same day.

Following the publication of our investigation, the Ethiopian Embassy in the United Kingdom responded on social media by suggesting that the incident would be investigated, and called the footage "distressing".

[read the full story](#)







# flash card apps expose nuclear secrets

May

A months-long investigation found that US service members had inadvertently revealed the exact location of American nuclear weapons based in Europe as well as the intricate security protocols that were supposed to protect them. The story raised serious questions about just how secure US nuclear devices stationed in Europe really are and whether a continued policy of secrecy around their deployment benefits the citizens of Europe and the nations that host them.

Bellingcat was able to find a raft of highly sensitive information by sifting through social media posts, conducting advanced Google searches and identifying data inadvertently made public by US service members who had studied security protocols through quiz apps. Each piece of data added to our understanding of how bases hosting nuclear weapons operated, informing further searches.

Among the details uncovered were the exact shelters, or "hot vaults," containing nuclear weapons. Protocols such as the position of security cameras, the frequency of patrols, secret duress words that signal when a guard is being threatened and the unique identifiers that distinguish restricted area badges were also found. An image depicting US service members posing beside a dummy nuclear weapon on a base in the Netherlands was

uncovered on Facebook – providing startling evidence of another security breach. This investigation received widespread attention with coverage in dozens of countries and in at least 36 separate languages. On Bellingcat's site alone, the story was viewed more than 370,000 times.

The presence of American nuclear weapons in Europe has long been an open secret, but governments in the US and Europe continue to refuse to confirm or deny their presence. The Dutch Ministry of Defence said it was coordinating with NATO and US Central Command after we showed the image above when requesting comment. The Pentagon also publicly stated that it had begun an investigation into our findings, although it again refused to confirm or deny that any US nuclear weapons were present in Europe.

The debate about nuclear weapons in Europe is often hampered by secrecy and a policy of ambiguity that, while operationally understandable, serves to shut down debate. Being able to prove the existence of nuclear weapons, as well as some shockingly lax security, helped open the conversation about whether such weapons are still relevant in the post-Cold War period. It also served to highlight potential dangers for those living close to such bases.



**newsy** + **bellingcat**

## cameroon's education crisis

*July*

The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, a conflict between Cameroon's English-based creole speaking minority and the central government, has been simmering since 2016 - and as of 2021 there was no end in sight. The conflict has long since turned bloody, with civilians caught in the middle.

Education became a critical part of the information war between separatist groups and the government early on in the conflict; many children in Anglophone regions were prevented from going to school by separatists as a boycott against government-mandated Francophone education. But after four years of school restriction and no real prospects of winning the war, children started to resume schooling, angering the separatists enforcing the boycott.

Since then, violence against schoolchildren and teachers - perpetrated by both the separatists and government forces - has risen. Bellingcat and Newsy worked together to geolocate incidents that were received and archived by the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis Database of Atrocities at the University of Toronto. The incidents verified by Newsy and Bellingcat, which included one of the most gruesome massacres against schoolchildren in Kumba, illustrate a tragic trend in one of the world's most underreported conflicts.

In parallel, Bellingcat launched a pilot volunteer project that sought to verify videos of other incidents stored in the database that had not yet been geolocated and verified. The results were then shared back to the database. This trial also provided the blueprint for what is now Bellingcat's Global Authentication Project.

**[read the full story](#)**





## hungary's far-right football fans

July

At matches for the European football (soccer) championships in June 2021, Hungarian fans affiliated with a supporter's group long criticized for its far-right leanings chanted anti-LGBT slogans and held up anti-LGBT and anti-Black Lives Matter banners.

Their actions certainly didn't help Hungary's national team very much – Hungary finished last in its group and didn't qualify for the knockout round. Worse, Europe's football governing body fined Hungary's football federation €100,000 and ordered it to play its next two UEFA matches without spectators (subsequently reduced to one on appeal) because of these fans' actions.

Bellingcat sought to find out who was behind these banners. We closely compared press photographs from the matches with those posted on far-right social media accounts, including a photo posted by a Hungarian neo-

Nazi group at an unrelated event a month after the matches. We determined that they were the same banner.

Bellingcat then determined, using matching visual cues and publicly-available facial recognition search engines, the identity of the individual holding up the banner and other similar banners from EURO 2020 – a senior member of a Hungarian neo-Nazi group.

After our investigation was published, the individual in question admitted publicly that he made these banners for Hungary's national team matches. Bellingcat's researcher also was the target of a veiled public threat from the neo-Nazi group for digging into their activities. In February 2022, this neo-Nazi group's annual "Day of Honour" commemoration of Nazi and Axis was banned by Hungarian authorities for the first time in years.



# wagnergate

November

Bellingcat and The Insider's investigation into the so-called "Wagnergate" operation was a year-long project that uncovered the sequence of bizarre circumstances around an audacious Ukrainian plot to capture dozens of mercenaries of the "Wagner" group who had fought for Russian-supported military entities in eastern Ukraine.

The investigation found that a fake private military contractor and mission had been created to lure the mercenaries onto a flight that would cross briefly into Ukrainian airspace before being forced to make an emergency landing in Kyiv. The mercenaries would then be arrested for crimes the Ukrainian authorities believed they had committed while on Ukrainian territory.

However, a last minute change of plan delayed the mission and led to a spectacular

unraveling of the plot as Russia inadvertently figured out what had been going on. The ensuing fallout created enormous political drama in Ukraine and finger-pointing over who was to blame for the operation's late collapse.

In the course of the investigation, Bellingcat and the Insider spoke to individuals involved in planning the sting as well as mercenaries who had been recruited by the fake PMC. Documents provided by the mercenaries were also uncovered. These included resumes, awards provided by the Kremlin and written admissions of how Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine had developed.

The publication of our investigation led to massive international attention and a flurry of official reactions and hearings in the Ukrainian Rada, largely in regards to the role of President Zelenskyy and his key staff members in delaying the operation, leading to its failure.

[read the full story](#)



# the far right and QAnon

Ongoing

*In 2021, Bellingcat secured funding to begin two major projects: one on QAnon in Europe, and one on the far right in Central and Eastern Europe.*

## QANON

The first, undertaken in collaboration with Lighthouse Reports and funded by the European Commission, concerns the QAnon conspiracy theory and its spread across Europe. The project will produce a series of articles and reports, an evidence database including a data-analysis dashboard that can be used by journalists in their own investigations, a series of online workshops concerning tools and websites commonly used by conspiracy theorists and an international two-day conference to be held online in October 2022.

Our innovative data-driven research into alternative social media platforms has allowed us to identify new trends in online conspiracy communities.

The Tech Team is developing tools that will give investigators a much greater chance of identifying trends on alternative social media platforms. The QAnon project published a report in 2021, on the misuse of open source research tools to create harmful new conspiracy theories, with more in production for 2022.

The demand for online workshops has also been high. In April 2022 we will train 120 participants from a variety of professional backgrounds. In May, Bellingcat and Lighthouse Reports will conduct a specialized workshop for journalism students in the Netherlands. This will be a valuable opportunity to share the findings of our research and address wider issues concerning disinformation on social media.

[read the stories](#)



# BELLINGCAT MONITORING

The second project monitors and investigates the far right using open-source research methods. Thanks to support from the Swedish Postcode Foundation, we began Bellingcat Monitoring in March 2021, focusing our efforts on more than 20 countries across Central and Eastern Europe. Our goal is not only to monitor and expose the far right ourselves, but to use our skills and experience to help build a network of organizations and journalists across the region to monitor the far right.

We spent the first few months of our project undertaking baseline and background research about far-right scenes, parties and movements in our target countries. In September 2021 we published our first investigation, which unmasked the links between a minority of Hungarian national football (soccer) team supporters and notorious far-right groups. The article was translated into Dutch by 360 Magazine and into Hungarian by respected independent media outlet Telex, and received considerable media coverage in Hungarian media. It also prompted a veiled threat to our own investigator from one of the far-right groups in question.

We followed this up in October 2021 with an investigation into Russian hate group Male State, a misogynist, homophobic and racist online gang

of vigilantes who have used the social media network Telegram to attack Russia's perceived enemies. We published this investigation in both English and Russian, and a Japanese translation was published by SlowNews.

In December 2021, we investigated the activities of American neo-Nazi Robert Rundo and his apparent return to Serbia – a country he had been banned from earlier in 2021 thanks to our 2020 investigation. Thanks to a piece of graffiti visible in a photo he posted on his Telegram channel, we were able to find Rundo at an address in central Belgrade. Our investigation generated considerable media coverage in Serbia and the western Balkans, as well as the US, and raised questions about why a known extremist awaiting trial in the US has been able to make an apparent home in Belgrade.

Our activities were not limited to our public investigations. We gave two workshops in October 2021: one with human rights officials in Moldova and another with LGBTQ+ activists and volunteers from Russia. In these workshops we taught how open-source investigative skills can be used not just to research and monitor the far right, but to gather evidence for accountability purposes. We followed this up with a lecture to the 'Women's Strike' (Strajk Kobiet) movement in Poland about disinformation and the far right in November 2021 in Warsaw, and are planning more workshops and training sessions in 2022 and 2023.

**[read the stories](#)**



# tools and technology

Throughout 2021, the Tech Team developed tools for researchers and released them as open source, piloted volunteer initiatives and started building a technical volunteer community, conducted tech-focused research initiatives, and continued to collaborate across the organization as a “service desk” for researchers with technology needs.

Starting in January, the Tech Team worked with volunteer coordinators to pilot two volunteer projects - real-time monitoring of the events of the US Presidential Inauguration and a collaborative geolocation project of violence in Cameroon. For the latter project, we built and tested a new volunteer collaboration platform.

Over the course of the year, we published many small open source tools for investigators, and started building a community of technical volunteers, with contributions from the wider technology community directly on our [Github](#).

We continued to collaborate on small projects with researchers, from interactive graphs in articles to a

Twitter bot that automatically tracks planes of interest in Venezuela.

We published tech-focused articles about the “research” performed by Qanon adherents in Germany, the stranded cargo ship in the Suez Canal, and how social media could be used to understand the hot-spots of India’s coronavirus crisis, turning this work into a resource that other investigators could use to understand how Twitter’s geolocation functionality works.

As part of a joint project with Lighthouse Reports, Bellingcat’s Investigative Tech Team started developing tools and techniques to automatically collect and archive online posts by QAnon conspiracy theorists in Europe. The resulting evidence database will be complemented by data analysis features which will allow research into the spread of conspiracy ideas across several countries. The project will continue in 2022.

Finally, we prepared the expansion of the Investigative Tech Team for 2022. To be able to respond to the growing needs of the organization in the area of tech and tool development, the team will be extended to five team members.

# ethics and editorial standards

*Bellingcat operates at the convergence of many disciplines and skill sets, making the establishment of editorial guidelines both uniquely complex and of paramount importance. In 2021, our editorial team strengthened this set of standards in order to ensure trust in the work we do. These standards will evolve over time as we face new challenges; no matter where our work takes us, however, we will always seek to apply the highest professional and ethical principles.*

## VALUES

We regularly report on issues of justice, transparency and accountability. As such, it is only fair that we look to hold our own work to these values. We seek to establish facts through objectively documented evidence, presented completely and in full context. Our researchers seek to report fairly, transparently and without bias, fear or favor.

## IMPARTIALITY

We are editorially independent, and the strictest standards of impartiality must be applied at all times. We will not work with partners whose behavior does not meet our ethical standards.

## ACCURACY

When our researchers and contributors submit stories, they go through a process of fact-checking and review by their fellow researchers. They are expected to be fair, accurate and clearly show their work. If articles do not meet Bellingcat's standards, they will not be published.

## COPYRIGHT & IMAGES

We commit to using images and comments in context and never in a misleading manner. We do not use copyrighted images and video in published articles without prior permissions. If we want to use visual material from social media, we strive to ask the uploader's permission and ensure the content belongs to them.

## **JOURNALISTIC & RESEARCH ETHICS**

Accusations of wrongdoing will only be made when there is a sound evidential basis for doing so. We will seek to give those accused the right to reply and a reasonable amount of time to respond. We do not steal information or pay individuals or witnesses for their statements. We will always consider the potential consequences of publication for vulnerable groups or individuals; certain circumstances may require us to balance such concerns with the wider public interest.

## **TRANSPARENCY**

We promote the use of open source tools for investigation and we encourage others to try these methods for themselves, openly and responsibly. We rigorously walk readers through our processes to build trust in and understanding of open source methodologies.

Our researchers will be as clear as possible with potential sources and subjects as to who they are, who they work for and what their intentions are. We will always seek to be open about our sources, methods and tools.

## **PRIVACY & HARM**

Researchers must not harass individuals they may be reporting on. They must exercise caution with information they find during investigations and not publish private details without fully justifiable public interest reasons. Care must also be taken to not unnecessarily reveal information or images of those who may be family members or related to the subjects of our investigations.

We also carefully consider the impact on victims, survivors or relatives who have suffered loss due to accidents or disasters. If researchers must approach them, they must act with compassion and understanding, and consider the consequences of publishing details that may add to their suffering.

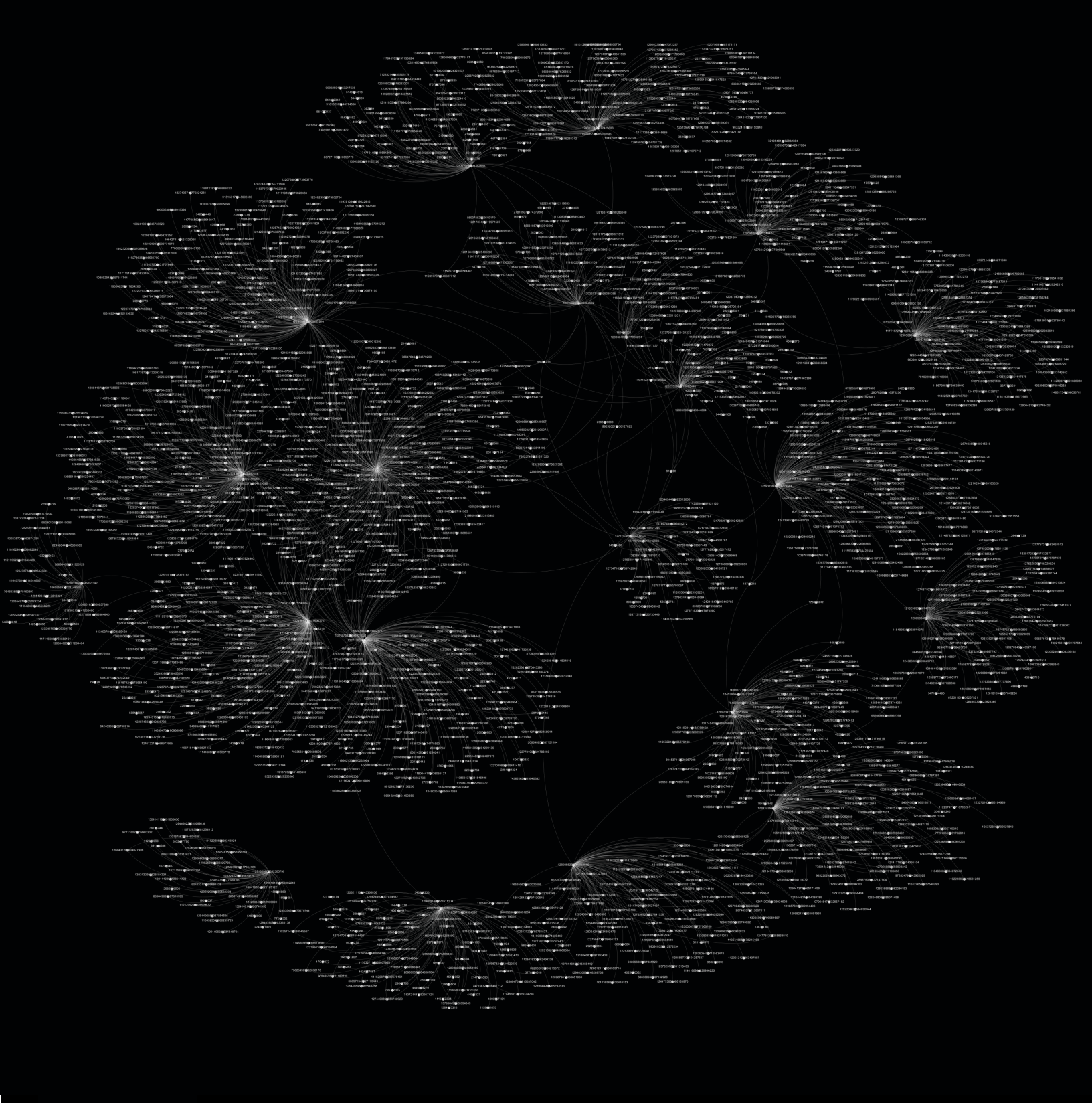
## **PERSONAL VIEWS**

Personal views must be kept entirely separate from our journalistic work. We aim to be fair and even handed, in line with good journalistic and research practice.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

Researchers or contributors who have a personal or financial stake in a subject they are writing about must make editors and senior staff aware. Depending on circumstances, the researcher may be required to disclose the conflict publicly, or be disqualified from contributing.





# TRAINING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

# workshops and training

Ongoing

Bellingcat has been at the forefront of teaching open source research methodology since our founding in 2014, evolving from publishing guides on our website, to in-person workshops, to now virtual webinars. With our collaborative mindset, we aim to spread our knowledge through these teaching methods to spread open source research techniques and expand the community of evidence-based researchers. Along with our educational publications and training workshops, we also partner with news organizations in our investigations to further the propagation of digital investigative methods in mass media.

In these workshops and published guides, we teach our audience digital investigative techniques such as creative search techniques, optimized reverse image search practices, aircraft and naval vessel tracking methods, archiving of digital materials, digital footprint tracing for individuals and groups, applications of satellite imagery in investigations, and the verification of visual materials through geolocation and chronolocation (determination of place and time of an image or video).

Along with the two-dozen paid public workshops we held in 2021, the growing reputation of Bellingcat has

led to requests for us to provide private workshops to train a wide variety of organizations, including media outlets, large NGOs, universities, corporations, and think tanks.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the travel restrictions that were intermittently imposed across the world, we continued to carry out our training online, allowing us to offer various training lengths and topics at a reduced rate. **In 2021, we carried out 69 public and private training workshops with more than 1,250 participants**, and participated in over 35 other training activities with a wide array of organizations and media outlets, including presentations and talks at conferences. Some of these workshops included free Russian-language training events held both publicly, such as in our Digital Showcase series later posted onto YouTube, and private workshops for organizations in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. In the last quarter of 2021, we were able to do seven in-person workshops after the restrictions began to be gradually lifted in some countries.

It is our aim to continue to offer our training in both formats (in-person and online) from 2022 onwards, as well as publishing freely accessible guides and case studies from our work.

# volunteer community

Ongoing

## ***In 2021, we launched the first iteration of our volunteer community.***

Over the course of the year, we conducted three pilot projects that allowed us to test assumptions about our potential volunteers and the resulting investigations.

These trials allowed us to build a plan towards a larger launch in 2022. We built a volunteer platform, created research and data collection methodologies, managed recruitment strategies, and came to understand what resources would be required from Bellingcat in order to upscale this community. With the lessons from 2021, we hired a full-time Investigative Lead to work alongside our Project Director and fully engage in our relationship to our volunteers and their research.

Our main takeaway from 2021 is that interest in volunteering for Bellingcat is overwhelmingly strong and we need to be prepared to manage this interest upon launching to the wider public in 2022. Ideally, we want to eventually give every person who wants to volunteer for us a space to do so. Most importantly, though, we want to do this right. We seek to foster professional relationships with our volunteers that allow them to get the most out of this endeavor-which

going forward will be called the Global Authentication Project.

The Global Authentication Project brings together individuals of all backgrounds and skills to solve research questions. Through collaborative methodologies and chat spaces, users can interact and review each other's work under the guidance and moderation of Bellingcat researchers. Whether it's collecting digital evidence of police violence at protests in Colombia or locating human rights abuses in Cameroon, the volunteers conduct research on human rights topics using open source data and methodologies under the guidance of our experts. These research tasks are compiled by our project leads and the results are published through creative and visual story-telling, including a forthcoming volunteer blog.

In keeping with our commitment to transparency and community, we are publishing standards for working together and fostering a sense of inclusion for all volunteers. Those who work with us will feel valued through the impact of their research and the connections they build.

Last year allowed us to lay the foundation for this community and these efforts have paid off. We are looking ahead towards making it a long-term pillar of Bellingcat.





**JUSTICE AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY**

Over the course of 2021, Bellingcat published several investigations focused on accountability, including mapping platforms tracking police violence in Colombia and Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in Yemen, a major investigation examining the killing of Lucas Villa and an investigation of a Houthi rocket strike which aimed to kill the new Yemeni Government, which was later cited in a UN report.

Because we aim to further justice and accountability with our work, our efforts don't stop at publication. We have cooperated with the Global Legal Action Network to develop a methodology which will increase the likelihood of the admissibility of open source information as evidence, which we are currently applying to the war in Ukraine.

In March 2021, a coalition including Bellingcat, the Global Legal Action Network, and Swansea University School of Law staged a mock admissibility hearing to test the principles behind the methodology. The hearing was to decide whether a video depicting an airstrike on the Office of the Presidency in Sana'a, Yemen would be accepted as evidence by a Common Law court. In order to do this a wider scenario was invented, with distinguished QCs arguing for the inclusion or exclusion of this video.

Ultimately Judge Joanna Korner, who now sits at the International Criminal Court,

decided that the video could be included as evidence, representing a significant step forward for the use of this kind of information as evidence. She also ruled that the open source practitioner, in this case Bellingcat senior investigator Nick Waters, could indeed act as an expert witness.

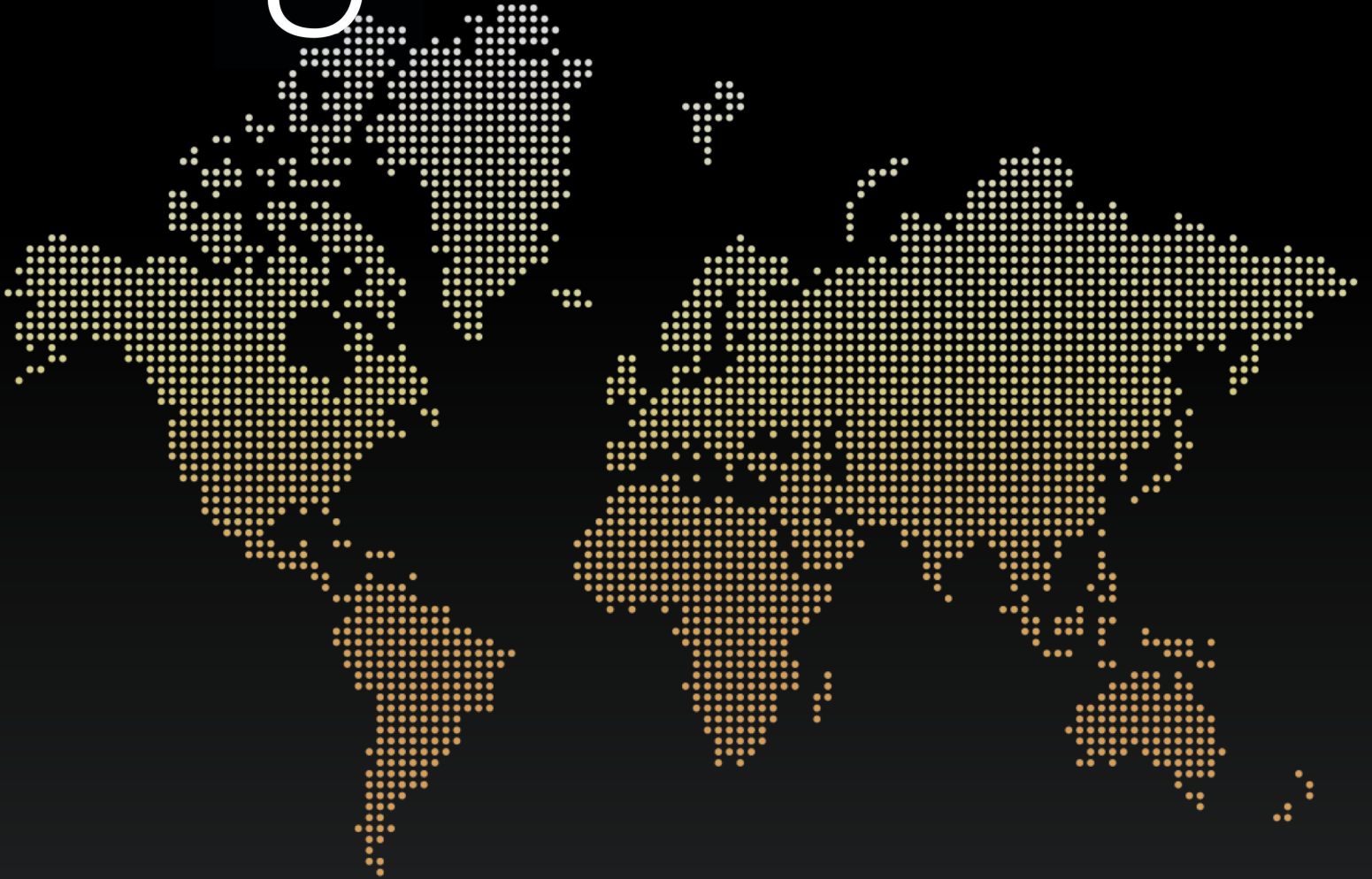
Apart from this mock hearing, several of our investigations have led to actual court cases, where Bellingcat or research partners have been asked to be witnesses. For instance, our research into the killing of Muhammad Gulzar led our research partner Forensic Architecture to be a witness in a case being brought by Mr. Gulzar's son. Information collected by Bellingcat regarding Saudi-led coalition airstrikes was included in a complaint to the ICC by ECCHR. Additionally, Christo Grozev submitted evidence that proved vital to establishing the involvement of the state of Russia in the assassination of a dissident in Berlin—a case in which the court concluded not only that the defendant was guilty, but also that he was acting on behalf of the Russian government.

We also joined our partners Mnemonic and GLAN submitting information regarding Saudi-led coalition airstrikes in Yemen as part of a criminal complaint to the ICC by ECCHR. This information demonstrated the SLC's participation in airstrikes which may constitute breaches of humanitarian law.





# THE TEAM



## executive board



**Dessi Damianova**  
Director of Operations



**Eliot Higgins**  
Executive Director



**Aric Toler**  
Director of Training &  
Research

## supervisory board



**Yoei Albrecht**  
Journalist & Director of  
De Balie



**Joseph Peeraer**  
Founding Partner,  
Postiron Ventures



**Marietje Schaake**  
International Policy Director,  
Stanford Cyber Policy Center

## international advisory board

**Algirdas Lipstas**, international media expert; former Director, Open Society Foundations

**Anya Niestat**, Legal Director of the Docket Initiative, Clooney Foundation for Justice

**Francis Fukuyama**, Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow, Stanford University's Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

**María Teresa Ronderos**, Co-Founder, Latin American Center for Investigative Journalism

**Premesh Chandran**, Co-Founder and CEO, Malaysiakini

## staff



**Aiganysh**  
Researcher and Trainer  
Central Asia



**Annique**  
Researcher and Trainer  
*Conspiracies and misinformation*



**Carlos**  
Researcher and Trainer  
*Human rights violations, war crimes, child sexual exploitation*





**Chantal**  
Fundraising Coordinator



**Charlotte**  
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Team Lead  
*Conflict zones & research  
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**Eoghan**  
Lead Editor



**Foeke**  
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*Environmental and conflict  
research*



**Giancarlo**  
Researcher and Trainer  
*Latin America and  
transportation tracking*



**Jaap**  
Financial Manager



**Johanna**  
Researcher and Tech Team  
Lead



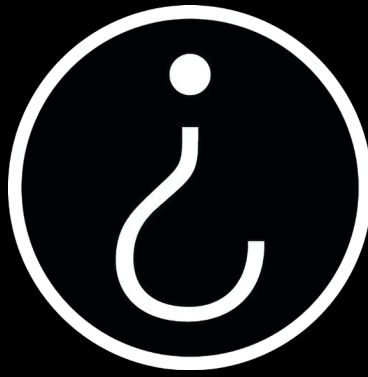
**Logan**  
Data Scientist  
*Analysis and tool  
development*



**Maxim**  
Editor



**Michael**  
Senior Researcher  
*Far right*



**Narine**  
Researcher and Trainer  
*Far-right extremism,  
environmental and military  
issues*



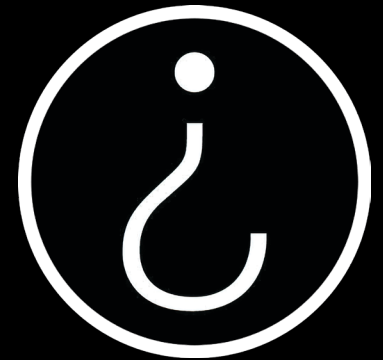
**Nasma**  
Training and Administration  
Coordinator  
*Syria, human rights, and  
feminism*



**Nick**  
Senior Investigator and  
Justice & Accountability  
Lead



**Pieter**  
Researcher and Trainer  
*Eastern Europe*



**Robert**  
Researcher  
*Far right movements and  
alternative social media*



**Ross**  
Researcher and Trainer  
*Financial investigations, the  
far right*



**Youri**  
Researcher and Trainer  
*Africa*



# 2021 contributors



## **Abigail**

*QAnon and data science*

## **Ambrose**

*The far right and technology*

## **Brenna**

*Cryptocurrency and disinformation*

## **Christo**

*Security threats, extraterritorial clandestine operations, weaponization of information*

## **Edward**

*Data-driven investigations, MENA, refugee and asylum law*

## **Elise**

*State-linked information operations, conspiracy theories, online dynamics of political movements*

## **Emmi**

*Disinformation and the far right*

## **Frank**

*Injustice, abuse of power*

## **Garrison**

*The far right in the US and Europe*

## **Hadi**

*Archiving digital information from the conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Sudan*

## **Jake**

*Civil conflict and human rights abuses*

## **Klement**

*Data journalism*

## **Max**

*Cybersecurity, data science, machine learning*

## **Nathan**

*Information operations, infrastructure hunting, the Middle East*

## **Oleksiy**

*Ukraine and right-wing extremism*

## **Ollie**

*Open source software development, spatial analysis, climate and environment*

## **Robert A.**

*Data science and visualization*

## **Shane**

*Social movements, fascism, and the far right*

## **Timmi**

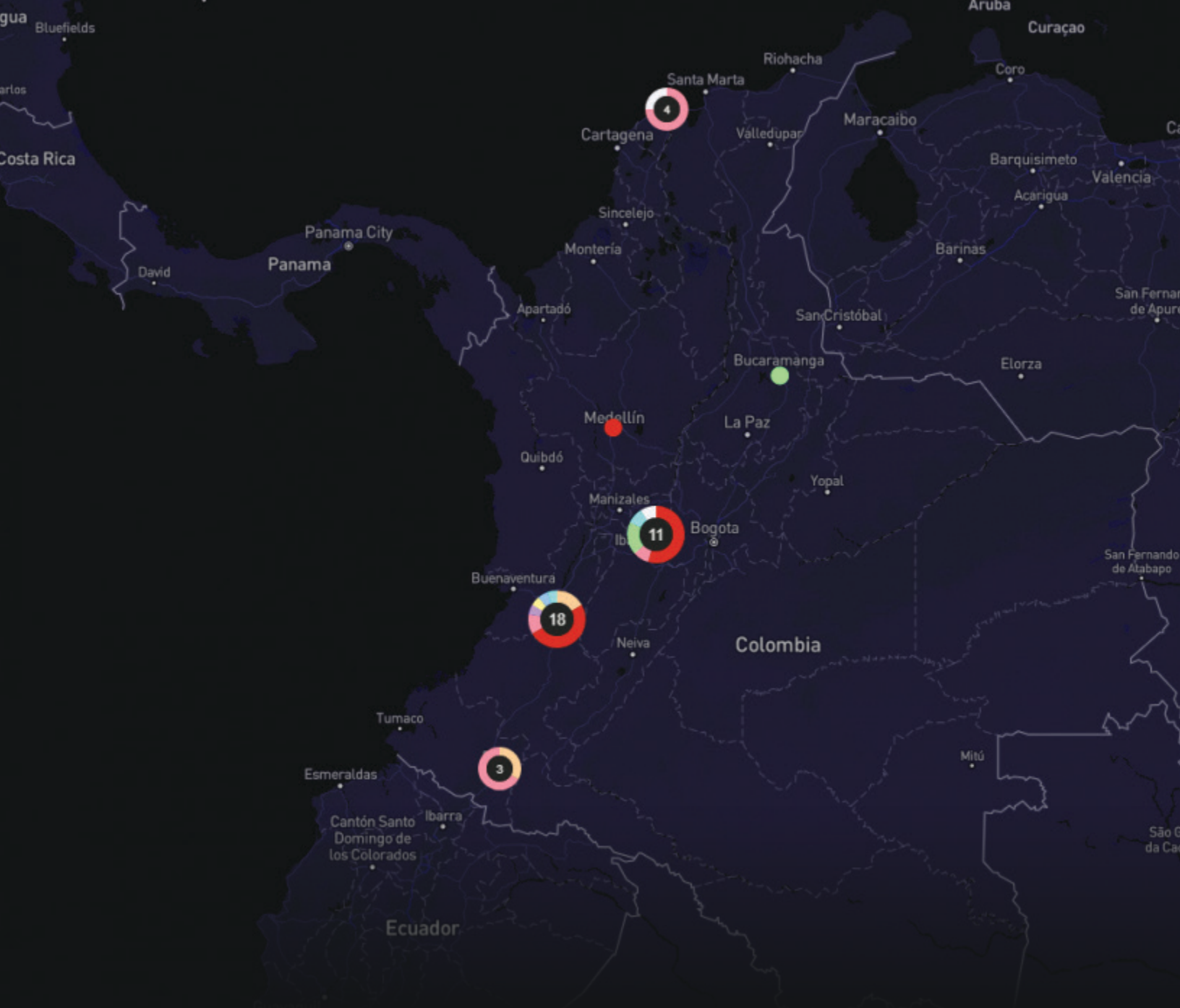
*Photo and video analysis and geolocation*

## **Wim**

*Impact of conflict on environment and climate, use of military drones*

## **Yordan**

*Security threats, hybrid warfare, Russian clandestine operations*



# PARTNERS AND FINANCIALS

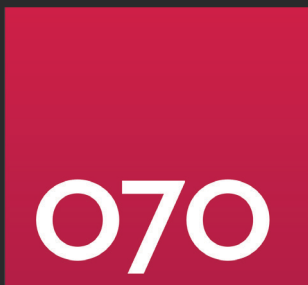
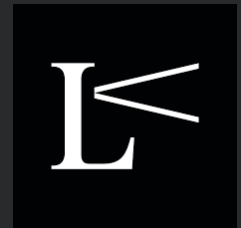
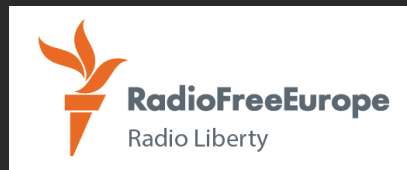


# partners

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Kennedy Van der Laan



# supporters

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who generously shared their time and resources with Bellingcat in 2021. You make our work possible, and without you we would not be where we are today. Every contribution, no matter how large or small, has an impact. Your generosity secures our independence.

We would also like to recognize our institutional donors who provided essential core and project funding throughout the year. Thank you for your support!



SIGRID RAUSING TRUST



global witness



a philanthropic initiative for democracy and solidarity in europe



# financial statement

## Statement of Income and Expense from 1 January to 31 December 2021

All amounts are in Euros

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>Actuals 2021</b>	<b>Budget 2021</b>	<b>Actuals 2020</b>
Income from lotteries	376.661	580.000	250.000
Income from other non-profit organizations	833.959	775.000	534.751
Income from companies	43.331	110.000	228.857
Income from governments*	16.801	40.000	3.876
Income from individuals	288.137	130.000	105.878
Income media productions	0	145.000	0
<b>Sum of proceeds</b>	<b>1.558.889</b>	<b>1.780.000</b>	<b>1.123.362</b>
Income from workshops	609.830	450.000	587.080
Income from keynotes / presentatons	31.717	5.000	5.182
<b>Sum of earned income</b>	<b>641.547</b>	<b>455.000</b>	<b>592.262</b>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>2.200.436</b>	<b>2.235.000</b>	<b>1.715.624</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>			
<i>Spent on the organization's objectives:</i>			
Research and Investigations	1.226.336	1.178.638	702.359
Training	289.111	533.975	311.938
Costs of fundraising	148.674	171.833	116.791
Management and accounting costs	268.136	247.554	335.367
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>1.932.257</b>	<b>2.132.000</b>	<b>1.466.455</b>
Operating result	268.179	103.000	249.169
Financial income and expenditures	-11.309	-5.000	-4.283
<b>Balance of income and expenses</b>	<b>256.870</b>	<b>98.000</b>	<b>244.886</b>
<b>Appropriation of the balance of income and expenses</b>			
<i>Additions to:</i>			
Continuity reserve	287.185	98.000	162.065
Earmarked funds	-30.315	0	82.821
<b>FINANCIAL RATIOS</b>			
Spent on the organization's objectives / Total generated income			68.9%
Spent on the organization's objectives / Total expenses			78.4%
Costs of income generation / Total generated income			6.8%
Management and accounting costs / Total expenditure			13.9%

\*Bellingcat does not solicit or accept funding and contributions directly from any national government. Bellingcat can solicit or accept contributions from international or intergovernmental institutions such as the European Commission or the United Nations.

# Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2021

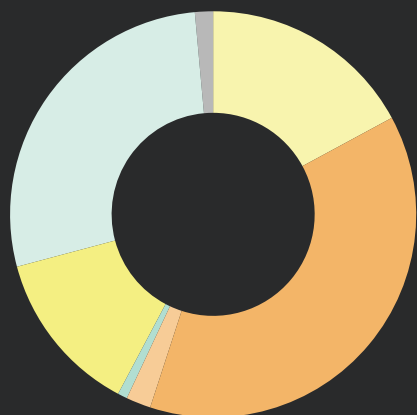
All amounts are in Euros

<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>31 December 2021</b>	<b>31 December 2020</b>
<i>Fixed assets - intangible</i>		
Website	15.714	20.850
<i>Fixed assets - tangible</i>		
Hardware and software	25.301	24.938
Office equipment	2.834	3.779
<b>Total tangible fixed assets</b>	<b>43.849</b>	<b>49.567</b>
<i>Financial fixed assets</i>		
Shares in Bellingcat B.V.	1	0
<b>Total fixed assets</b>	<b>43.850</b>	<b>49.567</b>
<b>Current Assets</b>		
Deposits	21.620	21.620
Debtors	44.798	17.869
Receivable from Bellingcat Productions	29.988	0
Accounts receivable and advances	36.154	15.898
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>132.560</b>	<b>55.387</b>
<b>Cash and cash equivalents</b>		
Bank	1.740.909	458.624
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>1.917.319</b>	<b>563.578</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
<i>Reserves and funds</i>		
Continuity reserve	453.695	166.510
Earmarked funds	52.506	82.821
<b>Total reserves and funds</b>	<b>506.201</b>	<b>249.331</b>
Provision	70.000	35.000
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Payable to staff	32.082	28.592
Payable to suppliers	2.140	15.621
Taxes payable	28.408	27.383
VAT payable	31.726	3.781
Pension premium	0	252
Other short-term liabilities	75.253	43.243
Obligations related to current projects	373.365	23.452
Grants received in advance	770.229	115.000
Other amounts received in advance	27.915	21.923
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>1.341.118</b>	<b>279.247</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>1.917.319</b>	<b>563.578</b>

# Cash Flow Statement 2021

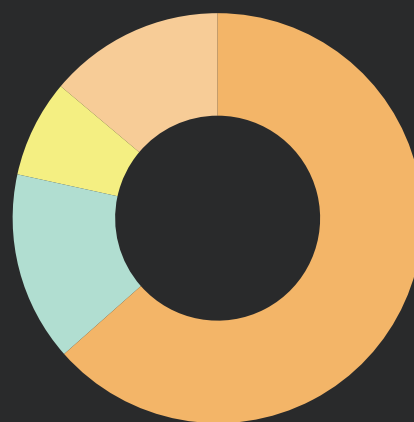
All amounts are in Euros

			2021			2020
<i>Cash flow from operational activities</i>						
Balance of income and expenses in the financial year		256.870			244.886	
Depreciation		13.131			11.685	
Provisions		35.000			35.000	
<i>Changes in working capital</i>						
- current assets	-77.173			50.207		
- current liabilities	1.061.990			-347.287		
<b>Cash flow from operational activities</b>			<b>1.289.818</b>			<b>-5.509</b>
<i>Cash flow from investment activities</i>						
Investment activities	-120			0		
Investments in tangible fixed assets	-8.927			-23.927		
Disinvestments in tangible fixed assets		1.514			0	
Cash flow from investment activities			-7.533			-23.927
<b>Net cash flow</b>			<b>1.282.285</b>			<b>-29.436</b>
Liquid assets at the start of the financial year	458.624			488.060		
Liquid assets at the end of the financial year	1.740.909			458.624		
<b>Changes in liquid assets</b>			<b>1.282.285</b>			<b>-29.436</b>



## INCOME - 2.200.436

Income from lotteries	17.1%
Income from other non-profit organizations	37.9%
Income from companies	2.0%
Income from governments	0.8%
Income from individuals	13.1%
Income from workshops	27.7%
Income from keynotes / presentations	1.4%



## EXPENSES - 1.932.257

Research and investigations	63.5%
Training	15.0%
Costs of fundraising	7.7%
Management and accounting costs	13.9%



# colophon



## PHOTOGRAPHY AND ILLUSTRATIONS

**Cover:** Image with “You Can’t Camouflage Facts” © Total Design

**Page 8:** Illustration by Ann Kiernan, for story on the killing of Lucas Villa

**Page 9:** Illustration by Bellingcat depicting Ashli Babbitt’s route through the US Capitol

**Page 10:** Illustration created in Neural Blender, © Hayley Smart

**Page 11:** (*bottom*) Image by Jennifer Smart for Newsy + Bellingcat, (*inset*) composite of video screenshots demonstrating horizon line matching PeakVisor

**Page 12:** Censored image from social media

**Page 13:** Image by Jennifer Smart for Newsy + Bellingcat

**Page 14:** Reuters

**Page 15:** Illustration by Ann Kiernan

**Page 21:** Screenshot of Twitter account network analysis

**Page 24:** Illustration created in Neural Blender, © Hayley Smart

**Page 29:** Image of Michael Colborne by Marcin Talarek

**Page 31:** Detail from Bellingcat and 070’s map tracking police violence in Colombia, based on MapBox

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