



**VOCES
DEL SUR**

**LATIN AMERICA'S PRESS
UNDER ATTACK:
VIOLENCE, IMPUNITY AND EXILE**

**SHADOW REPORT ON PRESS FREEDOM
IN LATIN AMERICA**

2023



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The Voces del Sur Network is comprised of 17 civil society organizations that monitor, analyze, and report on the state of freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and the right of access to information in Latin America with the purpose of defending and promoting these fundamental rights. The Voces del Sur Network began in 2017 in order to create a common registry of press freedom violations, allowing for a comparative view of the state of these fundamental freedoms in the region.

Argentina:

Foro de Periodismo
Argentino (FOPEA)

Bolivia:

Asociación Nacional de la
Prensa de Bolivia (ANP)

Brasil:

Asociación Brasileña de
Periodismo de Investigación
(ABRAJI)

Chile:

Observatorio del Derecho a
la Comunicación (ODC)

Colombia:

Fundación para la Libertad
de Prensa (FLIP)

Costa Rica:

Instituto de Prensa y
Libertad de Expresión
(IPLEX)

Cuba:

Instituto Cubano de
Libertad de Expresión y
Prensa (ICLEP)

Ecuador:

Fundación Andina para la
Observación y Estudio de
Medios (FUNDAMEDIOS)

El Salvador:

Asociación de Periodistas
de El Salvador (APES)

Guatemala:

Instituto Centroamericano
de Estudios para la
Democracia Social (DEMOS)

Honduras:

Comité por la Libre
Expresión (C-LIBRE)

México:

ARTICLE 19 Mexico and
Central America

Nicaragua:

Fundación por la Libertad
de Expresión y Democracia
(FLED)

Paraguay:

Instituto de Derecho y
Economía Ambiental (IDEA)

Perú:

Instituto de Prensa y
Sociedad (IPYS-Perú)

Uruguay:

Centro de Archivos y
Acceso a la Información
(Cainfo)

Venezuela:

Instituto de Prensa y
Sociedad (IPYS-Venezuela)

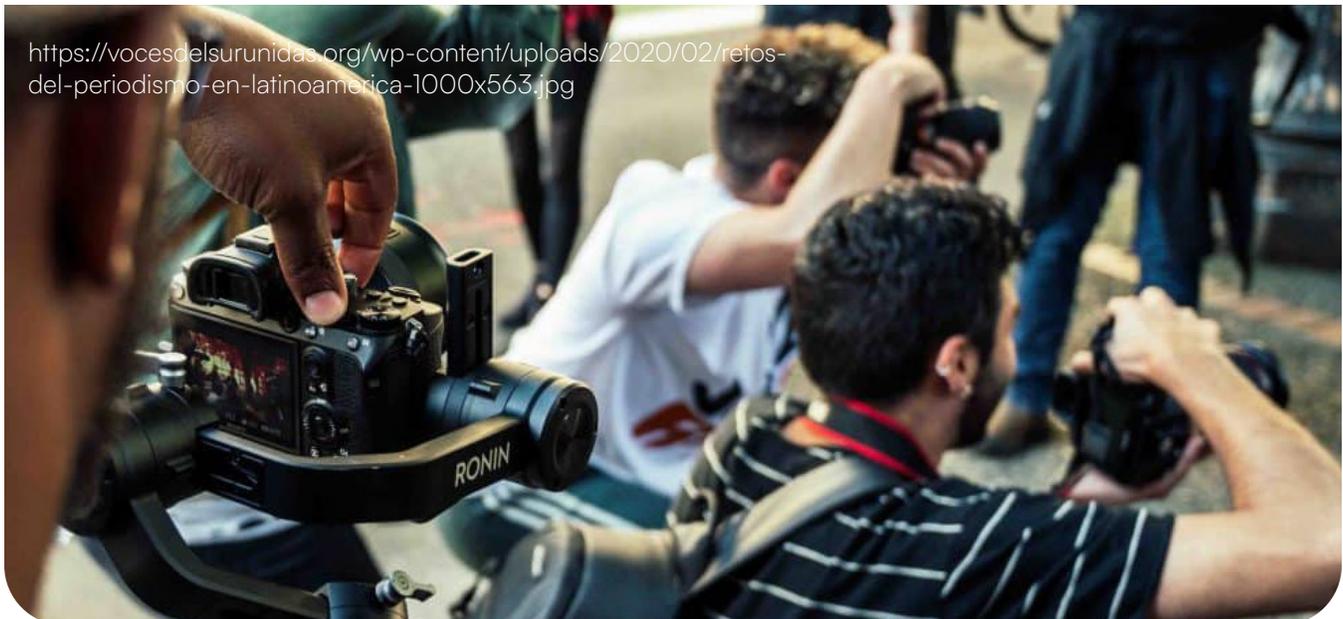
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, an average of 10 violations of press freedom were committed every day in Latin America; approximately 1 aggression every 2 hours. The consolidation of antidemocratic regimes and the proliferation of organized crime in the region have created an extremely dangerous combination for freedom of the press and journalism. At the regional level, the data show a worsening of violence against the press amid a climate of impunity fostered by the inaction — and occasional complicity — of State officials. This year, violence and repression claimed the lives of 17 journalists, sent dozens of media workers to jail, and have together forced self-censorship and

driven hundreds of journalists into exile throughout the region. This has contributed to the emergence of information deserts, or zones of silence, in certain parts of the hemisphere. Violence and repression towards journalism not only threaten the physical and professional integrity of reporters and media workers, but also have consequences for society as a whole. Censorship and persecution of the independent media undermine the foundations of democracy by denying citizens accurate information and preventing accountability for those in power, perpetuating impunity and helping consolidate the power of authoritarian regimes.



INTRODUCTION

The Voces del Sur (VDS) Network is an initiative of 17 civil society organizations (CSOs) working to promote and defend freedom of expression, press freedom, and access to information throughout Latin America. VDS began in 2017 with the aim of designing and implementing a shared methodology based on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.10.1 to monitor and report violations of these fundamental freedoms, which are continuously recorded through the publication of alerts. Beyond its monitoring activities, VDS has achieved significant impact in promoting freedom of expression in the region through its collective advocacy.

This year, VDS presents the sixth edition of its Shadow Report. This annual report seeks to enrich and contrast the information that different governments publish, or omit, in their own official reporting. The data collected and processed by VDS partner organizations allow for an independent assessment of trends, achievements, and challenges regarding the fulfillment of SDG 16.10.1, thus contributing to the search for solutions. Additionally, this report proposes policies and provides empirical evidence to promote the consolidation of more democratic, just, peaceful, and inclusive societies in the region.



<https://vocesdelsur.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/reios-del-periodismo-en-latinoamerica-000x563.jpg>

METHODOLOGY

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Target 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

Indicator 16.10.1: Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months.

The information and data contained in this Shadow Report have been produced through monitoring carried out by partner organizations in the 17 Latin America where VDS currently operates. Partner organizations document violations of press freedom using a common methodology

which has been developed collectively based on SDG indicator 16.10.1. VDS's monitoring methodology focuses on the documentation of "alerts" of violence against the press. Alerts issued are classified according to 13 common regional indicators, plus one cross-cutting gender indicator. In cases where there is more than one victim identified in the same alert, the methodology records each victim separately.

Alerts are classified according to the "most serious crime" rule: if an incident incorporates elements of more than one category, it is coded as the most severe offense. Finally, VDS's monitoring indicators only includes acts that are considered a direct consequence of the victim's journalistic work or that aim to obstruct, censor, or negatively impact journalistic work. In addition to being collectively agreed-upon by partner organizations, the VDS monitoring methodology follows the guidelines of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDG). It has been presented to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for consultation and has been continually and regularly improved over 6 years of implementation in the field.

VDS NETWORK INDICATORS



1. **MURDER:** Intentional killing of a journalist



2. **KIDNAPPING:** Unlawful seizure and retention of one or more journalists against their will



3. **FORCED DISAPPEARANCE:** Arrest or any other form of deprivation of liberty of journalists that is carried out by government agents, or groups or individuals acting on behalf of or with the support of the State, and that refuses to disclose their fate or whereabouts or to acknowledge that they are deprived of their liberty



4. **ARBITRARY DETENTION:** Arrest, retention, or detention of a journalist without fair trial or legal basis justifying the deprivation of liberty



5. **TORTURE:** Act by which intentional physical or mental pain, intimidation, coercion or severe suffering is inflicted on a journalist



6. **AGGRESSIONS AND ATTACKS:** Violent, intimidating, or limiting actions, which can be physical or verbal, against journalists or media outlets



7. **STIGMATIZING DISCOURSE:** Publicly-made attacks, usually verbal, aimed at discrediting and disqualifying one or several journalists or a media outlet



8. **SEXUAL VIOLENCE:** Unwanted sexual acts, attempts, comments, or insinuations, both in physical and digital spaces



9. CIVIL AND CRIMINAL PROCEDURES: Private or public legal proceedings in which consequences may include fines, imprisonment, among others



10. RESTRICTIONS OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION: Obstruction of access to public interest information or newsworthy events



11. ABUSIVE USE OF STATE POWER: Planned, proposed, and executed actions by the State that, abusing its power, go against international standards of freedom of press and freedom of expression, and that harm journalists and media outlets economically or prevent them from doing their job



12. LEGAL FRAMEWORK CONTRARY TO INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS: Proposal and/or approval of norms, which may include laws, decrees, regulations, resolutions, ordinances, and/or rules, that restrict freedom of the press, expression, and the right to access information and/or generate to censorship



13. INTERNET RESTRICTIONS: Impediment and/or limitation to freedom of press and freedom of expression on the internet through strategies that limit the use of the internet to publish or access information



14. GENDER ALERT (CROSS-CUTTING): Evaluates whether the motive behind an attack or violation is related to the victim's sex, gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation

GENDER AND INCLUSION

The VDS network has incorporated a sexual violence indicator and a cross-cutting gender indicator into its monitoring methodology to document differentiated threats and attacks against women and/or LGBTIQ+ journalists. Sexual violence refers to explicitly sexual aggressions, especially those committed from a position of power with the purpose of suggesting, intimidating, coercing, or forcing victims to engage in sexual relations with their aggressors. Gender alerts employing the cross-cutting indicator are issued when a violation of press freedom contains elements of discrimination based on gender, as well as physical appearance, sexuality, gender expression, gender identity, or sexual orientation of journalists. Gender alerts are not added to the total count, as they do not constitute a new aggression. Instead, these indicate that an aggression already registered under another indicator contains an element of discrimination based on the gender identity of the victim.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

The VDS network's monitoring methodology has been gradually developed and refined in exchanges between network members. It undergoes continual review and improvement based on the lessons of implementation and the experiences of partner organizations. However, the methodology is not without limitations. Firstly, although the definition of the SDG's Indicator 16.10.1 includes "unionists and human rights defenders," VDS monitoring focuses exclusively on journalists and media workers. Secondly, as is common in the monitoring of human rights violations, there is a potential underreporting of aggressions. The intimidatory effect and self-censorship generated by acts of violence entail that many cases are not reported out of fear of retaliation. Thirdly, the accuracy of monitoring figures ultimately depends on the monitoring, documentation, and reporting capacities of partner CSOs at

the national level. At the close of this report, alerts may still be in the validation stage of partner organizations. Hence, final data may vary. Additionally, VDS partner organizations are at different phases of adaptation and learning in terms of the cross-cutting gender indicator, possibly resulting in the underreporting of these cases. Finally, alerts are documented and systematized with partner organizations' different monitoring systems, which are

adapted to their own country-level contexts. In order to provide data for the VDS Shadow Report, local records are standardized and adapted under the 14 indicators of the VDS monitoring methodology. While this process facilitates comparative regional analysis, it may produce discrepancies between the data in this report and those reported by partner organizations at the country level.

Blindfolded Argentine journalists at a protest in Buenos Aires, July 11, 2018.
Martin Acosta / Reuters



LATIN AMERICA

ALERTS PER COUNTRY



LATIN AMERICA

3827 ALERTS

128 gender alerts 



17
murders



13
kidnappings



1
forced disappearance



220
arbitrary detentions



4
tortures



1680
aggressions and attacks



684
stigmatizing discourses



9
sexual violence



200
civil and criminal procedures



384
restrictions of access to information



124
abusive uses of state power



20
legal frameworks contrary to international standards



471
internet restrictions

VICTIMS



AGGRESSORS



CONTEXT AND TRENDS

Increasing Violence and Narco-Crime

In 2023, a journalist was murdered every 21 days in Latin America. This year, VDS recorded the murder of 17 journalists in 7 different countries in the region. As in 2022, Mexico, Honduras, and Ecuador remain the deadliest countries for the press in the region, with 5, 3, and 3 journalists killed respectively. Ecuador witnessed a dramatic increase in alerts related to organized crime in 2023. Fundamedios documented the murder of 2 journalists and the exile of 9 journalists as a result of drug trafficking activity. The assassination of presidential candidate and journalist Fernando Villavicencio is a significant case of this form of violence. Villavicencio made his career by investigating corruption cases linked to former Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa and was renowned for his critical journalism. He was murdered on August 9, 2023, while leaving a political event, mere days after reporting death threats from the Sinaloa Cartel. Villavicencio is the 13th journalist killed in Ecuador in the past 6 years. VDS also recorded 1,680 aggressions and attacks in the region, accounting for 43.8% of total alerts. Most aggressions

and attacks against media workers occur in the form of physical and verbal assaults; destruction of equipment and infrastructure; and threats and intimidations.

Throughout the region, journalists and media outlets have been targeted by organized crime groups for investigating their operations and exposing the corrupt networks that support them. Drug trafficking organizations have exerted a powerful influence on press freedom, fostering a climate of fear and coercion which inhibits independent journalists' ability to investigate and report. In the resulting atmosphere of threats, violence, and corruption, journalists either self-censor or avoid certain topics out of fear of retaliation. In turn, self-censorship limits the ability of media outlets to fulfill their essential function of informing the public comprehensively and accurately, thus undermining press freedom as one of the fundamental pillars of democracy.

Villavicencio's murder in Ecuador evidences the degree to which organized crime has become entrenched in the region and its devastating consequences for independent journalism. The expansion and con-

solidation of drug trafficking organizations in recent years has made Latin America a global epicenter of crime, exacerbating violence against regional media. Journalists are subjected to murder, torture, kidnapping, forced disappearance, death threats, physical and verbal assaults, and other forms of extreme violence. This often involves parastatal agents or organized criminal groups, the latter often operating with the complicity of government, employing violence to silence journalists.

Impunity and Instrumentalization of Public Institutions

In 2023, governments continued utilizing State institutions to hinder or directly silence the independent media. Although governments have an obligation to address crimes against the press, prosecute perpetrators, and provide reparations to victims, the vast majority of these crimes remain in impunity. Culprits were identified in only 2 of the 17 documented murders in 2023. These levels of impunity foster criminal permissiveness and fear, perpetuating cycles of violence and self-censorship. Furthermore, the very State tasked

with guaranteeing freedom of the press has been the independent media's most frequent aggressor. In 2023, as in previous years, State actors committed most offenses against the press, being identified as perpetrator in 53.2% of the alerts documented by VDS. The data collected in this report reflect a pattern of systematic State repression against independent and critical media in the region. To silence the press, Latin American governments employ stigmatizing discourse, arbitrary detentions, legal persecution, restrictions of access to public information, abusive use of State power, restrictions of the internet, promotion of laws contrary to international standards, among other forms of violence.

This year, 124 cases of abusive use of State power were recorded in 12 countries, with Nicaragua (26), Cuba (25), and Ecuador (19) recording the highest number of these alerts. Additionally, governments in the region have used economic strangulation to punish adversarial media outlets. Two specific practices have been identified in this regard. One practice is the application of stringent financial reporting requirements by public tax offices. Another is the selective denial of advertising funds

by governments to limit income streams for independent media. This year, digital newspaper El Faro announced it was relocating its operations from El Salvador to Costa Rica due to the constant administrative harassment by the Salvadoran government. Meanwhile, Bolivian newspaper Página Siete shut down its operations, denouncing fiscal harassment and exclusion from State advertising funds.

Additionally, 200 civil and criminal proceedings against the press were recorded across the region. Governments and powerful actors continue consistently manipulating judicial institutions to target their adversaries in the independent media. The persecution of José Rubén Zamora, director of the Guatemalan media outlet El Periódico is particularly alarming. In June, Zamora was sentenced to 6 years in prison for alleged money laundering. In addition to colluding to imprison Zamora, Guatemala's public prosecutor and judiciary opened legal cases against another dozen El Periódico staff, as well as Zamora's attorney. In doing so, Guatemala's government achieved the definitive closure of this outlet and the exile of much of its editorial staff.

Stigmatizing Discourse to Silence

In 2023, stigmatizing discourse was the second most common form of aggression against the press recorded by VDS in the region. This delegitimizes the work of journalists and puts them at risk by reinforcing the perception that they are enemies of the State or agents of external interests. It also weakens public support for press freedom and serves to justify repressive or restrictive measures against the media. This type of aggression accounts for 17.8% of this year's alerts, totaling 684 alerts recorded in 15 of the 17 countries. Stigmatizing discourse comes in the form of defamation, smear campaigns, disqualifications, or dissemination of fake news about media outlets and journalists. It seeks to undermine the population's trust in the media and journalists to facilitate impunity and permit little or no accountability for government officials, political figures, and powerful actors. Brazil (161), Venezuela (123), and El Salvador (96) recorded the highest number of alerts for stigmatizing discourse in 2023. In fact, El Salvador saw the highest increase in the total number of alerts of any kind in comparison with 2022 (391.5%), largely driven by a dramat-

ic 700% increase in alerts for stigmatizing discourse. The main force behind this has been President Nayib Bukele. Stigmatization often precedes other violations, such as physical assaults or the criminalization of journalists. In 9 of the 17 countries analyzed in this report, stigmatizing discourses decreased or increased in parallel to the year's total recorded alerts. This suggests a direct correlation between increases in stigmatization and increases in attacks on the press. The use of stigmatizing discourse by political leaders and elected officials creates an atmosphere of permissiveness and can be interpreted by public servants or partisan followers as instructions, instigations, authorizations, or support for carrying out actions that endanger the lives, personal safety, and rights of journalists.

Self-censorship, imprisonment, or exile in democratic regression

Across Latin America, democracy faces serious challenges. According to the 2023 Varieties of Democracy Report from the University of Gothenburg, around one third of the countries in the region are ex-

periencing setbacks to their democracies. Governments in regressing democracies tend to increase their attacks on press freedom. In 2023, authoritarian regimes in Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua continued to persecute and criminalize journalists and media outlets. While the total number of alerts of aggressions against journalists decreased in comparison with the previous year, this does not reflect an improvement in the state of press freedom but rather the intimidating, dissuasive effect of government repression. Each year, fewer media outlets and journalists are targeted, as reporters are increasingly forced to self-censor or driven into exile to avoid imprisonment and other forms of state violence.

In Nicaragua, state persecution has completely eliminated independent journalism in 5 of the country's 17 departments. Additionally, FLED claims that as a result of the Ortega-Murillo regime's illegal takeover of the country's universities, no institution of higher learning is currently training the next generations of independent journalists. This could result in the end of professional independent journalism in

Nicaragua, and an even greater consolidation of state-run media. Furthermore, in an unprecedented act of repression, Nicaragua's government arbitrarily revoked the citizenship of 317 opposition figures. This included 22 journalists, five of which had spent over 500 days in prison before being expelled from the country. In Venezuela, government repression has resulted in the creation of "information deserts". According to IPYS Venezuela's study, titled, "Atlas of Silence," state persecution has eliminated local information production in 133 localities across Venezuela, leaving over 7 million Venezuelans to reside in these information deserts. In Cuba, government attempts to silence the media were evidenced by 169 arbitrary detentions, most of which occurred during citizen protests in an effort prevent independent media coverage of public interest issues. As it did in 2022, Cuba continues to endure the highest number of alerts for internet restrictions in the region. This mainly occurs in the form of selective internet service cuts, leaving journalists, activists, and the relatives of political pris-

oners disconnected for days, and in some cases permanently. In addition to threatening reporters themselves, state harassment and repression of independent journalism affects society at large, as censorship and persecution of the independent media undermine the very foundations of democracy itself. By restricting citizen access to accurate information and shielding public officials from accountability, these repressive practices ultimately strengthen the power of authoritarian regimes.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

In 2023, VDS identified 9 cases of sexual violence and 128 gender alerts in 12 countries in the region. Throughout the year, VDS documented attacks on journalists investigating or reporting on cases of gender-based violence or reproductive rights. For instance, the threats and harassment endured by Argentine journalist Luciana Peker while covering a sexual assault accusation prompted her to continue her career outside Argentina. Attacks against women and LGBTQ+ journalists not only

normalize violence against these groups, but also hinder their reporting on critical issues.

Data collected by VDS demonstrates that the violence experienced by women and LGBTQ+ journalists differs from that of their male counterparts. While men constitute a higher percentage of total victims, attacks against men primarily focus on them individually and/or their journalistic reputation. In contrast, violence against women journalists and LGBTQ+ journalists often involves threats to their families and disproportionately refers to their physical appearance, sexual orientation, or gender identity. In addition to gender-based violence, it is critical to also acknowledge aggressions with racist undertones, as is the case involving Maria Guarchaj, a Guatemalan journalist who faced discrimination through racist comments and

disparagement of her reporting as an indigenous woman.

These findings highlight the importance of implementing specialized security mechanisms for women, the LGBTQ+ community, and groups at risk of racial discrimination. Bolstering institutional capacities within media organizations is essential to foster greater and more effective participation of women, LGBTQ+ individuals, indigenous peoples, and Afro-descendant individuals in the media. Addressing these challenges requires implementing self-care policies, specialized security procedures, safe reporting spaces, and organization-wide gender training as part of gender policies in media outlets. It is equally important to promote women, LGBTQ+ individuals, as well as indigenous and Afro-descendant individuals into leadership positions within these organizations.



<https://global.unitednations.entermediadb.net/assets/mediadb/services/module/asset/downloads/preset/assets/2014/01/18488/image1170x530cropped.jpg>

ARGENTINA

154 ALERTS

3 gender alerts



6

arbitrary detentions



82

aggressions and attacks



24

stigmatizing discourses



16

civil and criminal procedures



16

restrictions of access to information



9

abusive uses of state power



1

internet restriction

VICTIMS

86



34



34

?

AGGRESSORS

42,2%
State

40,2%
Non-state

8,4%
Groups outside
the law

5,8%
Unidentified

3,4%
Parastatal

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, Argentina held municipal, provincial, legislative, and presidential elections. In this context, FOPEA recorded a total of 154 alerts, a 33% increase in comparison with 2022. Throughout these electoral processes, FOPEA documented a notable increase in the use of police forces to repress journalism and citizens, as well as a spike in worrisome, anti-press rhetoric from political actors. Aggressions and attacks had the highest percentage of alerts recorded at 53%, followed by stigmatizing discourse at 15%. After being elected president of Argentina, Javier Milei did not allow the press to attend the swearing-in ceremony of his ministers during the transition of power. Additionally, 10 days into his term, Milei proposed an Urgent National Decree (DNU, in Spanish), which included several restrictions on freedom of expression. According to FOPEA, Milei has regularly perpetrated aggressions against the press ever since entering politics in 2021. Following his election, Milei's aggressions have become more severe and frequent, signaling a tense relationship between him and the media in the coming years.

Government actors remain the chief aggressors of the press in Argentina, identified as perpetrators in 42.2% of all documented alerts. However, FOPEA has also recorded attacks against the press at the hands of organized criminal groups for the third consecutive year, a problem which had not been documented previously. In 2023, organized criminal groups were identified as perpetrators in 8.4% of alerts. The city of Rosario remains the epicenter of attacks from these groups. Of all alerts recorded in Rosario and its surroundings, 37% were carried out by groups linked to the increasing drug trafficking activity in this region. An armed attack on LT3 Radio's station and arm-wielding threats against journalists from Canal Todo Noticias are particularly noteworthy cases of this trend. Despite rising violence in Rosario, FOPEA decries that there has been no comprehensive, country-level approach to address narco-criminality and its impact on press freedom.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

FOPEA recorded 3 gender alerts in 2023, including the case of journalist Luciana Peker. Peker was harassed and received

threats against her family because of her coverage of actress Thelma Fardin's rape lawsuit against actor Juan Darthes. Peker has stated that she has decided to continue her career outside of Argentina. When women journalists are attacked with impunity for reporting on crimes affecting women, violence against women becomes normalized. Failing to report on these forms of violence in the media severely limits society's knowledge about these issues. Additionally, the impunity with which these attacks are carried out ultimately leads to self-censorship, further limiting the reporting on issues affecting women themselves. This creates a vicious cycle that largely undermines women's rights to inform and be informed.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Javier Milei's rise to power in Argentina has occurred in the context of a severe economic crisis and deepening social polarization. A State-sanctioned, anti-press stance and increased presence of drug trafficking groups has exacerbated this already complex social situation. This dangerous combination sets the stage for further violence against journalists and the press in the upcoming year. Hence, civil society and international organizations must work together to keep press freedom and journalist safety on the national agen-

da. Concrete policies to prevent violence, protect journalists, and seek justice for crimes against reporters must be made to address the impact of drug trafficking organizations on the media. Argentina urgently requires a State mechanism for the promotion and protection of independent media. Finally, defending Argentine journalism also requires countering disinformation and stigmatizing discourse from powerful political actors, particularly those in the executive branch.

BOLIVIA

119 ALERTS

0 gender alerts



92
aggressions
and attacks



1
stigmatizing
discourse



4
civil and
criminal
procedures



6
restrictions
of access to
information



5
abusive uses
of state power



7
legal frameworks
contrary to
international
standards



4
internet
restrictions

VICTIMS

56



16



47

?

AGGRESSORS

40,8%
State

17,1%
Non-state

11,8%
Groups
outside
the law

17,1%
Unidentified

13,2%
Parastatal

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, Bolivia's press endured State administrative and financial persecution aimed at hindering media criticism of the current government. Throughout the year, ANP recorded 5 alerts for abusive of State power, 4 for judicial processes, and 7 for legislation contrary to international standards of freedom of expression. President Luis Arce's government has attempted to systematically strangle media outlets seen as "oppositional," mainly through the discretionary allocation of State advertising funds. In Bolivia, State advertising is often the main source of income for media entities. Outlets depend on these resources to survive financially, and denial of these resources has been clearly motivated by political concerns. As a result of this strategy, newspaper *Página Siete* ceased its operations this year after being targeted with tax harassment and exclusion from official State advertising funds. Additionally, newspaper *Los Tiempos de Cochabamba* was forced to sell its shares to Eduardo Valdivia, a businessman linked to President Luis Arce's government, after 80 years of independent reporting.

ANP also recorded a 300% increase in internet restrictions and a 133% increase in the approval of legal frameworks contrary to international standards of freedom

of expression. The bill on "Compliance with International Human Rights Commitments," promoted by the government, proposed increasing the penalty for journalists from 5 to 7 years in prison for purportedly engaging in racism. While efforts to combat Bolivia's historic racism are necessary, ANP believes that this law, in practice, would be manipulated by Luis Arce's government to persecute media and journalists critical of his administration. ANP and other journalist's unions declared a state of emergency in response to this bill, managing to exert enough civil society pressure for Bolivia's parliament to vote down this initiative. This is an example of how civil society actors can defend press freedom and confront the manipulation of laws by State entities.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

ANP did not record any gender alerts this year. However, it acknowledged that inequality and violence against women and LGBTIQ+ journalists intensify according to their ethnic identity and social class. ANP recorded the case of a woman journalist who was beaten and threatened with death in the city of Sucre. Although this aggression was not classified as a gender alert, ANP noted possible targeting of the victim for being a woman.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discretionary allocation of State advertising funds as a tool for economic strangulation constitutes an act of censorship and limits the population's right to various sources of quality information. Rather than fostering a varied and diverse media ecosystem, the current government's policies hinder a plurality of voices and citizens' right to be informed by an array of media. Bolivia's government must cease the use of public institutions to stifle the media and enforce the competitive allocation of State advertising funds. Additionally, with the support of civil society and international organizations, Bolivia's media must work to ensure the viability and financial sustainability of media by implementing business models that employ innovative formats and distribution channels, revenue diversification strategies, audience development, and several other sustainability policies.



<https://gijn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/press-camera-the-crowd-journalist.jpeg>

BRAZIL

370 ALERTS

36 gender alerts 



1
murder



3
arbitrary
detentions



149
aggressions
and attacks



161
stigmatizing
discourses



4
sexual violence



30
civil and
criminal
procedures



10
restrictions
of access to
information



2
abusive uses
of state power



10
internet
restrictions

VICTIMS

159



77



133

?

1*

AGGRESSORS

51,9%
State

25,2%
Non-state

0,5%
Groups
outside
the law

22,4%
Unidentified

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In Brazil, the year began with a tumultuous presidential transition. On January 8, thousands of outgoing President Jair Bolsonaro's supporters stormed the National Congress in the capital city of Brasilia. Abrajil registered 17% of the year's total attacks on the press during these days, most of which were aggressions and attacks, and stigmatizing discourse. After these disturbances, in a significant shift from the previous government, the presidential administration of Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva has demonstrated a renewed commitment to protecting the independent press. Brazil's government launched the National Observatory Against Violence Towards Journalists aimed at producing public policies to reduce violence and risks associated with the exercise of journalism. Among its functions are the monitoring of cases of aggression against the media, tracking investigations and trials of those responsible for crimes against reporters, and referring cases of violence to the State's Program for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders. It will also produce data in support of public policies for the protection and defense of freedom of the press.

In this context, Abrajil observed a 53% decrease in documented alerts compared to 2022. It documented a reduction of 65% in stigmatizing discourse, 50% in murders, 50% in abusive use of State power, and 45% in aggressions and attacks. Despite these important improvements, the State remains the main perpetrator of attacks on the press, identified as such in 51.9% of registered alerts. The 100% increase in alerts for judicial processes is also notable, including the case of the digital media outlet The Intercept, in which a civil judge cancelled an investigation on victims of the Parental Alienation Law. Finally, the persistence of lethal violence against the press in Brazil is worrisome. In December, journalist Thiago Rodrigues was shot dead in Guarujá, São Paulo. Rodrigues, who dedicated his career to investigating corruption cases, was a pre-candidate for mayor on the coast of São Paulo at the time of his killing. Rodrigues's killing and continued judicial harassment against the press in Brazil show that structural changes require more than just a change in government; it requires fundamentally combating patterns of authoritarianism and violence across the country's political, economic, and social structures at various levels.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

Abraji recorded 4 cases of sexual violence and 36 gender alerts in 2023, mainly related to misogynistic acts and comments on social media. Although these alerts constitute a 33.3% decrease from the 54 alerts recorded in 2022, Brazil is the second country with the most gender alerts in the region. Abraji has pointed out that an increase in specific aggressions towards the transgender community is one of the predominant trends of 2023.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There was a significant reduction in attacks on the press in Brazil in 2023. This can be attributed to the strengthening of State protection policies and a decrease in stigmatizing discourse and abusive use of State power. However, violence persists. There have been increases in legal persecution of the press, and lethal violence continues to occur. Thus, it is imperative that Brazil's government, civil society, and the international community develop policies for the comprehensive protection and defense of journalism at the national and local levels.

The design of such policies should be open, participatory, and inclusive, incorporating an intersectional approach that ensures measures are sensitive to gender identity and respond appropriately to the cultural and racial diversity of Brazilian journalists. Finally, combatting stigmatizing narratives and discourses towards ethnic minority women and the LGBTQ+ community should remain a priority, including protection of the transgender community and establishing special guarantees for their ability to exercise journalism in a dignified and safe manner.

CHILE

112 ALERTS

1 gender alert



5

arbitrary detentions



64

aggressions and attacks



17

stigmatizing discourses



1

sexual violence



10

civil and criminal procedures



11

restrictions of access to information



4

internet restrictions

VICTIMS

69



34



9

?

AGGRESSORS

56,1%
State

22,8%
Non-state

21,1%
Unidentified

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, the Observatorio del Derecho a la Comunicación (ODC) joined VDS as the network's partner organization in Chile. According to ODC, the press freedom situation in Chile has been affected by the constitutional overhaul process in recent years, which finally concluded in 2023. This process featured two plebiscites for the approval of a new national Constitution in the past few years. Since both proposals were rejected by the population at the ballot box, Chile continues utilizing the current Constitution, containing much of the original text from the 1980 version, enshrined during the authoritarian regime of Augusto Pinochet. The drive to change Chile's constitution gained momentum following the massive unrest that led to the social uprising in October, 2019. However, the Chileans have rejected two constitutional proposals since, once in 2022 and again in 2023. Amid growing polarization, the Chilean media has struggled to cover these events, as evidenced by over 400 aggressions documented by ODC throughout this process, as well as the increase in harassment of journalists on social media.

ODC documented 112 alerts for violations of press freedom in Chile in 2023. As in most of the region, the State is the principal culprit of aggressions against the media, identified as the perpetrator in 56% of documented alerts. ODC recorded cases of police violence, mainly against independent media and reporters covering protests, highlighting 5 arbitrary detentions by the police. Additionally, Chile's legal system has allowed the use of slander and libel charges to initiate legal proceedings against journalists on at least 10 occasions. Among these was the case of Felipe Soto, director of the digital newspaper Resumen. Soto was sentenced to 61 days in prison for slander based on a publication exposing administrative irregularities in the Municipality of Quilleco. Additionally, there has also been a proliferation of attacks by unidentified groups against television reporters. On September 11, 2023, while covering the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the coup against Salvador Allende, a cameraman from Mega was shot in the face with a rubber bullet by unknown individuals. Although this is the first year that Chile is included in the Shadow Report, patterns of aggressions identified by ODC

show a deterioration of press freedom that, if not corrected, could lead to increased violence against journalists in coming years.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

In 2023, ODC registered 1 gender alert related to sexual violence. In this case, the editor of El Ciudadano was sexually threatened by supporters of a soccer club during a journalistic investigation into an alleged group rape involving this sports club. ODC has also identified a worrisome proliferation of aggressions linked to journalists' gender and sexual orientation in digital spaces.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2023 was a highly eventful political year in Chile. None of the new constitutional proposals garnered the support of the majority of the population, highlighting intense societal polarization. Chile's government has been the chief aggressor against press freedom in the country, mainly through its use of police forces, restrictions of access to information, and the use of legal proceedings against media

and journalists. The Chilean State must urgently review police action protocols. It must also adapt its legal framework to international standards of freedom of expression, ensuring that slander and libel suits are not manipulated to censor the press and obstruct critical coverage. Additionally, a bill for the protection of journalists is being discussed in the Chilean National Congress. As it stands, this bill requires further involvement from media and CSOs, as well as their participation in the legislative inter-institutional press security commission, which would allow them to help shape institutional mechanisms and policies for their own protection.

COLOMBIA

484 ALERTS

14 gender alerts



1
murder



1
kidnapping



261
aggressions
and attacks



66
stigmatizing
discourses



43
civil and
criminal
procedures



71
restrictions
of access to
information



41
internet
restrictions

VICTIMS

282



84



118

?

AGGRESSORS

30,2%
State

21,7%
Non-state

20,4%
Groups outside
the law

22,1%
Unidentified

5,6%
Parastatal

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

Colombia remains one of the most dangerous countries for journalism in Latin America. According to FLIP, the period leading up to the 2023 elections was one of the most violent for Colombia's press in recent years. Prior to the regional elections in September, FLIP recorded 69 violations of press freedom; 86% of these alerts were recorded during the final quarter of the year, closing 2023 with a total of 484 violations of press freedom. Although this represents a 26.3% reduction in total alerts compared to 2022, Colombia continues experiencing extreme violence against the independent media that intensifies amid during elections and popular protests. In May, Luis Gabriel Pereira, a journalist investigating security threats in the municipality of Ciénaga de Oro, was killed by unknown gunmen. Additionally, 5 journalists from Caracol Radio, RCN Radio, and Blu Radio were assaulted while covering social protests linked to regional elections, and the office of *Semana* magazine in Bogotá was violently taken over by organized criminal groups. Colombia is the VDS member country with the highest number of press freedom violations linked to organized crime. FLIP identified these groups as perpetrators in 20.4% of alerts documented this year. Among other grave

offenses, criminal groups “Los Cancerberos” and “Oficina de Tuluá” threatened 5 media outlets in the municipality of Tuluá, located in the central region of the Valle del Cauca department. These actions pose an imminent danger to journalists and media workers for these outlets and send a clear message of intimidation to all media across Colombia.

Meanwhile, the very State tasked with defending and protecting Colombian journalists continues to be its greatest aggressor. In 2023, FLIP identified State actors as responsible for 30.2% of press freedom violations. This includes 71 cases of restrictions of access to information, accounting for 14.6% of the total alerts registered in the year. There was also a 38.7% increase in lawsuits against the journalists and media. FLIP has decried the political pressures exerted on prosecutors to take action against the press. Through a comment on the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), Senator Isabel Zuleta requested that the Attorney General persecute *Semana* magazine for alleged defamation against Gustavo Petro's former chief of staff.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

FLIP recorded 14 gender alerts, mostly in the form of aggression and attacks. The case of journalist Valeska Alvarado is particularly noteworthy. While covering a protest in Bogotá, Alvarado received threats and sexist comments, and was forced by hooded individuals to delete recorded material. FLIP is also alarmed by the case of journalist Dhynaad Calero, who suffered stigmatizing discourse and threats of legal action for her investigations into gender-based violence. This again demonstrates that violence not only seeks to attack journalists based on their gender, but ultimately aims to silence their reporting on gender-based subjects.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Colombia, two distinct yet complementary forms of violence against the press converge. On the one hand, journalists in Colombia endure extreme forms of direct violence, such as murders and kidnappings perpetrated by organized criminal groups across the country. On the other hand, reporters face structural forms of violence, such as legal persecution and restrictions of access to information by State institutions.

According to FLIP, in 2023, an already difficult and violent situation was aggravated by elections, resulting in one of the most violent periods for Colombian press in recent years. FLIP has demanded that the State mediate with organized crime groups to prevent journalists from becoming victims of violent actions that restrict their coverage. Additionally, Colombia's government must urgently strengthen protocols for preventing violence against reporters during elections and social protests. However, these measures refrain from criminalizing peaceful protest or preventing the press from carrying out its reporting. It must also work to eliminate the stigmatizing discourse deployed against the independent press by public officials and deliver swift justice in cases of crimes against media workers, thus ending the cycle of impunity which has perpetuated violence against journalists.

COSTA RICA

38 ALERTS

0 gender alerts



14
aggressions
and attacks



11
stigmatizing
discourses



5
civil and
criminal
procedures



7
restrictions
of access to
information



1
legal frameworks
contrary to
international standards

VICTIMS

9



2



27

?

AGGRESSORS

75%
State

21,4%
Non-state

3,6%
Unidentified

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, Costa Rica experienced a 245% increase in documented alerts compared to 2022. IPLEX recorded a total of 38 alerts, 14 for aggressions and attacks, 11 for stigmatizing discourse, 7 for restrictions of access to information, and 5 for legal proceedings against reporters. President Rodrigo Chaves continues to engage in stigmatizing discourse, which is then echoed by other public officials and supporters of his government. In a press conference, Chaves referred to journalists from La Nación, CRHoy, and Teletica as “political hitmen.” Meanwhile, ruling party legislator Pilar Cisneros has been accused of leading a “troll farm” against media workers. Cisneros has also been linked to efforts to financially strangle La Nación and CRHoy by excluding these outlets from State advertising funds, as well as promoting the legal persecution of journalists. The executive’s anti-press stance contribute to a climate of permissiveness in which verbal violence leads to further aggressions and attacks against journalists. In some cases, violence is reproduced through aggressions and attacks by State officials themselves. Such was the case in the physical assault of Eduardo Alfaro, a journalist from Canal 5 Guanacaste, at the hands of Luis Gerardo Castañeda, the mayor of the city of Liberia. The stigmatizing

discourse utilized by Costa Rican public officials, financial attacks against critical media, and increase in aggressions and attacks against journalists demonstrate the rapid deterioration of conditions for journalistic exercise in a country that until recently was considered a regional bastion of democracy and fundamental freedoms in the region.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

IPLEX registered no gender alerts in 2023. However, women continue facing stigmatizing speech and insults in the digital sphere. The case of journalist Vilma Ibarra, host the Radio Columbia program Hablando Claro is a clear example of this type of aggression. In June, Costa Rica’s President accused Ibarra, without evidence, of receiving money to promote a public works project. After Ibarra defended herself against this baseless accusation, she began receiving death threats on social media, an occurrence which was decried by local legislators as unacceptable. In addition to highlighting the Costa Rican executive’s worrisome stigmatizing discourse against journalists, this case reflects the differentiated forms of violence afflicting women journalists.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

President Rodrigo Chaves's stigmatizing discourse and disinformation against media and journalists have resonated among his cabinet members and supporters. Moreover, these actions are accompanied by financial strangulation and disinformation tactics that raise serious concerns about the future of press freedom in Costa Rica. This constitutes a significant setback for a country that had traditionally been characterized for the stability of its democracy, respect for human rights, and the promotion of fundamental freedoms. Nonetheless, the democratic institutions that Costa Rica has developed over decades have served to confront policies seeking to undermine independent media. Institutional counterweights have worked, cancelling initiatives that threaten freedom of the press. In September, the Costa Rican Legislative Assembly formed a commission to investigate the discretionary and political use of State advertising by the executive branch. This follows a 2022 Supreme Court ruling decrying violations of press freedom and reversing the government measures unfairly affecting La Nación. These responses are clear

evidence that democratic institutions, separation of powers, and checks and balances play a fundamental role in protecting independent journalism. However, 2023 still marks the second year that VDS has raised alarms about the declining state of press freedom in this country. It is thus imperative that the Supreme Court and human rights organizations, the media, and civil society at large work in tandem to counter abuses committed by the current administration against fundamental freedoms in Costa Rica.

CUBA

496 ALERTS

0 gender alerts



169 arbitrary detentions



91 aggressions and attacks



25 abusive uses of state power



211 internet restrictions

VICTIMS

251



216



29



AGGRESSORS

97,9%
State

0,6%
Non-state

1,5%
Unidentified

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, the Cuban government maintained its policy of persecution and criminalization of journalists, media outlets, and any voices dissenting from the party line. ICLEP registered 496 alerts for press freedom violations on the island, 97.8% of which identified the State as aggressor. This lays bare the highest levels in the region of State participation of violence against the press. In 2023, this repressive policy produced 169 arbitrary detentions, most of which occurred during mass protests to prevent journalistic coverage of these public interest events. Additionally, much like in 2022, Cuba boasted the highest number of internet restriction alerts in the region; 211 cases of this sort were documented in 2023, representing 45% of all internet restriction alerts in Latin America. On International Human Rights Day (December 10), at least 39 journalists from 13 media outlets were hit with internet service interruptions, some lasting as long as two weeks. These selective service cuts were attributed to the State-owned Cuban Telecommunications Company and Cuba's Political Police, leaving journalists, activists, and relatives of political prisoners incommunicado. Finally, Cuba's government continued institutionalizing its repression of the independent media through the

approval of legal frameworks contrary to international standards of press freedom. The new "Social Communication Law" passed by Congress in May 2023 stipulates that the only media allowed on the island are those affiliated with the State, thus completing the absolute prohibition of the independent press on the island.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

The Cuban State has completely outlawed independent journalism on the island. Its policy of repression and criminalization is widely exercised against the Cuban press, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or identity factors. Nevertheless, alarming situations of violence against women journalists and communicators in the country were reported in 2023. Influencer Sulmira Martínez Pérez was arrested in January, then interrogated for 67 days at political police headquarters before being transferred to a women's prison. Martínez Pérez was accused of incitement to commit crimes after calling for a demonstration on Facebook. Additionally, journalists Camila Acosta and Yunia Figueredo were subjected to home confinement to prevent them from participating in public acts commemorating the social protests of July 2002.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In its 2023 annual report, ICLEP states that, “Cuba continues to be a grim example of State repression against press freedom.” Throughout the year, journalists were subjected to arbitrary house arrest, selective internet service cuts, judicial persecution, destruction of work materials, threats, and incarceration. Cuba’s regime must cease its policy of persecution against the press, starting with the release

over 24 journalists currently detained for exercising their right to freedom of expression. ICLEP recommends the international community take urgent action, calling for the defense of democratic principles and human rights in Cuba, and demanding an end to the prohibition and persecution of independent journalism and free expression.



ECUADOR

292 ALERTS

10 gender alerts



3
murders



157
aggressions
and attacks



40
stigmatizing
discourses



16
civil and criminal
procedures



33
restrictions
of access to
information



19
abusive uses
of state power



2
legal frameworks
contrary to
international
standards



22
internet
restrictions

VICTIMS

113



52



127

?

AGGRESSORS

27,4%
State

37,3%
Non-state

35,3%
Unidentified

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

Ecuador faced a grave year for press freedom in 2023. The critical issues of drug trafficking and organized crime proliferation have had a devastating impact on freedom of expression. On August 9, presidential candidate and journalist Fernando Villavicencio was assassinated while leaving a campaign event. Villavicencio had built his career on investigating corruption cases linked to former Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa and was known for his incisive journalism. His murder occurred a matter days after he reported receiving death threats from the Sinaloa Cartel.

In addition to Villavicencio's killing, Fundamedios documented the murders of two other media workers and at least 10 additional cases of serious death threats, all at the hands of non-State actors. Ecuador is the only country in Latin America where the State is not the main perpetrator of press freedom violations. Instead, an alarming 35% of recorded aggressions are committed by unidentified actors with suspected ties to organized crime organizations. Amid this wave of violence, largely driven by non-State armed groups, Fundamedios recorded the forced exile of

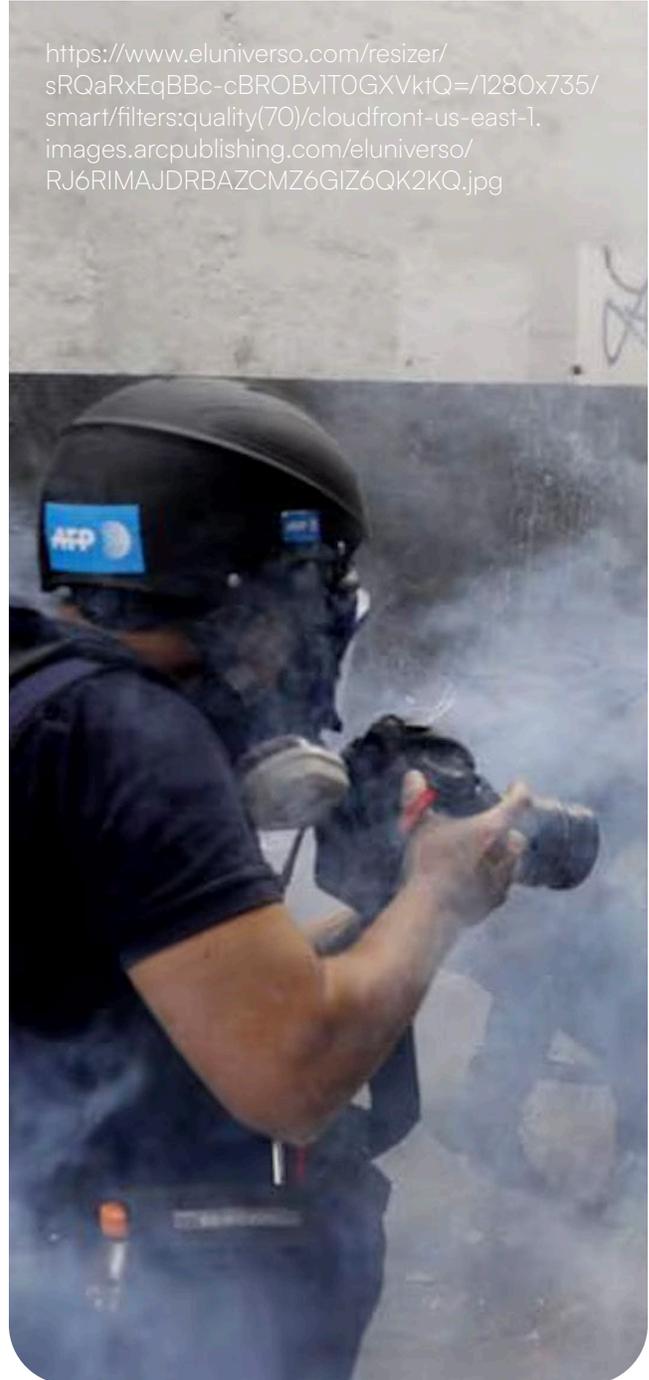
9 Ecuadorian journalists. This is the highest number of displaced reporters within a year that Fundamedios has recorded in 15 years of monitoring. It has warned of the emergence of "fear zones," or entire geographic areas that are silenced due to the self-censorship imposed for alarm at reporting in areas controlled by organized crime groups. Coordinated efforts between the government, civil society, and the international community are as necessary as ever to safeguard press freedom in Ecuador in the face of the grave threat posed by drug trafficking organizations.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

Fundamedios identified 10 cases of aggression and attacks in 2023 as gender-based offenses. In Ecuador, misogynistic discourse has become a recurring problem in the digital sphere. Most of these differentiated attacks against women occurred during elections and included sexual threats or comments regarding their physical appearance. In one notable case, Santiago Vallejo, a political candidate from the region of Mora, victimized journalist Alexandra Mera with misogynistic comments and threats while she conducted a campaign interview.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ecuador is the only country in Latin America where the State is not the main culprit of press freedom violations. This represents a rare opportunity for government and civil society to work together to address the rampant violence perpetrated by organized crime. At the end of 2023, the State Mechanism for the Protection of Journalists was created. Although the creation of this institution is a step in the right direction, this entity currently lacks adequate funding to function effectively. Newly elected president, Daniel Noboa, should provide this mechanism with greater funding to improve its reach and impact. Fundamedios has emphasized the importance of ensuring that mechanisms for the protection and defense of journalism maintain their independence and autonomy from incumbent governments.



EL SALVADOR

290 ALERTS

12 gender alerts 



14
arbitrary
detentions



91
aggressions
and attacks



96
stigmatizing
discourses



3
sexual violence



6
civil and criminal
procedures



29
restrictions
of access to
information



1
abusive use
of state power



50
internet
restrictions

VICTIMS

101



84



102

?

3 *

AGGRESSORS

55,2%
State

37,6%
Non-state

7,2%
Unidentified

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

According to APES, 2023 has been the worst year for press freedom in El Salvador since Nayib Bukele assumed the presidency in June of 2019. APES recorded 290 alerts throughout the year, a staggering increase of 391.5% compared to 2022. This rapid increase is mainly attributed to a 700% increase in stigmatizing speech, 658% in aggressions and attacks, and 383.3% in restrictions of access to information.

The decline of press freedom in El Salvador has deepened due to a “State of Exception” that has become alarmingly permanent, having been extended month by month since its original decree in March 2022. Normally, States utilize this measure to temporarily restrict constitutional rights, granting exceptional powers to the government to address a national emergency. This measure was implemented



through the current government's policy to combat gangs and organized crime, yet it continues to this day. Additionally, Salvadoran journalists and media outlets face the increasing risk of criminalization due to vague laws against cybercrime that penalize the dissemination of messages related to criminal groups that could "cause panic." Concerns have been raised about reforms to the Penal Code that could lead to up to 15 years in prison for transmitting such messages. The government's actions, including surveillance and attacks on independent media, contribute to a climate of fear and put journalists at risk of legal repercussions for their work.

Much like in 2022, the Salvadoran government was the chief aggressor against the press in 2023, representing 55.2% of alerts documented by APES. One of the main offenses of the Bukele government has been the deployment of stigmatizing discourse by the president and his ministers. This discourse is then reproduced on social media by the president's supporters and online trolls that triggers the self-censorship of local media. In addition to silencing critical voices, the discreditation of journalists also seeks to legitimize

and facilitate other State offenses such as judicial persecution and financial strangulation of media. This includes the arbitrary detention of community journalist Víctor Barahona, who remained incarcerated for nearly a year after producing critical coverage of the Bukele government. Barahona was the first Salvadoran journalist to be deprived of liberty under the State of Emergency. Moreover, media outlets have also been stifled financially through the denial of access to State advertising funds, in addition to being persecuted through excessive tax controls, financial espionage, and frequent audits. Digital newspaper El Faro endured these punitive strategies and was forced to move its administration to Costa Rica after 25 years in operation due to extensive government persecution.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

In 2023, APES recorded 12 gender-based alerts, including 3 cases of sexual violence within the workplace that are still under investigation at the time of this report's publication. Two-thirds of gender alerts documented by APES are aggressions and attacks, most of which occurred during waves of digital harassment by

government-affiliated trolls. Additionally, this year saw the forced exile of 3 female journalists. These reporters left the country due to State persecution and digital harassment, all of which was greatly exacerbated due to their gender. In El Salvador, women journalists tend to be attacked for their physical appearance and sexual preferences, which represents a barrier to their professional development and personal well-being. Overall, APES identifies a lower presence of women professionals in Salvadoran journalism and media.

munity to develop regulations, programs, and mechanisms for journalist protection. El Salvador's Legislative Assembly must urgently resume discussions on the journalist protection law which has been on hold since 2018. It must also strengthen legal, psychosocial, and humanitarian emergency support programs for journalists, communicators, and media workers. Finally, the State's Office of Human Rights should become an independent, autonomous entity and fulfill its role as an intermediary between the government and media.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Victory over the criminal gangs that once dominated the country has generated a feeling of citizen security that El Salvador has not enjoyed in over 30 years, skyrocketing President Bukele's approval. However, Bukele has used this political capital to dismantle democratic processes and lay siege on the country's institutions. Amid the accelerated democratic decline and the deterioration of institutional checks and balances, media outlets and CSOs must work with the international com-

GUATEMALA

46 ALERTS

4 gender alerts



3 murders



25 aggressions and attacks



11 civil and criminal procedures



6 restrictions of access to information



1 abusive use of state power

VICTIMS

18



8



20

?

AGGRESSORS

60,87%
State

4,35%
Non-state

30,43%
Unidentified

4,35%
Parastatal

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, DEMOS reported a total of 46 alerts, a 36% increase compared to the previous year. Presidential and legislative elections dominated media attention, significantly impacting civic life and the exercise of fundamental freedoms. Political actors seeking to maintain power attempted to delegitimize—and even annul—Bernardo Arévalo and Karin Herrera’s surprising victory at the ballot box, as well as political party Movimiento Semilla’s triumph in legislative elections. However, a resistance movement led by indigenous peoples, civil society, and independent media exerted enough citizen pressure to ensure that Arévalo, Herrera, and the parliamentary representatives of Movimiento Semilla were sworn into office. In its attempts to prevent Arévalo from taking office, the outgoing administration utilized public prosecution to judicially harass political opponents, civil society, and journalists. The imprisonment of journalist José Rubén Zamora, founder of one of the most important media outlets in the country, El Periódico, marked a turning point in the history of press freedom in Guatemala. Zamora was sentenced to 6 years in prison for alleged money laundering. Persecution also extended to El Periódico’s staff members, who were

threatened with legal persecution, had their bank accounts seized, and saw their Director and Editor-in-Chief forced into exile. As a result of this wave of repression by President Alejandro Giammattei and Attorney General Consuelo Porras, El Periódico was ultimately forced to close in 2023 after more than 20 years in circulation. In addition to this case, Guatemala saw other instances of media persecution. Indigenous journalist Anastasia Mejía suffered arbitrary detention and legal persecution, as did rural journalists Carlos Choc and Robinson Ortega. Finally, Guatemala experienced an increase in lethal violence against the press. DEMOS documented the murder of 3 journalists in 2023, the highest number recorded in a single year since the organization joined the VDS network in 2020.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

In 2023, DEMOS recorded 4 gender alerts, all of which were categorized as aggressions and attacks. This includes the gender and race-based aggression suffered by Radio K’iche’ journalist María Guarchaj, an indigenous woman, as well as constant social media attacks containing discriminatory and misogynistic messages and threats of sexual violence against journalist Mi-

chelle Mendoza, who has also faced legal harassment at the behest of Guatemala's Public Prosecutor's Office.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The swearing-in of the president, vice president, and legislative bloc of Movimiento Semilla was made possible due to popular mobilization. However, this new government faces significant challenges in attaining democratic stability in Guatemala. As long as institutions such as the Public Prosecutor's Office remain co-opted by anti-democratic actors, there are no prospects for the release of José Rubén Zamora, guarantees of return for exiled journalists, or justice for murdered journalists. The new Movimiento Semilla government enjoys significant international solidarity, but more importantly, popular local support. These conditions must be seized to produce concrete mechanisms and institutional guarantees to protect and promote human rights and press freedom.

Guatemala's new government should establish open and transparent dialogue with the media in order to develop journalist protection policies to counter persecution by public prosecutors and other government entities co-opted by anti-democratic actors. Finally, Guatemala's Ministry of the Interior, independent press, and civil society must implement urgent measures in collaboration with the international community to address the increase in lethal violence against the media, including strengthening security protocols and building international support networks.

HONDURAS

137 ALERTS

2 gender alerts



3 murders



5 arbitrary detentions



77 aggressions and attacks



30 stigmatizing discourses



5 civil and criminal procedures



11 restrictions of access to information



6 internet restrictions

VICTIMS

63



36



36

?

2*

AGGRESSORS

35,0%
State

4,4%
Non-state

54%
Unidentified

6,6%
Parastatal

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, Honduras was one of the deadliest countries for journalism in the region. The year both began and ended with the murders of media workers. Throughout the year, C-Libre recorded the killings of 3 journalists and media workers. This trend of lethal violence, coupled with State censorship and persecution, has dashed the previously-high expectations for the government of Xiomara Castro, who was elected in January 2022. Under Castro's administration, the Honduran government has continued the judicial persecution and arbitrary detention of journalists. There were 5 legal proceedings against journalists and 5 arbitrary detentions reported by C-Libre in 2023. This constitutes a continued and systematic State attack against journalism in Honduras. Although over one-third of recorded aggressions identify the State, and specifically public officials, as aggressors, most press freedom violations in Honduras (54%) are perpetrated by unidentified actors. C-Libre asserts that a significant number of aggressions could be linked to organized criminal groups, as journalists and media covering organized

crime and State corruption have been the most likely to suffer retaliation. State authorities have not identified perpetrators in the vast majority of these crimes, evidencing high levels of impunity for violence against journalists in Honduras.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

C-Libre recorded 2 gender alerts in 2023. Both alerts register cases of stigmatizing discourse against LGBTIQ+ persons and were perpetrated by public officials. In one notable case, Roberto Contreras, the mayor of San Pedro Sula, used his position to direct stigmatizing insults and hate speech against the LGBTIQ+ community.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ongoing lethal violence against journalists and the lack of an effective State response pose serious threats to press freedom and independent journalism in Honduras. The murders of journalists and media workers, along with judicial persecution and arbitrary detentions, reflect a clear attempt

to silence critical voices and restrict the exercise of journalism. The impunity surrounding most crimes against journalists, and the fact that 54% of aggressors go unidentified, reveals a lack of interest in investigating and punishing those responsible. This perpetuates a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists. Honduran State officials must take urgent measures to protect journalists, starting with strengthening the Mesa de Protección, the Honduran State's mechanism for protecting human rights defenders and journalists. It must provide the financial resources and political support necessary for this entity to operate effectively. Combatting impunity in crimes against journalists in Honduras requires a comprehensive approach, strengthening legal frameworks, expediting police investigations, promoting the protection of journalists, and educating the public on the role of journalism in society. All of these efforts should be framed within the wider struggle to fight corruption and strengthen democratic institutions in Honduras.

<https://hondudiario.com/nacionales/honduras-reporta-67-periodistas-en-riesgo-o-victimas-de-desplazamiento-forzado/>



MEXICO

561 ALERTS

38 gender alerts 



5
murders



12
kidnappings



1
forced disappearance



11
arbitrary detentions



4
tortures



293
aggressions and attacks



73
stigmatizing discourses



22
civil and criminal procedures



53
restrictions of access to information



11
abusive uses of state power



76
internet restrictions

VICTIMS

303



167



91



AGGRESSORS

51,1%
State

21,4%
Non-state

10,2%
Groups outside the law

17,3%
Unidentified

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, Mexico's independent media experienced yet another deadly year. Throughout the year, 5 journalists were murdered: Marco Aurelio Ramírez Hernández in the state of Puebla; Luis Martín Sánchez in Nayarit; Nelson Matus Peña in Guerrero; Jesús Gutiérrez Vergara in Sonora; and Ismael Villagómez Tapia in Chihuahua. From 2000 to the present, ARTICLE 19 has documented the murder of 163 journalists in Mexico; 43 of these have been recorded during the current administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, indicating that threats against journalists have not receded during his tenure. In addition, ARTICLE 19 reported the kidnapping of 12 journalists and the disappearance of journalist Juan Carlos Hinojosa. It also documented 293 alerts for aggressions and attacks, including assaults, death threats, and other forms of intimidation and harassment. Media workers attacked for covering corruption, politics, security, and justice accounted for 76% of documented aggressions. This demonstrates a clear intention to silence these journalists and dissuade them from reporting on these topics. Much of this violence is carried out by organized crime groups and unidentified actors with links to criminal organizations. In Mexico, territorial

disputes between drug trafficking organizations result in extreme violence against citizens in general, but especially against journalists, communicators, and human rights defenders. Nonetheless, most press freedom violations (51.1%) are carried out by State actors. López Obrador's government has maintained a permanent campaign of stigmatization against the media. Through his customary morning address, known as "las mañaneras," the Mexican president stigmatizes media outlets and journalists, contributing to a culture of tolerance towards violence against reporters and increasing the immense risk of working in journalism in Mexico. On the one hand, Mexican journalists face the strong presence of organized crime groups throughout the country, and on the other, they endure the anti-press rhetoric and policies of public officials and government institutions. As in other countries in the region, these two factors combine to dramatically exacerbate violence against the press.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

In 2023, ARTICLE 19 recorded 38 gender alerts in Mexico, of which 20 identified State actors as the aggressor. Gender-based attacks against women and LGBTIQ+ reporters persist on social media. Through-

out the year, transgender journalists faced censorship of their social media accounts after suffering coordinated attacks by trolls. The high prevalence of gendered attacks demonstrates a dire situation for women and LGBTIQ+ journalists in Mexico.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Near the end of López Obrador's term, there has been no significant progress in journalist protection in Mexico. Despite extremely high numbers of murdered journalists, no reforms to existing protection systems have been carried out in the last 6 years, nor have there been advances in combating impunity for crimes against the press. In June 2024, Mexico will hold elections to select over 20,000 positions, including the presidency. Given the lethal violence against the Mexican press and the regional trend of increased aggressions in electoral contexts, 2024 stands to be an especially high-risk year for reporters. Hence, current and future State officials must commit to concrete measures to protect journalists and defend press freedom. This starts with ceasing their own stigmatizing rhetoric against media outlets and journalists. Public servants must employ speech that promotes plural and diverse dialogue, encourages differing opinions,

and highlights the pivotal role of journalism in a democracy. Judicial officials must also refrain from initiating civil, criminal, or electoral proceedings against critical journalists or media outlets. Instead, the judicial branch should conduct diligent investigations into crimes against journalists. Given the lethal violence carried out by organized criminal groups, Mexico must strengthen national mechanisms for journalist protection and expand available defense resources, protection plans, and risk assessments.

NICARAGUA

86 ALERTS

0 gender alerts



3
arbitrary
detentions



33
aggressions
and attacks



22
stigmatizing
discourses



1
civil and
criminal
procedure



1
restriction
of access to
information



26
abusive uses
of state power

VICTIMS

42



22



22

?

AGGRESSORS

60,60%
State

4,60%
Non-state

4,60%
Unidentified

30,20%
Parastatal

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

Nicaragua continues navigating the social and political crisis that has persisted since the outbreak of popular protests in April of 2018, when hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans took to the streets to protest, mostly peacefully, against the government of Daniel Ortega. The State responded to the uprising with brutal repression, resulting in over 300 deaths. Since then, the Ortega-Murillo regime has pursued a systematic policy of criminalization of social movements, CSOs, human rights defenders, and media outlets that denounce this government's repression. Hundreds of CSOs and dozens of media outlets have since been closed, been stripped of their legal status, had their assets confiscated, and seen their leadership driven out of the country or imprisoned. Since 2018, at least 242 journalists have been forced into exile.

While this year's data show a reduction in the number of aggressions compared to 2022, this is linked to the decline in independent journalism overall rather than an improvement in the situation of press freedom. The closure and confiscation of La Prensa, the oldest and most renowned media outlet in the country, has left Nicaragua with no print newspapers in circulation, nor are there television channels or

radio stations broadcasting critical journalistic content about the current government. The independent media outlets that do exist have managed to circumvent censorship by reporting online, mainly through social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. However, FLED is unaware of any independent journalists presently working in 5 of the 17 departments in Nicaragua, and has hence designated these areas media deserts.

As a result of the forced exile and self-censorship of journalists due to State repression, there are currently no independent media organizations operating with full freedom within Nicaragua. Furthermore, Murillo-Ortega regime has also targeted the national education system by closing and co-opting dozens of universities, including the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) in 2023, which hosted the premier journalism school in the country. The closure of UCA and the reluctance of other universities to offer journalism courses implies that new generations of journalists are no longer being trained, potentially leading to a future where Nicaragua may be left without free and independent journalism.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

No gender alerts were recorded in Nicaragua in 2023. However, FLED has discovered that aggressions against women journalists in Nicaragua tend to be particularly vicious, as offenses against them are charged with a misogynistic and discriminatory tone, referencing their private life or physical appearance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The mass exile of Nicaraguan journalists has had a positive impact on innovation, collaboration, and cohesion in media circles. Journalists in exile have formed dozens of new media outlets and platforms that, thanks in part to international funding, continue to produce committed journalism that resists and innovates in the face of censorship and repression. International organizations must continue supporting and funding Nicaraguan independent journalism in exile and finding opportunities to promote journalism within Nicaragua. It is also essential to raise awareness of the grave press freedom violations in the

country in order to keep this issue on the international public agenda. The reduction in violations does not signify an improvement in the situation, but rather reflects its severity. Finally, at least 22 journalists have been left Stateless after being illegally stripped of their Nicaraguan citizenship. FLED suggests that countries hosting these journalists create mechanisms to guarantee the right to identity and foster journalism in exile by relaxing legal requirements for journalists with refugee status.

PARAGUAY

50 ALERTS

2 gender alerts 



1
murder



1
arbitrary
detention



30
aggressions
and attacks



4
stigmatizing
discourses



1
sexual violence



6
civil and
criminal
procedures



1
restriction
of access to
information



6
legal frameworks contrary
to international standards

VICTIMS

24



14



12

?

AGGRESSORS

42%
State

18%
Non-state

4%
Groups
outside
the law

32%
Unidentified

4%
Parastatal

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, the Paraguayan press continued facing severe challenges. Most press freedom violations occurred during the presidential elections, although lethal violence persisted against journalists in the border region with Brazil throughout the year. IDEA's 50 registered alerts reflect a worrisome 92% increase in comparison with 2022. The majority of alerts were registered between January and April in the context of general elections, including 30 for aggressions and attacks (triple the amount from the previous year), as well as 1 arbitrary detention. Journalist Judith María Vera was detained while covering a demonstration just weeks before the elections. Moreover, IDEA reported that Paraguay's government restricted access to public information all throughout the electoral period. Several media outlets also reported obstacles to publishing the results of public opinion polls due to selective and discretionary court orders. The past 2 years of monitoring by IDEA demonstrate a pattern of judicial persecution to silence the press: 12 alerts for this form of violence were registered between 2022 and 2023. Finally, IDEA recorded the murder of 1 journalist in the border city of Pedro Juan Caballero for the second

consecutive year. In this case, the victim was Alexander Álvarez, a morning news presenter for local outlet Radio Undure. Álvarez reported death threats from organized crime and had been assigned a State protection detail. According to IDEA, there have now been 9 journalists murdered in the border area with Brazil since 1991. This demonstrates the strong presence of organized crime in this region, and its grave risk to the lives of journalists and press freedom in Paraguay.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

In 2023, IDEA registered 1 case of sexual violence and 2 gender alerts. This year, journalist Mercedes Barriocanal suffered attacks and disqualifying insults due to her opinions in favor of gender equality, women's reproductive rights, and the right to sex education. Once again, this demonstrates that violence against women journalists not only seeks to discredit and humiliate individuals, but also aims to prevent public discussion on women's issues and gender inequality. Furthermore, for the second consecutive year, IDEA has decried the manipulation of Paraguay's "Law on Protection of Women Against All Forms of Violence" to censor the press. Public officials have abused this norm by

prohibiting publication of public interest investigations when they involve women in public positions.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An increase of over 90% in violence against the press in Paraguay in 2023 is extremely alarming. The 2 murders recorded in as many years in the city of Pedro Juan Caballero are particularly worrisome, as is the incapacity of the government to guarantee the protection and security of Paraguayan journalists. In both cases, journalists reported serious threats against them and requested State protection. In both cases, the State response was insufficient. In Paraguay, the Mesa de Protección—which was ordered by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights after the murder of journalist Santiago Leguizamón—has been established. Nonetheless, this resource must be strengthened. It is essential that the Paraguayan government create spaces for dialogue with civil society and the press to develop a joint strategy to strengthen this entity, providing it with the necessary financial resources and creating protection protocols from this space. The government must address the situation in the border city of Pedro Juan Caballero, labelled a

“silenced zone” by the IACHR Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression. State officials should also create a binational action plan to neutralize drug trafficking activity and protect the independent press and the general population in this region. IDEA has urged the Paraguayan legislature to update legal frameworks to comply with international standards of press freedom. This is particularly necessary in order for the murder of journalists to be classified as a crime of concern and thus investigated more swiftly and efficiently. The legislature must also correct the law regarding women’s violence to prevent its manipulation to censor the press.

PERU

119 ALERTS

0 gender alerts



3 arbitrary detentions



99 aggressions and attacks



1 stigmatizing discourse



7 civil and criminal procedures



1 restriction of access to information



6 abusive uses of state power



2 legal frameworks contrary to international standards

VICTIMS

59



32



28

?

AGGRESSORS

61,34%
State

7,56%
Groups outside
the law

1,68%
Unidentified

29,41%
Parastatal

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, Peru continued navigating the crisis unleashed by the political impeachment of President Pedro Castillo in 2022. In January, the interim government, led by President Dina Boluarte, brutally repressed protests in favor of Castillo and unilaterally declared a state of emergency in nine geographic districts across the country. These actions resulted in the deaths of 49 protesters across the country. Amid this repression and violence, IPYS Peru recorded a total of 119 alerts for violations of press freedom, representing an increase of 17.8% from 2022. Consequently, 83% of alerts issued during the year correspond to aggressions and attacks, as tends to occur in scenarios of deep polarization and social conflict. IPYS Peru registered 99 alerts of this indicator, representing a 67.8% increase from the previous year. The Peruvian State again emerged as the principal aggressor against the press, identified as perpetrator in 61.3% of all alerts. In addition to acts of direct violence committed by the National Police, Peru's government orchestrated the arbitrary detention of 3 journalists and the opening of at least 7 new judicial cases against members of the media. The Boluarte government also

proposed at least 2 bills that would see a regression in protections for freedom of expression and the press in the country. One of these proposals would require mandatory accreditation of journalists by the journalism association, granting unilateral power to the organization to decide who may and may not be called a journalist in Peru. Another bill aims to increase jail time for individuals who disseminate information considered defamatory, which is in clear violation of Inter-American standards on the subject. According to IPYS Peru, both laws have the potential to be used in a discretionary and arbitrary manner to inhibit or restrict journalism and reflect a pattern of abusive use of State power to motivate self-censorship, particularly for journalists reporting on sensitive issues such as politics, the environment, corruption, and organized crime.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

Although IPYS Peru did not record any gender alerts in 2023, it asserts that women reporters investigating and exposing cases involving politicians and other powerful actors are specifically targeted. Repression against women journalists is exacerbated on account of their gender, as they face

forms of harassment and attacks that their male colleagues rarely experience. Additionally, the increased use of social media as a news platform has amplified attacks by “trolls,” which try to intimidate journalists based on their gender or race.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Press freedom in Peru has endured progressive deterioration in the past years. Amid high levels of social polarization, mass protests, and government repression in 2023, IPYS Peru documented the highest number of alerts in a single year since VDS monitoring began in 2018. To address this situation, public officials must diligently investigate and sanction attacks against journalists, including physical assaults, threats, and intimidation to prevent fostering a climate of impunity. Peru’s government must collaborate with civil society to review and update existing legislation on press freedom to bring its laws into compliance with international standards. The State must urgently revisit and redefine the penalization of “crimes against honor,” such as defamation, insults, and libel. The ability of citizens to protect

their reputations and seek remedies for slander and libel must be guaranteed only through civil sanctions, especially in cases of public interest. In parallel, independent media and the public must call for the strengthening of the government protection mechanisms for human rights defenders, which also covers journalists. In addition to enforcing protocols to protect journalists, this mechanism must also evaluate proposed bills that stand to negatively affect press freedom.

URUGUAY

60 ALERTS

3 gender alerts



15 aggressions and attacks



15 stigmatizing discourses



9 civil and criminal procedures



15 restrictions of access to information



3 abusive uses of state power



2 legal frameworks contrary to international standards



1 internet restriction

VICTIMS

15



7



38

?

AGGRESSORS

61,7%
State

28,3%
Non-state

10%
Unidentified

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

Once a benchmark for press freedom in the hemisphere, Uruguay has shown a sustained decline in conditions for independent journalism. In 2023, Cainfo recorded 60 alerts, an 11% increase compared to 2022. In addition to this increase, data collected by Cainfo indicate high levels of State violence against the media; this year, 61.7% of offenses against the press were committed by State actors. The prevalence of the State in the commission of offenses against journalists has remained steadily above 60% in the last 3 iterations of the Shadow Report, situating Uruguay as the third country in the region with the highest rate of participation of public officials in violence against journalists. In 2023, Senator Graciela Bianchi was responsible for 10% of all alerts documented throughout the year, mainly through the use of stigmatizing discourse. The Senator threatened to sue journalist Leo Sarro after being the subject of an investigation into mismanagement during her tenure as a legislator. Data also reflect systematic abuse of the judicial system to silence the Uruguayan press. Cainfo registered 9 alerts for civil and criminal procedures in 2023. The

figure for this indicator has remained consistently high since 2021, as Cainfo has reported 35 alerts of this indicator in the past 3 years. This year, the State policy of judicial persecution was exemplified by prosecutor Irene Penza's lawsuit against community radio outlet La Kandela. Cainfo has also denounced threats sent to two Uruguayan media outlets for covering the criminal activity of drug trafficker Sebastián Marset, who is currently a fugitive facing an international arrest warrant. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case, as Cainfo has already denounced lacking security conditions for journalists reporting on this type of criminal activity, especially in border areas.

Rather than acting to improve press freedom in Uruguay, the government of Luis Lacalle Pou has promoted a reform of the "Audiovisual Communication Services Law" that could be approved in 2024. This modification has been at the center of national debate due to its regressive nature, as it cancels previously established limits on media concentration and foreign ownership. This has been decried by academics and civil society for undermining transparency and pluralism. The proposed

reform would increase the maximum number of radio and television licenses that can be held by the same owner. It would also allow the sale of up to 100% of shares of television outlets to foreign groups. The current law allows the sale of only 49% of television channels to foreign companies. Cainfo asserts that this bill seeks to directly benefit media groups aligned with the government and to permit media concentration by foreign investors. It would also repeal State payments to companies for occupying certain frequencies, which will affect the audiovisual industry and the dissemination of art, science, and culture in Uruguay. Although the draft of this bill was slightly improved by the end of 2023, it still fails to meet international standards of press freedom due to its proposed elimination of institutions designed to ensure transparency, citizen participation, and independent media management.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

In 2023, 3 gender alerts were registered in Uruguay. Sports journalist Ana Inés Martínez was attacked on several occa-

sions by sports fans, even receiving death threats from supporters of the soccer club Peñarol. The Uruguayan Sports Journalists Circle attributed these attacks to both her journalistic coverage and her gender. Attacks against Martínez were exacerbated when she was fired by Canal 10 in December, which led to her denouncing sexual and workplace harassment by company executives.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Presidential and parliamentary elections will be held in Uruguay in 2024. As evidenced throughout this report, electoral contexts oftentimes result in greater risks for journalists and media workers. Therefore, government, civil society, and media outlets must work to improve the conditions for reporting and put a specific focus on guaranteeing the safety and protection of journalists that will cover elections. State officials must also emphasize transparency in the dissemination of public information, allowing CSOs and the media to oversee

the electoral process in accordance with national legislation. In addition, the Lacalle Pou government must prompt deeper public debate on the reform of the “Audiovisual Communication Services Law” in order to avoid regressions in press freedom and

human rights. Finally, State authorities and other public officials must respect the demands of the Uruguayan public and refrain from deploying stigmatizing language and manipulating the justice system to silence the press.



VENEZUELA

413 ALERTS

3 gender alerts



107
aggressions
and attacks



123
stigmatizing
discourses



9
civil and criminal
procedures



113
restrictions
of access to
information



16
abusive uses
of state power



45
internet
restrictions

VICTIMS

157



126



130



AGGRESSORS

49,4%
State

13,8%
Non-state

3%
Groups
outside
the law

27,8%
Unidentified

6%
Parastatal

CONTEXT AND TRENDS

In 2023, Nicolás Maduro’s regime maintained its policy of systematic repression of press freedom in Venezuela. In recent years, this has included discretionary concessions of radio frequency permits to government sympathizers, hoarding of production supplies to prevent the adequate functioning of the independent press, persecution of news sources and advertisers, restrictions of access to information, and attacks on digital media sites. According to the second edition of IPYS Venezuela’s study “Atlas del Silencio,” systematic persecution of the independent press has left 133 localities in Venezuela with no access to media whatsoever, increasing the number of Venezuelan people living in news deserts to over 7 million. In 2023, Venezuela experienced two pivotal events in terms of press freedom. The first was the primary elections of opposition parties in October 2023. Despite being a nationally significant event, journalists and media outlets reported receiving threats and intimidation from the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL), which reportedly urged media outlets to

not cover the opposition’s primary elections. Second was the proposal of laws that will restrict freedom of expression and open debate during the 2024 elections. These include the “Law Against Fascism, Neofascism, and Similar Expressions,” also known simply as the Anti-Fascism Law, and the “Law of Supervision, Regularization, Action, and Financing of Non-Governmental Organizations and Affiliates,” known as the Anti-Society Law. The Anti-Fascism Law promoted by the Maduro regime is a criminal law that can be used to censor and punish the press. It allows for the revocation of radio and television concessions to media outlets that disseminate messages considered fascist or “of a similar nature.” The Anti-Society Law, on the other hand, would undermine freedom of association rights for Venezuelan civil society, as well as media institutions.

GENDER AND INCLUSION

In 2023, IPYS Venezuela recorded 3 gender alerts. All 3 alerts correspond to aggressions and attacks with misogynistic content, 2 of which were committed online by unidentified individuals. IPYS Venezuela

has repeatedly denounced the prevalence of sexist and discriminatory comments based on gender, sexual orientation, or physical appearance on social media in Venezuela.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The upcoming year will be a pivotal one for media in Venezuela. Looming presidential elections have raised hopes for some degree of democratic opening. To ensure the legitimacy of these elections and guarantee the safety of the press, it is essential that media outlets and journalists are permitted to work freely with full access to information and without fear of being attacked while covering elections. Given the likelihood of increased violence during these elections, the international community must support CSOs and media outlets to strengthen security protocols for journalists covering elections. The Venezuelan government must guarantee access to public information, especially

regarding the electoral process, and cease its persecution of independent journalism. This includes refraining from the continued manipulation of public institutions, especially CONATEL, to censor and control the media.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The consolidation of antidemocratic regimes and proliferation of organized crime in Latin America have created an extremely dangerous combination for press freedom and journalism. Regional data reveal increasing violence against the press, amid a climate of impunity fostered by the inaction, and occasional complicity, of State actors. Rather than protecting the press, governments throughout Latin America are the very actors persecuting and stigmatizing journalists and the independent media. Violence and repression have led to self-censorship and the forced exile for hundreds of journalists in the region. In addition to threatening journalists and media workers, these issues have consequences for society at large. Censorship and persecution of independent press undermine the very foundations of democracy by depriving citizens of truthful information and shielding public officials from accountability. This perpetuates impunity for crimes against journalists and media workers and strengthens authoritarian regimes. The VDS network proposes 6 strategic approaches to confront these issues and improve the situation of press freedom in the coming years:

1. Implement effective mechanisms and public policies for the protection and promotion of journalism:

The persistent violence against the media throughout the region highlights the urgent need for government action to guarantee journalist protection. Brazil is a positive example of a country implementing effective public policies to protect journalists. Intersectoral collaboration between the State, civil society, and the media has produced programs to safeguard press freedom and ensure a safe environment for reporting. It has led to the establishment of the National Observatory Against Violence Towards Journalists, an interinstitutional entity to protect Brazilian journalists. In countries where there is need for improvement, such as Ecuador it is important to promote consensus among political actors to create mechanisms and laws to promote a free and pluralistic press. These agreements ought to produce long-term public policies that remain in place despite changes in government. It is also crucial to inform society of the importance of press freedom as a fundamental pillar of democracy and the rule of law. Educational programs and awareness

campaigns can increase societal recognition of the importance of press freedom and access to information, fostering a culture of respect for and support of journalism.

2. Promote judicial independence and legislative frameworks in line with international standards of press freedom:

Throughout the region, the judiciary is used as a political tool to restrict press freedom. This is evidenced by the legal persecution of independent journalism and the creation of laws that do not comply with international standards of press freedom. Furthermore, persisting impunity in cases of violence creates a climate of fear that can lead to self-censorship. Therefore, ensuring judicial independence is critical for protecting press freedom. Judiciaries must remain impartial and act free of external influence in cases of violence against journalists. Impunity for crimes against the press not only undermines trust in democratic institutions but also perpetuates a hostile environment for journalism. Governments must appoint fair judges regardless of political affiliation, guarantee the safety of judicial personnel, and facilitate independent evaluations of judicial performance. They must also pro-

vide funding for prosecutors specializing in crimes against journalists. The progressive decriminalization of “crimes against honor,” such as defamation and libel, is necessary to prevent these laws from being used to silence the press. Finally, it is essential to provide gender training for judges and judicial civil servants to help prevent and punish gender-based violence within journalism and society at large, as well as to facilitate equal access to justice and protection of the rights of all individuals.

3. Addressing the Issue of Organized Crime with Regional and National Responses

Organized crime has become alarmingly dominant across Latin America, posing a serious threat to stability and security in the region, as well as an imminent danger to the free press. Addressing this issue requires strong, coherent policies at both the national and regional levels. Countries must strengthen their judicial and security institutions to combat corruption and impunity, ensuring independence and impartiality of the judiciary and police. Police must be equipped with the tools to combat drug trafficking, and judiciaries must avoid selecting judges with links to political parties or criminal networks. This requires

establishing protection mechanisms for journalists investigating organized crime, including resources to provide personal and family security, legal assistance, and relocation funds if necessary. Additionally, media outlets must provide their staff with physical and digital security training, as well as tools to protect their personal information and alert them of high-risk situations. Governments across the region must push forward laws to safeguard the identity of journalists in these cases. Furthermore, governments must cooperate across the region to confront organized crime in a coordinated and effective manner. This involves sharing intelligence, coordinating cross-border security, and strengthening regional judicial and police cooperation. Inter-border protection and relocation services must be developed, helping journalists attain refuge, psychosocial care, and to continue their journalistic work with basic security guarantees. This should include the streamlining of visas so that journalists may reside safely in neighboring countries.

4. Strengthening Civil Society Work to Enhance Oversight and Truth-seeking

Rather than promoting press freedom, governments in the region are stifling journalism and limiting the population's right to information. States employ restrictive laws, excessive administrative controls, and discretionary allocation of advertising revenue to restrict critical reporting. Hence, alliances between civil society, local communities, political parties, and the independent media must confront attacks on press freedom. Such collaboration will strengthen resistance to censorship and repression, with civil society and media oversight of the State and other powerful actors bolstered through support networks and information sharing. It will allow the exchange of knowledge and resources and promote advocacy to hold these actors accountable for press freedom violations.

5. Coordinated Action by the International Community to Defend Press Freedom

Defending press freedom requires coordinated international action to address challenges facing media outlets and journalists throughout the region. The international community must provide journalists and media outlets with adequate protection

resources. This includes financial support to offer training, provide security technology, and implement safety measures to protect journalists and independent media in hostile environments. Additionally, the international community must act decisively to address the deterioration in press freedom, even in countries that have traditionally been stable democracies.

As a preventive measure, country oversight through the Inter-American Human Rights System must be bolstered. Effective steps must be taken to pressure authoritarian governments and promote accountability for press freedom violations. Support must also be provided in the fight against corruption and organized crime, both producing regional responses and strengthening the internal capacities of each country to protect journalists and ensure a safe environment for independent and critical journalism.

6. Investment in Gender-Specific Policies and Protocols

Violence against women and LGBTQ+ reporters has particularly harmful effects, and both manifests and results in differen-

tiated forms of violence than those faced by cisgender and heterosexual men in the same field. Alarming, the vast majority of these aggressions are carried out in the digital sphere, underscoring the urgent need to regulate this space and establish effective laws and protection mechanisms to mitigate the impact of online violence. This should include media outlet response mechanisms providing victims with psychosocial support and legal assistance, as well as direct contact with social media platforms and State authorities to curb verbal attacks and suspend users as necessary. More effective public policies are required to ensure that women journalists can work safely, including the creation of specialized mechanisms for addressing violence against women and LGBTQ+ reporters. Furthermore, public awareness campaigns regarding these issues should be developed to sensitize the public. Media outlets also have a crucial role to play in this process. These entities must strengthen their internal policies to ensure the security of women and LGBTQ+ persons, which could include the hiring of gender editors within newsrooms to ensure the full participation of these groups in the journalism profession.



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2023