TRUMP’S PRESIDENCY: A TIME OF DIVISION AND DELUSION
The Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ) is a global organization of support for women journalists. The CFWIJ pioneered mentorship for mid-career women journalists across several countries around the world and is the first organization to focus on the status of free press for women journalists. Our network of individuals and organizations brings together the experience and mentorship necessary to help female career journalists navigate the industry. Our goal is to help develop a strong mechanism where women journalists can work safely and thrive.

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The outgoing president of the United States, Donald Trump, has been featured front and center in the media since his inauguration. In his candour, the president has often reignited the stereotypes and biases that the present world is working to extinguish. Not always for his rhetoric or questionable ambitions for America and its people, but for the division he provokes.

One example is the gender bias perpetuated by his interactions with women journalists during press conferences.

Whether it is asking a women reporter to “keep her voice down”, calling them nasty and horrid for questioning him at news conferences organized for that very purpose, Trump’s degrading comments towards women journalists soon became a pattern of disrespect. An anachronistic element of his presidency, his contempt exemplifies the conservatism that America hopes to leave behind.

Power, however, is not what encouraged the outgoing president’s flagrant disregard. Even before he took office, in the first Republican debate of 2015, he rebuked a Fox News anchor, Megyn Kelly, after she questioned him about his offensive statements regarding women.

“You could see blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever...” he told CNN’s Don Lemon.
Trump has also been called out for his derogatory remarks towards African-American women journalists. In one notable instance, he ridiculed three African-American women journalists for three days. In 2018, he singled out Abby Phillip, April Ryan and Yamiche Alcindor, for asking questions, calling them “stupid”, “a loser” and “racist”.

Abby Phillip, a CNN reporter at the time and had previously worked for the Washington Post, asked a question regarding Trump’s presidential campaign. Trump snapped at her, calling her question “stupid”, accompanied by “I watch you a lot. You ask a lot of stupid questions”.

Later, while speaking to Elle about the interaction, Abby said, “There’s no such thing as a stupid question when you’re doing this...And, you know what, I’m not concerned whether he thinks it’s smart or stupid...because he could’ve just answered the question or dodged the question. He chose to not do either of those things.”

Referencing April Ryan, he had said, “You talk about somebody that’s a loser...She doesn’t know what the hell she’s doing. She gets publicity, and then she gets a pay raise, or she gets a contract with, I think, CNN. But she’s very nasty, and she shouldn’t be. You’ve got to treat the White House and the office of the presidency with respect.”

Two days before calling April a loser, Trump chided her at a White House news conference when she tried to ask him a question. “Such a hostile media,” he said, and while referring to another reporter, he added, “You rudely interrupted him”.
Later, Yamiche Alcindor asked Trump about being a self-proclaimed nationalist and whether that “emboldened white nationalists”. Trump responded by calling it a “racist question”.

Moreover, there have been instances where Trump has underscored stereotypes about women by implying they must be polite and docile. When Fox News reporter Kristin Fisher questioned him about the lack of Covid-19 testing in the country, Trump told her to congratulate him, “You should say, ‘Congratulations! Great Job! Instead of being so horrid in the way you ask the question”.

In April 2020, when Trump asked CBS reporter Wejia Jiang to keep her voice down, a special contributor to People TV, Gretchen Carlson, had noted that there was no doubt there was a difference in the way he treats women. “...And it’s horrible.”

Such statements coming from the American president, heralded as the leader of the free world, legitimizes a behaviour that interferes with working women journalists. It is this attitude that requires women to be seen as compliant, any behavior that strays is labelled as harsh and bossy.

Other than verbal hostility, women journalists covering important beats like the White House have faced harassment and attacks, the most recent cases being seen during the Capitol Hill riots.

CFWIJ documented the attack on photojournalist Erin Schaff who was taking photos when she was assaulted by a group of rioters.
Likewise, Katie Nicholson of CBC was surrounded by Trump supporters on the same day, who were hurling insults at her. She and her crew were unable to continue reporting amidst the chaos.

The climate Trump has created in the U.S. is contrary to the welcoming environment for women journalists fostered during Barack Obama’s tenure.

In December of 2014, Obama held a news conference hearing questions only from women journalists, an unusual and deliberate move made to highlight their dedicated work. The White House press secretary of the time, Josh Earnest, had explained this was done to laud the work of women who covered presidential affairs.

“The fact is, there are many women from a variety of news organizations who day-in and day-out do the hard work of covering the President of the United States.”

CFWIJ condemns the hostile environment in the United States for women journalists and hopes for the situation to get better for them to do their duties without fear.