The 2016 Photo Contest:Technical Report

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Foreword

This technical report is an innovation for the World Press Photo Foundation. In the past, although data about the photo contest was collected and considered internally, little was released publicly.

As part of our desire to be more transparent about our activities, we are making public data on the contest related to issues of diversity, representation, and verification. Where possible, we are also releasing historical data so we can consider the current state of play in the context of the last decade.

This report is intended to start a conversation within our community of professional visual journalism. It has been compiled in the week after the 2016 Photo Contest winners' announcement, and is not intended to be a comprehensive presentation of all aspects of all the relevant issues. It is the first step in a process, and we will be making some of the issues analyzed here topics for debate at the Awards Days in Amsterdam on 22-23 April 2016.

Combined with the conversation and debate that follows, this report will have practical consequences too. Each year we undertake an evaluation of the contest. This was especially detailed in 2015, and involved a series of international consultations with the industry. We will have another review of the contest in the summer of this year, and the conversation and debate around the issues presented in this report will become part of that review.

Putting this report together has made us realize one very important fact: there is a scarcity of data on the global, professional visual journalism community. For example, we are not aware of how many people around the world consider themselves to be professional photographers, photojournalists, or visual journalists. Without that baseline knowledge of the community as a whole, it is difficult to make judgments about some of the data in relation to the contest. For example, because we do not know the demographics of the global, professional visual journalism community, we cannot say whether the number of women entering the contest is representative of the professional community as a whole, or whether as a percentage it is better or worse than the number of women in the global professional community as a whole.

With the State of News Photography report last year, we began a research program surveying contest entrants to help understand the lives and livelihoods of professional photographers. We have repeated that survey this year, and the main findings will be presented during the Awards Days. However, to get a comprehensive picture of the global professional community from which our contestants come, we need partners to undertake this research and we welcome proposals that would contribute to this effort.

Reviewing this data highlights the need for many new programs. As a charitable, non-profit foundation we unfortunately do not have the extra resources to undertake these programs alone. But we will be seeking partners to support us in this vital work.

Lars Boering
Managing Director

Executive Summary

1. More photographers entered the 2016 Photo Contest than in 2015, and we had the second largest number of entrants ever.

2. The number of countries from which entrants come has been steady, ranging between 124 and 132 countries, in the last decade.

3. The number of pictures entered peaked in 2011 at 108,059, and this year was just under 83,000. This reflects in large part the progressive reduction in the number of pictures in stories, which has been cut from 12 to 10, and now eight.

4. Most contest entrants come from Europe (46%) and Asia (32%).

5. China is the country that provided the largest number of entrants (1,014), followed by the USA (512) and Italy (440).

6. Africa is severely under-represented (only 2% of entrants), and we need to encourage global diversity by supporting talent in Asia beyond China, and South America as well.

7. This year 15% of entrants and 17% of prizewinners were women. There has been a gender imbalance in the proportion of female contest entrants and prizewinners in the last five years, though we don't know whether this differs from or replicates the gender balance of the global visual journalism community.

8. The 2016 contest saw a new, more extensive verification process. The World Press Photo Contest is the only contest that has this extensive of a verification process, and ours is the only contest that can say all the winners have successfully passed such an extensive verification process. Entrants readily accept this process—this year 99% of photographers met the requirement of providing their original files for analysis, meaning they are open and do not want to mislead either us or the audience.

9. This year, we checked more entries than before in the second to last round of the contest: the number was up more than 50%, from 100 to 174. Finalists were then subject to additional fact checking after the provisional awards were determined by the jury. Despite this greater scrutiny, fewer problems than last year were found, and proportionately fewer entries were excluded for contravening entry rules 10 and 11. The primary reason for exclusion was darkening or lightning of an image area so that material content is obscured and, in effect, removed. We offered video guidance on this prior to the contest, and the jury took a strong but consistent stand. Further discussion on this issue is required, and we will initiate that at the Awards Days in April.

1. <u>Overview of the number of entrants, their countries, and pictures entered 2007 - 2016</u>

Submitted photos
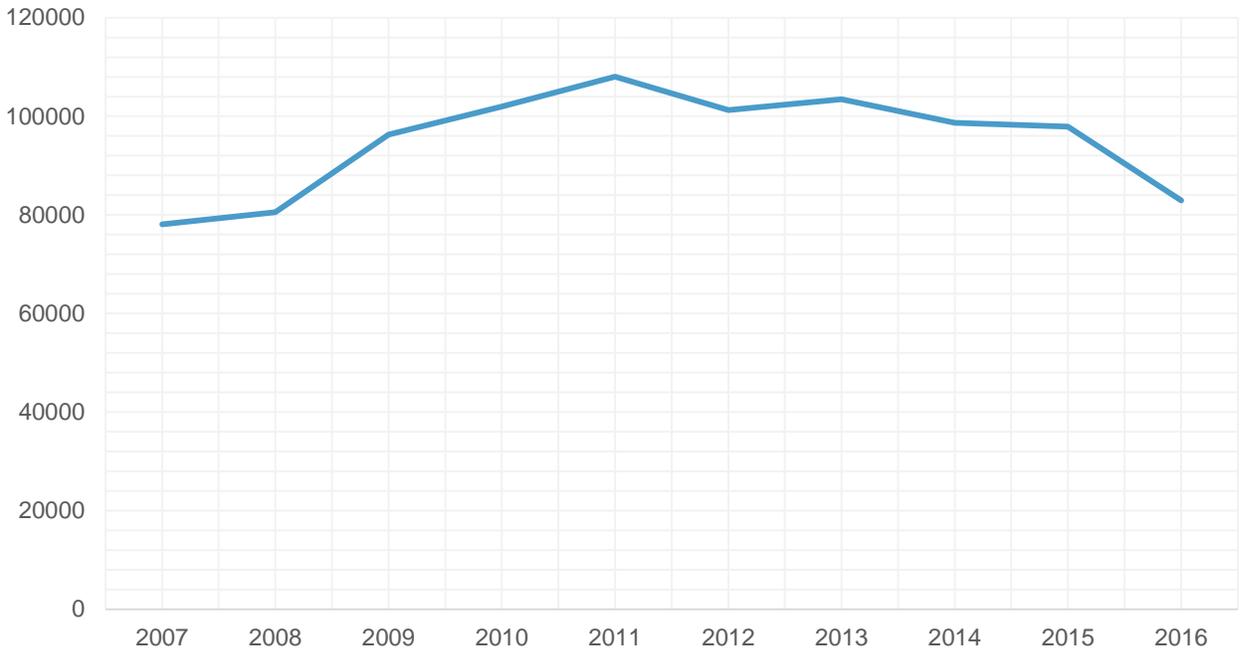
Entrants
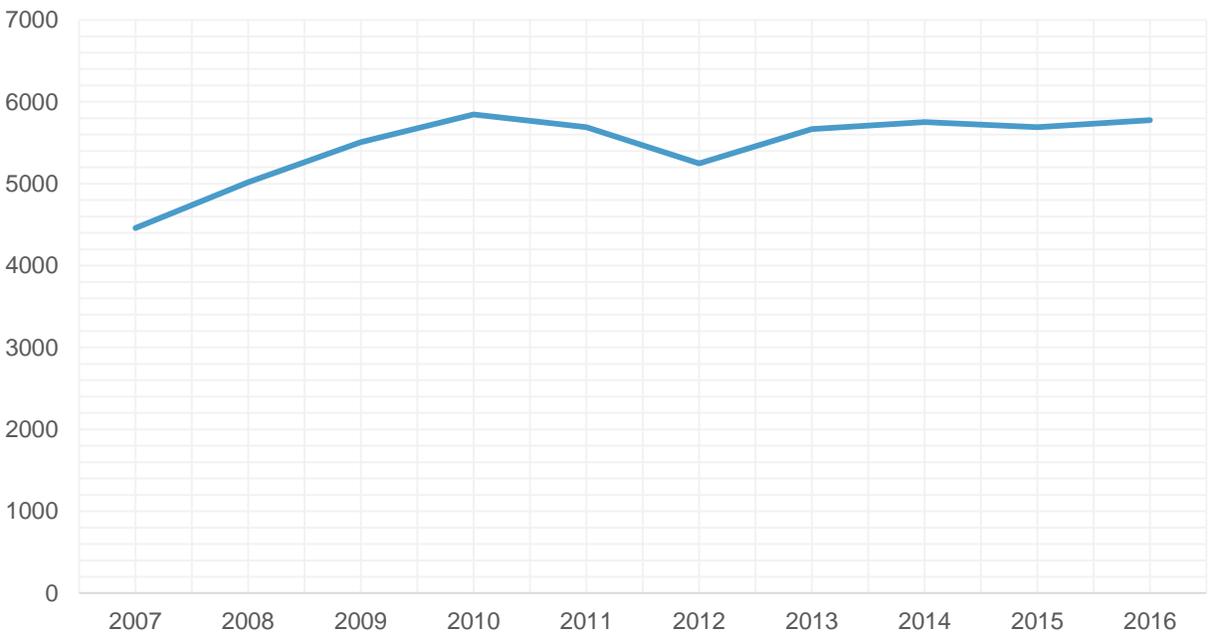
Year	Entrants	Countries	Submitted photos
2007	4,460	124	78,083
2008	5,019	125	80,537
2009	5,508	124	96,268
2010	**5,847**	128	101,960
2011	5,691	125	**108,059**
2012	5,247	124	101,254
2013	5,666	124	103,481
2014	5,754	**132**	98,671
2015	5,692	131	97,912
2016	5,775	128	82,951

The 2016 Photo Contest was well supported. More photographers entered in 2016 than in 2015, and we had the second largest number of photographers in the last decade. The number of countries from which photographers come has been steady, ranging between 124 and 132 countries, in the last decade. The number of pictures entered peaked in 2011, and lowered to just under 83,000 this year.

Average number of photos entered per participant
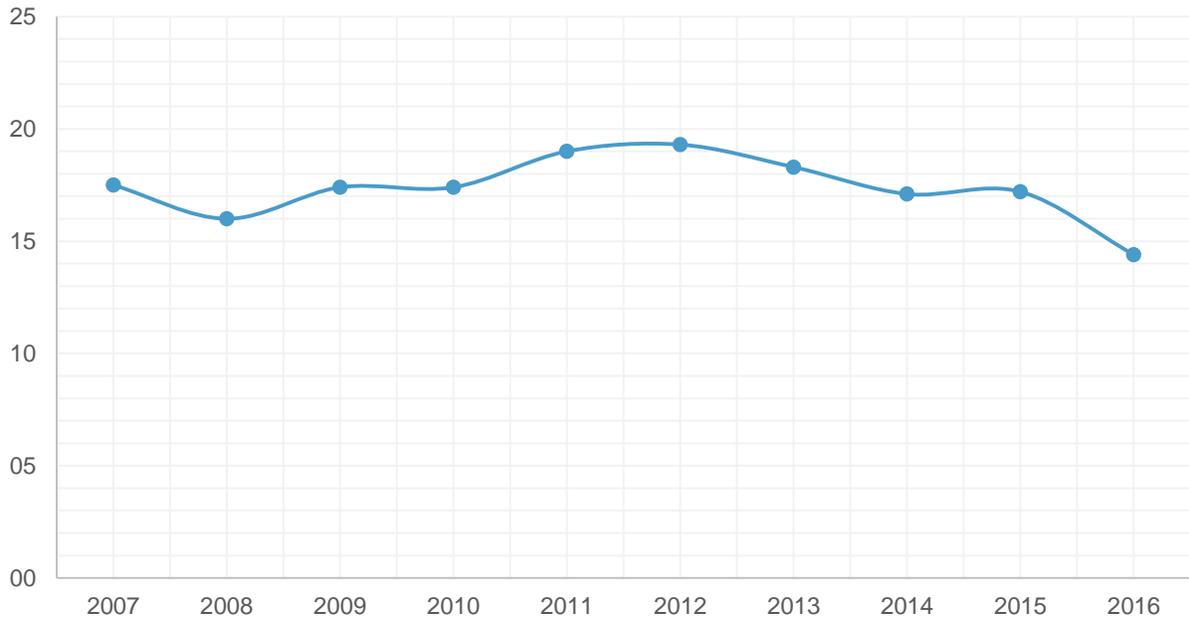
Year	Average number of photos entered per participant
2007	17.5
2008	16.0
2009	17.4
2010	17.4
2011	19.0
2012	19.3
2013	18.3
2014	17.1
2015	17.2
2016	14.4

One reason was the reduction in frames in a story from 12 to 10, and then to eight this year. The trend towards more entrants with fewer images, so quality can be enhanced, is something we would like to encourage.

2. Entrants by continent and country
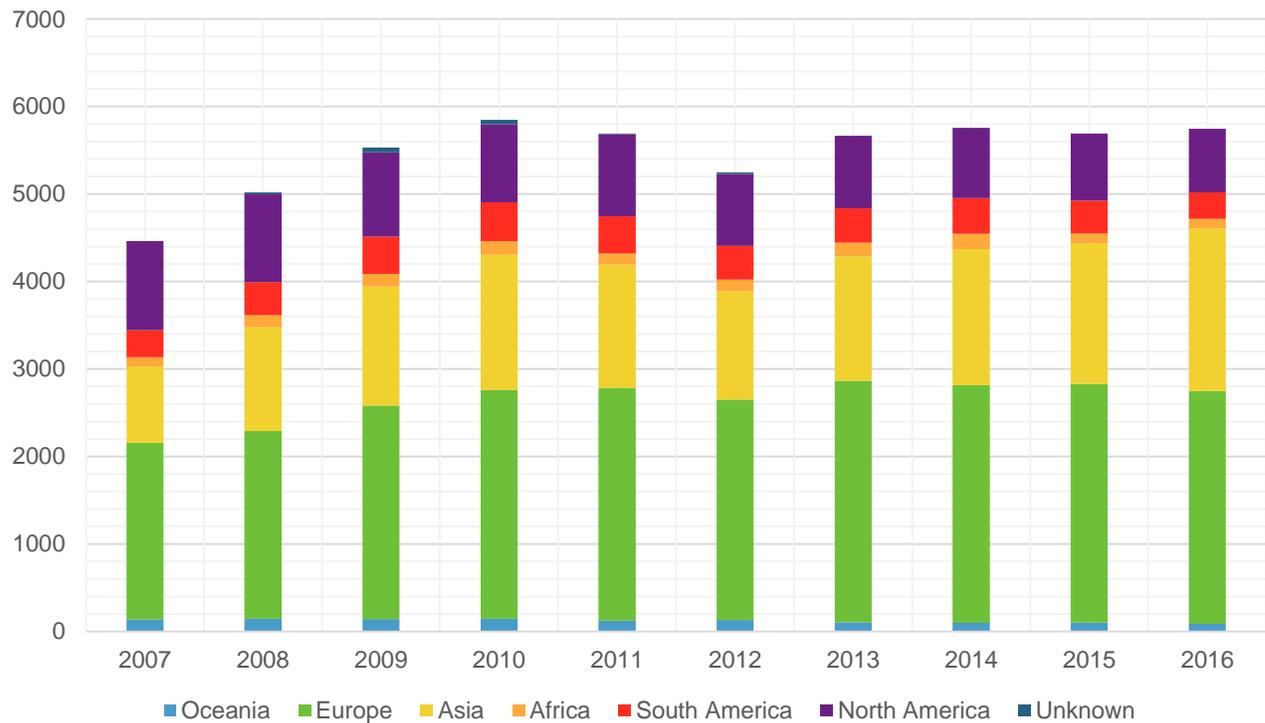
The geographic distribution of entrants is weighted towards Europe and Asia, with the 2016 data showing 46% of entrants came from Europe and 32% from Asia. North America was the source of 12% of entrants, 5% were from South America, 2% from Africa, and 1.5% from Oceania.

Over the last five years, the number of European entrants has been steady, the number of Asian entrants has increased, and the number of North American entrants has declined. The proportion of African and Oceanic entrants has remained low and declined slightly.

In 2016, the top 14 countries for entrants (those that had 100+ entrants) were:

1. China – 1,014
2. USA – 512
3. Italy – 440
4. Spain – 246
5. Germany – 234
6. France – 231
7. UK – 219
8. Russia – 189
9. India – 153
10. Poland – 151
11. Netherlands – 150
12. Brazil – 125
13. Iran – 117
14. Canada – 106

Improving global diversity is a major goal for the organization. Addressing the under-representation of photographers in Africa, Asia (beyond China), and South America is a priority. We have had initiatives over the years in these areas, including training programs in Bangladesh, the Philippines and Mexico.

We are now committing more attention and resources to this issue. For example, we had a regional masterclass in Mexico City in December 2015. Beginning with the creation of the African Photojournalism Database—in conjunction with Everyday Africa—we intend to develop on-going regional programs and masterclasses in Africa, building on our earlier programs (like Twenty Ten and Reporting Change) so we can make a sustained effort to encourage the photographic talent that exists in these areas.

15. Gender
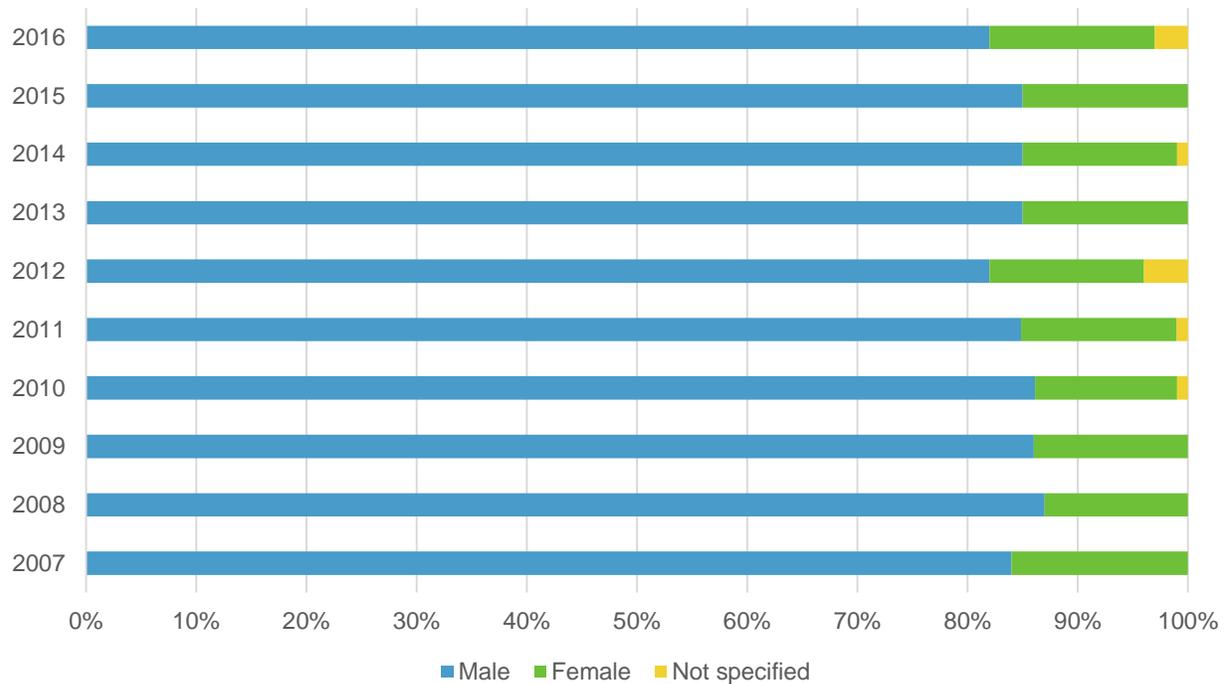
This table shows the proportion of female contest entrants between 2007 and 2016. This data indicates a clear gender imbalance. This was also clear in the State of News Photography survey, where 85% of respondents were male and 15% female.

However, as noted in the introduction, because we do not have data on the number of women in the global profession generally, it is not possible to say if the number of entrants is more or less reflective of the global profession as a whole.

Judging takes place anonymously, so the identity of entrants is not a factor in the awards. However, 17% of the 2016 winners were women.

Year	Male	Female	Not specified
2007	1,584	305	0
2008	3,422	507	2
2009	4,272	667	0
2010	5,102	784	45
2011	4,989	839	76
2012	4,278	751	218
2013	4,295	784	3
2014	4,825	817	12
2015	4,807	858	2
2016	4,709	891	175

16. <u>Prizewinners by country</u>

Top 5 countries with most prizewinners
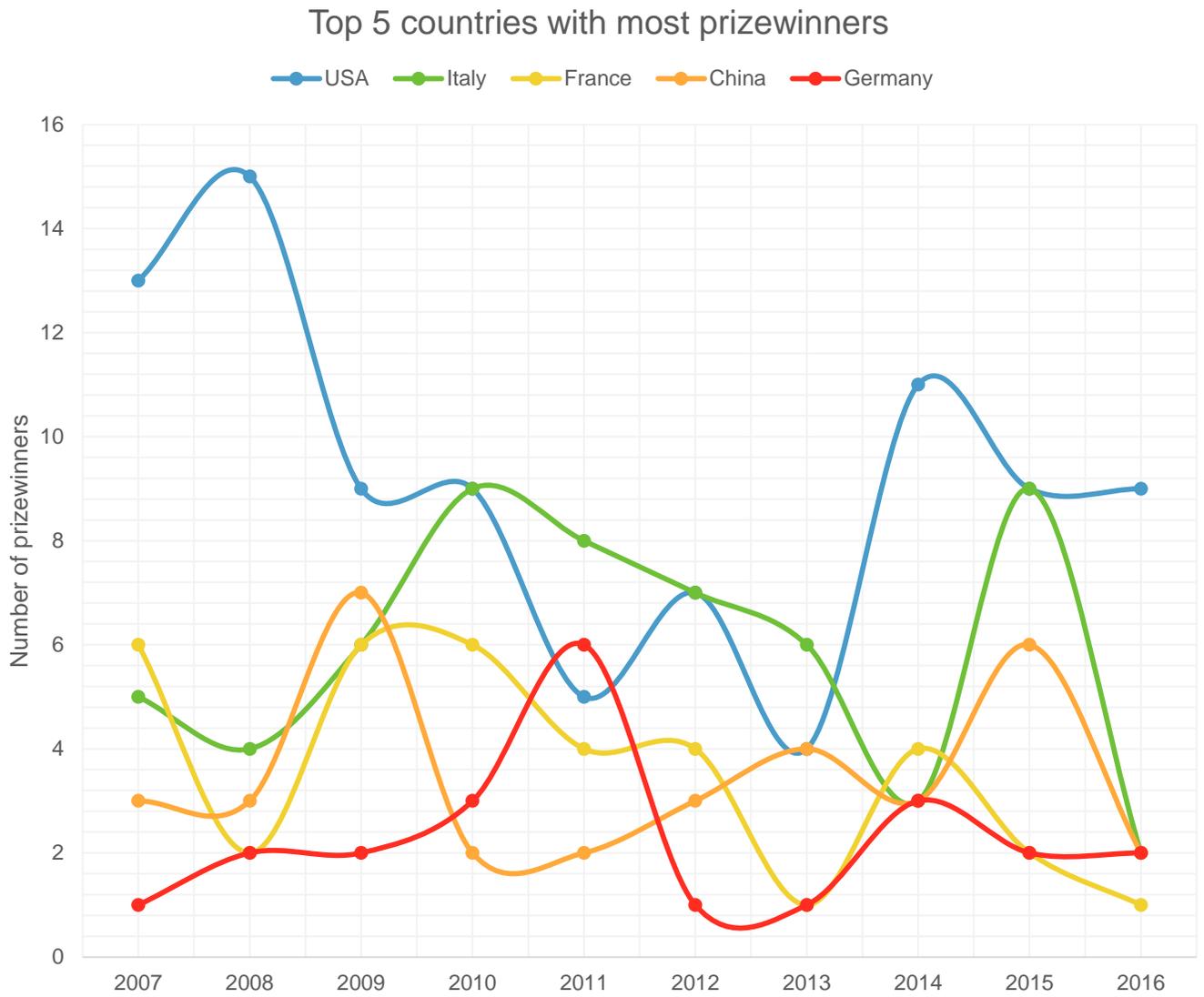
Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
USA	13	15	9	9	5	7	4	11	9	9	91
Italy	5	4	6	9	8	7	6	3	9	2	59
France	6	2	6	6	4	4	1	4	2	1	36
China	3	3	7	2	2	3	4	3	6	2	35
Germany	1	2	2	3	6	1	1	3	2	2	23
Australia	2	3	1	3	3	1	2	2	1	4	22
Spain	5	4	1		3	2	3	2		2	22
The Netherlands	2	1	1	6	3	5	1	1			20
UK	1	3		7		2	1	4	1		19
Poland		2	5		2	2	2	3	1		17
Russia		1	3			3	1	3	3	2	16
Sweden	2		2	2		3	1	1	1	4	16
Canada	2	4	2	2	1	1	1			2	15
Denmark	3	1			1	2	4		1		12
South Africa	1	1	1		2	2	1	1		1	10
Brazil	1		3	1	1		1			2	9
Mexico	1		1	1	1	1	1	1		2	9
Iran						1	3	1	2	1	8
Japan	1	1	2			3				1	8
Switzerland	2	2	2				1			1	8
Ireland			1	1	3	1			1		7
Argentina	1		1	1		1	1	1			6
Hungary	1	3		1	1						6
Israel	2	2		1	1						6
Belgium		1	1				2		1		5
India			1		2	1	1				5
Palestinian Territories	2			2			1				5
Bangladesh					1			2	1		4
Turkey							1		2	1	4
Chile			1	1			1				3
Portugal		1					1			1	3
Azerbaijan								2			2
Bulgaria		1						1			2
Czech Republic							1	1			2
El Salvador			1					1			2
Indonesia					1		1				2
Jordan							1	1			2
Malaysia							2				2
Norway	1					1					2
Peru					1		1				2
Serbia							1	1			2
Slovenia										2	2
Somalia					1	1					2
Syria										2	2
Afghanistan						1					1
Austria									1		1
Bosnia & Herzegovina						1					1
Colombia			1								1
Ecuador				1							1
Egypt						1					1
Eritrea									1		1
Finland								1			1
Greece			1								1
Haiti					1						1
Hong Kong					1						1
Mali				1							1
New Zealand								1			1
Nigeria	1										1
South Korea			1								1
Ukraine			1								1
Vietnam							1				1
Zimbabwe		1									1
Totals	59	58	64	62	54	57	55	55	44	45	553

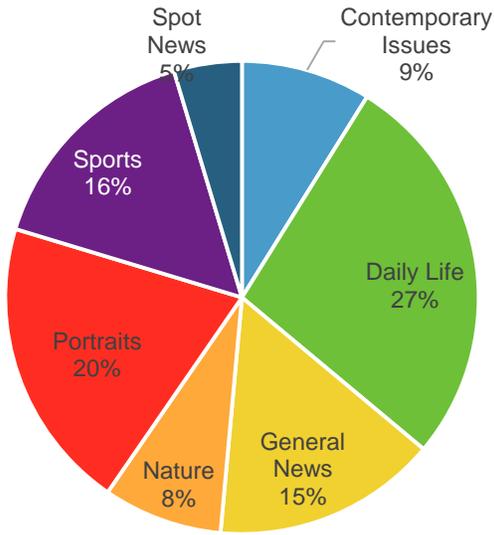Countries with no prizewinners from 2007-2016: Armenia, Cuba, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, and Puerto Rico

This table shows the number of awards per country, not the number of winning photographers. This means if a photographer is awarded a prize in two categories, the country is counted twice. The table does not include winners of the photo of the year. Note also that the nationalities of the prizewinners are provided by the prizewinners when they enter, and on occasion the nationalities have changed after announcement, when dual nationalities are sometimes declared by photographers.

As entries are judged anonymously, the country of entrants is not a visible factor in the process. It is interesting, nonetheless, to see the range of countries from which winners have come.
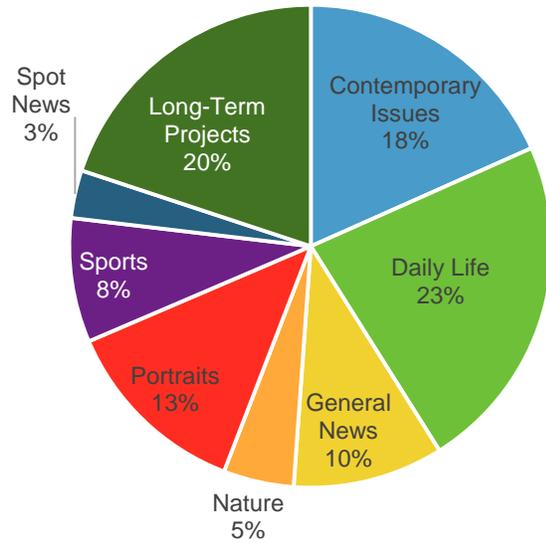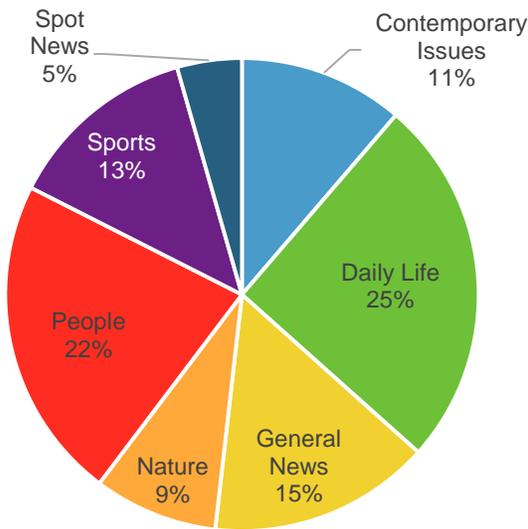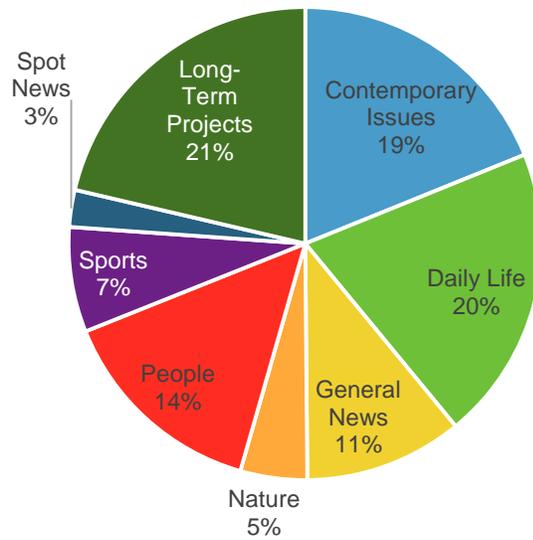
17. <u>Contest entries by category 2014 - 2016</u>

Total submitted photos

2014 - singles

2014 - stories

2015 - singles

Spot News 5%
Contemporary Issues 9%
Sports 16%
Daily Life 27%
Portraits 20%
Nature 8%
General News 15%

2015 - stories

Spot News 3%
Long-Term Projects 20%
Contemporary Issues 18%
Daily Life 23%
Sports 8%
Portraits 13%
General News 10%
Nature 5%

2016 - singles

Spot News 5%
Contemporary Issues 11%
Sports 13%
Daily Life 25%
People 22%
Nature 9%
General News 15%

2016 - stories

Spot News 3%
Long-Term Projects 21%
Contemporary Issues 19%
Daily Life 20%
Sports 7%
People 14%
General News 11%
Nature 5%

This table shows the number of picture entries in the contest categories—by singles and stories—over the last three years.

We have seen a reduction in the number of Contemporary Issues stories and Daily Life stories. Some of this is explained by the progressive reduction in the number of pictures in stories, which has been cut from 12 to 10, and this year to eight.

Notable also is the popularity of the Long-Term Projects category, first introduced in 2015. This year we revised that category into two: Long-Term Projects – Individual (LTP-I) and Long-Term Projects – Groups (LTP-G). This year's LTP-I received a very large number of entries, but the new LTP-G category did not. The jury considered that there was an insufficient number of LTP-G entries to make separate awards that recognized work of the same quality as LTP-I. As a result, all LTP entries were judged together, so if the jury felt there was an LTP-G entry of equal or better quality than an LTP-I entry, it could have been awarded one of the three prizes.

After considering the jury's point of view, the organization supported their decision. We will now consider how to encourage a higher number of quality submissions for LTP-G, and whether next year it should be a separate category or one again considered alongside LTP-I entries.

Verification process

The World Press Photo contest has three verification processes to ensure compliance with its code of ethics and entry rules.

Photography gives us a creative interpretation of the world. However, when we want pictures to record and inform us of the varied events, issues, people, and viewpoints in our world, there are limits to how pictures can be made. This is why we take a strict stance on manipulation.

The World Press Photo contest rewards pictures that are visual documents, providing an accurate and fair representation of the scene the photographer witnessed. We want the audience to be able to trust in the accuracy and fairness of the prize-winning pictures. We do not want prize-winning pictures to mislead the audience.

We are the only photo contest that has this extensive a verification process, and we are the only photo contest that can say all the winners have successfully passed an extensive verification process.

a) Entry checks

Entry rule 9 states the contest is for single frame, single exposure pictures. This means multiple exposures, polyptychs (diptychs, triptychs, etc.), stitched panoramas (either produced in-camera or with image editing software), and pictures with text added within the frame, are not eligible. These entries that are not eligible are removed from the contest by a pre-check team before the first round of judging begins.

This year, 451 pictures were removed by the pre-check team because they were ineligible. The specific reasons for removal were:

- Duplicate images (for example, because the same image had been entered by both a photographer and an agency or publication)

- Multiple exposure images

- Composite images, usually diptych presentations (new edits were requested when possible)

- Images too small (new files were requested when possible)

- Fabricated / manipulated dates

- Images not considered photographs (for example, those made by a scanner, x-ray machine, thermal heat camera, etc)

- Scanned documents/letters/drawings included within entries

- Images containing additional text / copyright / borders / drawings (new files were requested when possible)

- Images with selective black, white and color within one frame

b) Manipulation review

Entry rule 10—revised for 2016—states "the content of a picture can not be altered by adding, rearranging, reversing, distorting or removing people and/or objects from within the frame."

There are two exceptions to this: (i) cropping that removes extraneous details is permitted; (ii) sensor dust or scratches on scans of negatives can be removed.

The process for ensuring compliance with this rule takes place in the second-to-last round of judging. Entrants whose pictures remain in the contest and are eligible for the final round are contacted and required to provide the file as recorded by the camera. These files could be:

- RAW file(s)

- Full format JPEG file(s). These must be as delivered by the camera, and provided in a series showing at least three frames before and after the contest entry

- For smartphones, the image captured with the built-in, stock camera app, emailed from the phone

- Scans of film negative(s), provided as a contact sheet to show a series of at least three frames before and after the contest entry

Entrants readily comply with this requirement. That is testament to their openness and commitment to transparency on how images are produced. It underlines the fact that photographers do not want to mislead either the jury or the audience.

In 2015, two entries were excluded because of a failure to provide these files.

In 2016, two entries were excluded because of a failure to provide these files.

The reasons for the failure to provide the files are unknown, so we cannot assume any intent to deceive.

Two independent digital analysts compare original files with contest entries to determine whether the content of any picture (either a single picture or frame in a story) has been altered (click here for details on how this is done). The guidance on manipulation describes and shows what alterations to the content of a picture are not allowed.

We produced videos with visual examples, and they have been viewed 23,569 times. We promoted their existence heavily on social media throughout November and December 2015, and there were links to them on the contest submission site where photographers entered.

While the organization sets the rules and provides the guidance, it is the jury that determines the application of the rules that leads to exclusions.

Overall, more entries were checked in 2016 than 2015, and proportionately fewer problems were found. However, the types of problems found in 2016 differed from 2015.

In 2015, 100 entries were analyzed, and 12 were excluded for cloning.

In 2016, 174 entries were analyzed, and 7 were excluded for cloning.

The few instances of cloning involved very small, often tiny, elements being removed. A number of them replicated almost exactly the examples of what not to do shown in our guidance video on removal of content. These included:

- physical marks on a body
- small objects in the picture
- reflected light spots
- shadows
- extraneous items on a picture's border that could not be removed by crop

The jury was presented with images flagged by the digital analysis, shown the original file and the contest file side-by-side, then confirmed the exclusion of the flagged entries. In the case of cloning, that did not involve extensive debate as even when materially small, the ethical significance of cloning was clear. At the same, the materially small nature of these cases means that there was no intention on the part of the photographer to mislead the jury in relation to the meaning of an image.

A new part of the process this year was the inclusion of a 36-hour period allowing photographers whose entries were flagged by the independent analysts to respond. Only one photographer did not respond to that opportunity. All the photographer responses were presented in full to the jury. In those few cases dealing with cloning, photographers often apologized for their mistake, sometimes noting that files prepared for non-journalistic use had been submitted in error.

Entry rule 11—revised for 2016—states:

Adjustments of color or conversion to grayscale that do not alter content are permitted, with two exceptions:

(i)   Changes in color may not result in significant changes in hue, to such an extent that the processed colors diverge from the original colors.

(ii)   Changes in density, contrast, color and/or saturation levels that alter content by obscuring or eliminating backgrounds, and/or objects or people in the background of the picture, are not permitted.

It is important to emphasize that this rule is not about processing itself. All images are processed, but the line is drawn at those instances where there is darkening or lightning of area of an image so that material content is obscured and in effect removed. This was detailed in our guidance video on unacceptable color changes. Levels of processing that produce changes within the rules are judged as aesthetic choices, and factored into the jury's general deliberations on the overall merits of an entry.

In 2015, of the 100 entries analyzed, eight were excluded for obscuring or eliminating backgrounds, objects or people through changes in density, contrast, color, or saturation.

In 2016, of the 174 entries analyzed, 22 were excluded for obscuring or eliminating backgrounds, objects or people through changes in density, contrast, color, or saturation, and four for changes in color that resulted in significant changes in hue, to such an extent that the processed colors diverged from the original colors.

The jury process by which these cases are decided involves the secretary tabling a series of individual motions to exclude those entries from the contest for breaching entry rule 11. There is then extensive debate in the jury. Each of those individual motions is then voted on by the jury, with at least five votes out of seven in total required to confirm exclusion. The 2016 jury viewed the guidance videos before considering the cases presented to them by the analysts and, after debate, took a firm and consistent line against these color changes. It is our sense that over the last two years juries are becoming stricter with regard to color changes.

We need further industry consultation on these issues, especially as much of the problem arises when pictures are converted to grayscale and processing is poorly done, which is something a number of photographers who responded to us admitted was the case. We are planning a public discussion on this specific issue at the Awards Days in April 2016.

c) Fact-checking

Entry rule 8 states "all pictures must have accurate captions," and the guidance on captions details what information must be provided in captions.

The process for ensuring compliance with this rule takes place after the jury decides on the prize winners. An independent fact-checking team reviewed all captions to verify the completeness and accuracy of the information given. They also examined the metadata in the picture files. If required information was missing or incorrect, photographers were contacted and asked to provide the correct information in the five days between the jury's decision and the public announcement of the winners.

The fact-checking process is where clause 2 of the code of ethics (that entrants "must not intentionally contribute to, or alter, the scene they picture by re-enacting or staging events") is handled. Captions must explain the circumstances in which a photograph was taken. If the photographer influenced the scene in any way, or gave directions to a subject to pose in any way for a portrait, this must be disclosed in the caption.

The independent fact-checking team found no problems with any of the winning pictures, and was able to verify their captions and metadata.