

2014

# How Free are Media in the Americas Today?

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/lacc\\_hemisphere](https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/lacc_hemisphere)



Part of the [Latin American Languages and Societies Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

(2014) "How Free are Media in the Americas Today?," *Hemisphere*: Vol. 23 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

Available at: [https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/lacc\\_hemisphere/vol23/iss1/1](https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/lacc_hemisphere/vol23/iss1/1)

This work is brought to you for free and open access by the Kimberly Green Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC) Publications Network at FIU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hemisphere by an authorized administrator of FIU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [dcc@fiu.edu](mailto:dcc@fiu.edu).

---

## How Free are Media in the Americas Today?

### **Abstract**

Guest-edited by Raul Reis, Dean of FIU's School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Volume 23 takes an in-depth look at a key challenge to democracy: freedom of the press. Despite the significant progress made over the past two decades to consolidate political rights and civil liberties in the region, the situation facing media professionals is more precarious; news outlets are closed, journalists' ability to inform the public intensifies, and violence and intimidation targets them. Gag orders and legislation have increased the costs of reporting on important issues such as corruption, crime and violence. As a result, self-censorship has become the norm, with serious implications for the entire hemisphere.

# Hemisphere

A MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAS

VOLUME 23 • SUMMER 2014 • [HTTP://LACC.FIU.EDU](http://lacc.fiu.edu)



**How Free are Media  
in the Americas Today?**

# Latin American and Caribbean Center

## School of International and Public Affairs

An integral part of the School of International and Public Affairs, the Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC) is one of the largest and most comprehensive area studies program at FIU. The center coordinates a robust program that spans across the disciplines, supporting and enhancing the university's academic mission.

Designated as a National Resource Center for Foreign Language and Area Studies by the U.S. Department of Education, LACC fosters high quality research, education and services on Latin American and the Caribbean.

LACC's academic offerings include graduate and undergraduate certificate programs and a variety of summer and foreign study opportunities. The center's programs build on the unique assets of FIU's inter-American setting and the expertise of approximately 200 faculty associates who work on Latin America and the Caribbean.

For more information, contact LACC at 305-348-2894 or by email at [lacc@fiu.edu](mailto:lacc@fiu.edu)  
Please visit our website at [lacc.fiu.edu](http://lacc.fiu.edu)



**Arts & Sciences**

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

# Hemisphere

VOLUME 23 • SUMMER 2014 • [HTTP://LACC.FIU.EDU](http://lacc.fiu.edu)

## I N T H I S I S S U E

### LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Frank Mora .....3

### LETTER FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

Raul Reis .....4

### SETTING THE STAGE

Freedom in Latin America: What Press Monitors Say  
*Leonardo Ferreira* .....6

The Two Americas and the Freedom of Expression Disconnect  
*Alejandro J. Aguirre* .....12

Digital Media Ethics: Reinventing Journalism in Latin America  
*Leonardo Ferreira* .....16

### SPECIAL FEATURE

Press Freedom, Democracy and Climate Change Reporting in Latin America  
*Juliet Pinto and Mercedes Vigón* .....24

### FOCUS ON CUBA

What Can I Say? Freedom of Expression in Cuba  
*Jorge Dalmau and John Virtue* .....32

A Surprise Witness for the Prosecution  
*John Virtue* .....34

### REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

90 Miles to Freedom of the Press  
*Patrick Farrell* .....36

Haiti: Land of Radios  
*Bernard Diederich* .....40

### OPINION

A Disastrous Year for Press Freedom in the Americas  
*Claudio Paolillo* .....44

# *Hemisphere*

---

## EDITORIAL STAFF

---

Founding Editor	Anthony P. Maingot
Editor	Francisco O. Mora
Guest Editor	Raul Reis
Associate Editor	Liesl Picard
Copy Editor	Alisa Newman
Graphic Designer	Rafael Avalos
Production Manager	Kristina Mur

---

## EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

---

Uva de Aragón	Ana María Bidegain
David Bray	Carol Damian
Eduardo A. Gamarra	Sarah J. Mahler
A. Douglas Kincaid	Félix E. Martín
Andrea Mantell Seidel	Juan Martínez
Patricia Price	Raul Reis
Mark B. Rosenberg	Ana Roca
Richard Tardanico	Victor M. Uribe-Uran

*Hemisphere* (ISSN 08983038) is published once a year by the Latin American and Caribbean Center, School of International and Public Affairs, Florida International University. Copyright © 2014 by the Latin American and Caribbean Center, Florida International University. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.

*Hemisphere* is dedicated to provoking debate on the problems, initiatives, and achievements of the Americas. Responsibility for the views expressed lies solely with the authors. Editorial, Circulation and Advertising Offices: Latin American and Caribbean Center, Florida International University, Modesto A. Maidique Campus, DM 353, Miami, Florida, 33199, Tel.: (305) 348-2894, Fax: (305) 348-3953, E-mail: [lacc@fiu.edu](mailto:lacc@fiu.edu), <http://lacc.fiu.edu>

Cover Image: A protester modeling miniature microphones protests 27 May, 2003, in front of the National Telecommunications Commission in Caracas. Hundreds of demonstrators protested a new controversial press law, which opponents see as censorship against media opposed to the rule of President Hugo Chavez. AFP PHOTO/ ANDREW ALVAREZ/Getty Images

# FROM THE EDITOR

Dear *Hemisphere* readers:

The Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC) is delighted to be partnering with FIU's School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC) to provide our readers with an in-depth look at a key challenge to democracy, security and transparency in Latin American and Caribbean: freedom of the press.

Despite the significant progress made over the last twenty-five years to advance and consolidate political rights and civil liberties in the region, the situation currently facing media professionals is becoming more precarious with each passing day. Media seem to be under assault as efforts to close news outlets and restrict journalists' abilities to inform the public intensify. Moreover, violence and intimidation targeting journalists are not abating; in fact, as you will read in this issue, in some countries homicide rates of journalists are on the rise and impunity continues to stand in the way of justice. Gag-orders and legislation that threaten reporters with fines or imprisonment in countries such as Ecuador and Venezuela have significantly increased the costs of reporting on important and controversial issues such as corruption, crime and violence, and the weakening of democratic institutions in the region. As a result, self-censorship and timidity in reporting have begun to settle in, with multiple and serious implications for the entire hemisphere.

Fortunately, many media professionals and independent journalists, scholars and industry-related organizations continue to work hard to get news out, uphold the ethics of the profession, and serve as critical defenders of press freedom. They are among the contributors to this issue of *Hemisphere* and all have done a magnificent job of shedding light on a complex, agonizing subject.

I'm extremely grateful to Dean Raul Reis, who embraced the opportunity to serve as the guest editor of this issue. He did a masterful job with the diligent editorial support of Liesl Picard, Associate Director of LACC, and Alisa Newman, and brought together an impressive cadre of exceptional academics and journalists who intimately understand the challenges facing media professionals currently covering the region.

I also want to thank Dean Reis and his FIU SJMC colleagues, Leonardo Ferreira and Teresa Ponte, as well as LACC's Sally Zamudio, for taking the issue of press freedom beyond the pages of *Hemisphere* and designing a program, as part of our 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Journalists & Editors Workshop on Latin America and the Caribbean, that further examines the topic and provides professional development training opportunities for both media professionals and Journalism students.

I look forward to continuing the conversation.

Frank O. Mora  
Director  
Latin American and Caribbean Center  
Florida International University

# FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

In 2013, Freedom House's *Freedom of the Press Index*, an annual survey of media independence in 197 countries and territories, downgraded Ecuador and Paraguay from "Partly free" to "Not free," joining a growing list of Latin American countries that also includes Honduras, Mexico, Venezuela and Cuba. Ecuador was demoted to "Not free" because of "state interference and a hostile environment for the press." The justification probably applies to the other Latin American and Caribbean countries with the same ranking.

*Reporters Without Borders*, a different NGO which issues its own press freedom index, ranks Argentina 55th and Brazil an embarrassing 111th out of 180 on its 2014 list of most to least "press free" countries. Brazil dropped nine places in the ranking from 2012 to 2013, in part because five journalists were assassinated in that country in 2013 alone. In the case of Argentina, which dropped eight places since 2012, the downgrading was justified by "the growing tension" between the government and privately owned media, culminating with the adoption of new media laws that some analysts see as designed to curb (if not silence) opposition voices.

This issue of *Hemisphere* is dedicated to media freedom in Latin America and the Caribbean. Through a series of journalistic articles, opinion essays, academic pieces, and even beautiful photos by Pulitzer-winning photographer Patrick Farrell, we hope to shed light on the evolving situation and growing tensions in the region between governments and the media. The articles in this special issue not only evaluate the extent of press freedom in different countries, but also discuss the historical, social and political context to explain the issues involved.

An essay by Claudio Paolillo, chairman of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information, gives a sobering assessment of the precarious situation of the media in Latin America in 2013, going into detail about why that year could be characterized as one of the worst in recent memory for press freedom in the region. In his article, Leonardo Ferreira, an FIU faculty member specializing in international communication and media law and ethics in Latin America, makes historical connections between journalistic integrity, ethical behavior, endemic corruption, and violence against the media to provide an overview of the challenges faced by anyone trying to do serious journalism in the region.

An academic piece by two FIU journalism professors, Juliet Pinto and Mercedes Vigón, examines very interesting interconnected questions: How do and should media report on climate change? What does this reporting tell us about freedom of the press in democracies and democratizing nations? The authors tried to answer those questions by focusing specifically on the issue of climate change and how it is reported in Latin America. Alejandro Aguirre, former publisher of *Diario Las Américas*, the oldest Spanish-language newspaper in Miami, examines the media freedom question by focusing on an apparent disconnect between "Atlantic-facing" and "Pacific-facing" countries, and the tension between government control and market forces that permeates the region.

Jorge Dalmau and John Virtue, from FIU's International Media Center, try to assess the main contradictions (and evolving situation) of the Cuban media, including the latest challenge posed by blogs and other forms of electronic communication. With cautious optimism, they try to evaluate the positive impact of *blogueros* on the media and the general conversation in Cuba.

By providing this collection of very different and far-reaching pieces and voices, *Hemisphere* hopes to contribute to the debate about the challenges (and small victories) that have come to define the past, present and future of media and press freedom in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Raul Reis  
Dean  
School of Journalism and Mass Communication  
Florida International University



Yo digo...

SI

... por Venezuela

JELA

# Freedom in Latin America: What Press Monitors Say

By Leonardo Ferreira



Colleagues, relatives and friends of murdered journalists place candles and pictures in an altar erected at the Independence Angel monument in Mexico City on May 5, 2012 during a vigil to protest against violence towards the press. YURI CORTEZ/AFP/GettyImages

Over and over again, the media and NGOs report data about freedom of the press around the world. After some scandalized commentary, the issue gets pushed to the back burner, where it is forgotten. A good example is the impunity surrounding the slaying of journalists, a frustrating reality in Latin America.

According to the global IFEX network (formerly the International Freedom of Expression Exchange) and the IFEX-ALC alliance (Alianza de América Latina y el Caribe), violations of freedom of expression and impunity have reached “alarming” numbers. Between

January 2010 and September 2012, the groups report, 74 journalists were murdered in the Americas, but only eight killings resulted in a conviction, leading them to conclude: “The progress of the investigations is often modest or non-existent. This raises a primary concern: The legal systems of the region show a worrying inability to investigate and punish attacks on journalists.”

Joining forces in an International Day to End Impunity (every November 23 since 2011, commemorating the 2009 Maguindanao or Ampatuan Massacre of 32 journalists and 26 other civilians in the Philippines), the International Press Institute

(IPI) and Transparency International (TI) seek to reverse the trend that makes reporting on crime, politics and corruption a matter of life or death in so many countries.

Routinely, in nations as different as the Philippines, Bangladesh and Mexico, the latest IPI Death Watch (2013) points out, successive governments have expressed commitments to fight the culture of impunity with little if any success, and despite major legislative and institutional changes—Mexico being a most frustrating example. True, only three journalists were killed in Mexico in 2013 compared to the seven, 10, and 12 reporters murdered in 2012, 2011, and 2010, respectively. “But before we allow

for talk of progress,” warns the IPI report, “let us consider another pair of statistics: 69 journalists have been murdered in Mexico in the past 10 years and ‘in zero’ of those cases have the perpetrators been brought to justice. Today, even the decline in the killing of journalists must be scrutinized in Mexico. Given that no material advancement has been made in fighting impunity, the fear is that statistical improvements are in fact due to the reestablishment of a corrupt balance of power surrounding the new national government. Actually, it may simply be that a nexus of corrupt interests between government officials, organized crimes, and the media itself has replaced violence as the easiest method for stopping the free flow of information.” If this diagnosis is correct, Mexican democracy is in great peril.

According to the New York City-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 149 murders of journalists have been committed in the Americas since 1992 and 67 percent of them – 100 murders – remain unsolved. The CPJ lists Colombia, Mexico and Brazil as among the world’s top 20 countries with the greatest number of cases in “complete impunity”—36, 23 and 19 murders, respectively. Yet, reporters have been shot to death without legal punishment or consequence across the continent, including Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. To this day, the United States and Venezuela also shoulder partial impunity in the cases of journalists Manuel de Dios Unanue, Dona St. Plite and Orel Sambrano. Still, it

is important to point out, the rate of two out of three unpunished murders in the Western Hemisphere is “preferable” to the nine out of 10 cases of impunity worldwide.

### Legal Limitations

Why is there so much impunity in cases of murdered journalists? In his Spanish-language master’s seminar at the FIU School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Colombian-born professor Leonardo Ferreira explained that, in most Latin American societies, paid criminals can be just around the corner to silence a dissenting voice without legal consequences. A tragic irony is the murder of fellow countrymen Julio Daniel Chaparro and Jorge Enrique Torres, both reporters for the renowned daily *El Espectador*. Assassins killed them on the street on April 24, 1991 while they were covering the social impact of violence, a 1988 massacre in the northeastern municipality of Segovia, Antioquia. This fatal stop was next to last in a series of six chronicles they wrote about towns terrorized by horrific massacres in Colombia.

At first, the news informed that FARC guerrillas had gunned them down after mistaking the reporters for state intelligence agents, but evidence pointed to members of the region’s paramilitary forces uncomfortable with the pair’s investigative reporting on rampant political violence and local power struggles. Julio Daniel and Jorge died “in a murky context,” commented journalist Sergio Otálora, then a co-worker at the Bogotá daily, “in confusing circumstances following a sequence of deadly attacks against the paper which included the assassination

of director Guillermo Cano (killed four years earlier in front of the newspaper office). You have to understand,” Otálora insisted, “that the region was as complicated as other zones of the country, places where landowners, narcos and the paramilitaries, with the complicity of the Colombian army, were at war with the guerrillas and the political influence of a leftist Patriotic Union allied with civic leaders and members of the Liberal Party in several towns.” The same criminals (the Castaño brothers) suspected of the Segovia massacre and of ordering the execution of Otálora’s colleagues warned him to go into exile to protect his wife and young son. Sadly, the murders of Chaparro and Torres, as well as the 63 other journalists killed between 1977 and January 2014, “found a second death”: the Colombian judicial system’s 20-year statute of limitations, María Camila Rincón of *El Espectador* noted.

“We are less than a week away from prolonging this pain forever,” cried out Ruby de Torres, shortly before the expiration of the criminal case investigating the murder of her husband, Jorge Enrique. On July 25, 2013, Reporters Without Borders (RWB) published a reminder: “Statutes of Limitations are a Tragic Guarantee of Eternal Impunity.” Because a genuinely democratic society cannot afford to forget past abuses, authorities must be urged “to do what is necessary to prevent a statute of limitations from taking effect [...] and combat impunity not just for the sake of the families, who have a right to demand truth and justice, but also in order to guarantee respect for freedom of information,” the RFS press release stated.

Since its founding by four journalists in Montpellier, France, in 1985, RWB has monitored attacks on media and freedom of information worldwide, assisted persecuted journalists and their families morally and financially, and fought against censorship and laws aimed at restricting freedom of information, including all statutes of limitations on murdered journalists. “The fight against impunity for those who attack and kill journalists is unfortunately still absolutely essential,” RWB Secretary-General Christophe Deloire declared recently. “Defining certain murders as crimes against humanity is a step forward.”

With roots going back to 1926, the world’s oldest press freedom monitor, the Inter American Press Association, has also expressed outrage over the inaction surrounding murders of journalists in the Americas. On September 15, 2011, the IAPA called on UNESCO and the United Nations “to use their influence for governments to be more dedicated and effective in the defense and protection of the work of the press.” This complaint came even after Colombian lawmakers responded to international pressure by increasing the statute of limitations for crimes (kidnapping, torture and homicide) committed against journalists and human rights advocates from 20 to 30 years. Other countries should imitate Colombia, primarily Mexico, Brazil and Honduras, urged Juan Francisco Ealy of the Mexican daily *El Universal* and former president of the IAPA’s Commission against Impunity, while lamenting that murder and impunity continue as the main problems for journalists in these and other Latin American nations.

In December 2013, in a country with a 97.5% impunity rate and 40 murders against journalists in the last decade, Honduran National Human Rights Commissioner Ramón Custodio asked his government to conduct a diligent investigation to convict the perpetrators and masterminds of these unpunished homicides. “We regret that so many requests, like the one being made right now by the Human Rights Commissioner, continue to fall on deaf ears,” stated Claudio Paolillo, chairman of the IAPA Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information. If corrective action is not taken, Custodio warned, Honduras will remain “a country without justice for victims and without punishment of the murderers.”

Since 1992, 614 journalists have been killed with complete impunity worldwide, according to the CPJ. Politics, war, corruption and denunciation of both common criminals and human rights violators are the top five motives for slaying a reporter anywhere, but in the Americas, half of the killings involved reports on some type of corruption in government, politics or business, especially in provincial areas. Indeed, the problem of impunity in Latin America and the Caribbean has deep roots in the 1950s through 1980s: Cold War decades of major political confrontation, brutal military and civil dictatorships, the first peak of the drug cartels and, not coincidentally, the worst violence against journalists.

Like Colombia following the downfall of Pablo Escobar, Mexico can now have renewed hope of defeating its culture of impunity

with the recapture of Joaquín Guzmán Loera, El Chapo, “but Mexican officials are yet to effectively combat the murderous crime groups targeting news media in vast parts of the nation,” affirmed the latest CPJ Special Report on the subject (2012). Immediate action on impunity is imperative: Latin Americans cannot wait or rely on complex, lengthy and costly truth and reconciliation commissions to learn what happened to their dead or disappeared. As Javier Garza, deputy director of *El Siglo de Torreón* in the northern Mexican state of Coahuila, so aptly put it, “impunity is the oxygen for attacks against the press and the engine for those who seek to silence the media.”

### What Rankings Reveal

Closing 2013 with a big wish, Ecuadorian journalist Emilio Palacio, currently in exile in Miami, wrote: “My true desire for new year’s is that everyone, in every corner of the globe, in both free countries and enslaved countries, defend freedom of expression, fighting like a cat: claws out, tooth and nail.” According to Palacio, a former editorial page editor of Guayaquil’s *El Universo* (Ecuador’s largest daily, which published his polemical piece in February 2011 accusing President Rafael Correa of ordering the army “to open fire at will and without warning on a hospital full of civilians and innocent people” during a police protest), six countries in Latin America now have no press freedom: Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Honduras, Venezuela and the endemic case of Cuba (as of February 2014). A trend toward increasing attacks, threats and violations of freedom

of expression is evident around the world, including Latin America, especially in the last couple of years.

Global indicators, specifically those of the US-based Freedom House (Global Press Freedom Rankings) and the French Reporters Without Borders (World Press Freedom Index), differ markedly in some respects. The United States, for example, ranks 23rd on the Freedom House index, alongside Barbados, Costa Rica and Jamaica. On the RWB list, in contrast, it is 46th, next to Haiti and downgraded as sharply as Paraguay in just one year. Policy and media circles in the United States tend to criticize RWB's rankings as misguided or exaggerated, whereas European critics often deem the FH rankings self-serving and patriotic. Savvy reporters, in the meantime, realize that the truth mostly likely lies somewhere in between. Both organizations have stable methodologies based on rigorous criteria: Freedom House, with its focused, contextual approach (legal, political and economic, although cultural factors are missing), and RWB with its inclusive criteria built on issues of pluralism, media independence, self censorship, legislative frameworks, transparency and infrastructure. They are not perfect measurements, however, and researchers and evaluators are often victims of their own methodological tradition and inflexibility.

Among the top five best media environments for freedom of the press, FH and RWB both give high marks to Jamaica and Costa Rica, as well as other members of the Caribbean Community (St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados, Belize and Suriname).

<b>World Press Freedom Index for Freedom of Information</b>		
Ranking of Countries in the Americas; Highest Degree of Freedom to Least		
<b>COUNTRY</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2013</b>
Jamaica	17	13
Canada	18	20
Costa Rica	21	18
Uruguay	26	27
Belize	29	NA
Suriname	31	31
El Salvador	38	38
Trinidad and Tobago	43	44
United States	46	32
Haiti	47	49
Argentina	55	54
Chile	58	60
Guyana	67	69
Dominican Republic	68	80
Nicaragua	71	78
Panama	87	111
Bolivia	94	109
Ecuador	95	119
Peru	104	105
Paraguay	105	91
Brazil	111	108
Venezuela	116	117
Guatemala	125	95
Colombia	126	129
Honduras	129	127
Mexico	152	153
Cuba	170	171

Source: Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index  
<http://rsf.org/index2014/en-index2014.php>  
 Taken from general index of 180 countries across the globe.  
 Key: 1=Most Free; 180=Least Free

As for the worst places to speak one's mind, the two indices also agree on the shocking situation in Cuba, Honduras and Venezuela, as well as Paraguay, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Guatemala and Brazil. The CPJ, for its part, lists the deadliest countries for journalists

in the Western Hemisphere as Colombia, Brazil and Mexico.

Killing journalists with impunity does not always translate into poor rankings. Distinctive examples are Colombia and Brazil, which Freedom House categorizes as "Partly Free." Mexico, with the

same level of killings and impunity, is labeled “Not Free.” Rankings are even more complicated and unreliable when one considers discrepancies in the death toll. The International Press Institute, for instance, reports 85 journalists killed in Colombia since 1997, whereas CPJ counts only 79 since 1992. Neither international press monitor mentions cameraman Yonni Steven Caicedo, assassinated on February 19, 2014. These apparent inconsistencies are due to different conceptualizations and qualitative considerations, another reason why analysts must review all possible human rights monitors, particularly local ones (rarely done in practice), before making any judgments.

### Biggest Worries Today

In addition to unsafe media environments and the murder of journalists—including netizens or bloggers—which, ironically, only occasionally make top headlines in the digital age despite the enormous significance of communication in these modern times, freedom monitors believe the main challenges at the moment are:

#### *Espionage and Privacy*

Breaches of national security and privacy with unlawful interceptions of communications have become ever more public and scandalous in the region. As in the United States and Europe, Latin American and Caribbean intelligence actors are immersed in monitoring other government offices and private citizens (through wiretapping, Internet surveillance and the like). The illegal and unconstitutional manipulation of antiterrorism laws has become the norm, modeled after

the secret interventions customarily seen in US, Russian, British and other European relations.

Colombia, for example, is engulfed in a mutual blame game inside the military for illegal interceptions of the President’s email, confidential communications among government negotiators, and information exchanges between foreign and local journalists, sources and editors during peace talks with the FARC guerrillas in Havana, Cuba. Similar complaints about government surveillance have been heard in Cuba, Venezuela and Honduras. Costa Rica introduced legislation to increase penalties for political espionage, but after a major outcry by journalists the proposal was ultimately shelved.

#### *Defamation Issues*

Spying on citizens, including journalists, is a favorite intimidation tool today among secret agencies and their supporters worldwide. In addition, however, highly placed authorities are willing to engage in deliberate campaigns to discredit journalists, their reports and news organizations. Accusations range from soft claims of “irresponsible” or “unethical” reporting to more heavy-handed charges of journalists as “trash-talkers” with no sense of patriotism, honor, morality or respect for the law or the authorities. Presidents and cabinet ministers in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, as well as law enforcement authorities in Mexico, Honduras and Paraguay, are known for insulting news media professionals as “liars,” “deceivers,” “malicious people who deserve what they get,” and so on and so forth.

Recent media legislation, such as Ecuador’s 2013 Communications Law, also represents a significant threat to news entities and government critics, Human Rights Watch’s World Report 2014 warns. HRW, established in 1978 and based in New York City, writes with concern about the Ecuadorean policy of treating all communications as a public service and subject to anti-lynching media rules – defined as persistent critical reporting with the purpose of undermining the prestige or credibility of a person or legal entity. Excessively broad notions such as communicating “with responsibility and quality,” contributing to “the good life of the people,” and publishing “verified, contrasted, precise, and contextualized” information also open the door to censorship and arbitrary decisions about “truthful” reporting.

Some observers have praised the Ecuadorean law for promoting media pluralism, local content production, and indigenous and other ethnic communication. However, placing all communications, including private community and commercial media, under the control of the government – specifically, the Council of Regulation and Development for Information and Communication and the Superintendent of Information and Communication – appears to contravene the American Convention on Human Rights (Art. 13), signed and ratified by Ecuador.

Even as Venezuela has increased its prison terms for libel, media internationalists are calling for greater decriminalization of defamation in Latin America and the Caribbean, including

substituting monetary compensation as a penalty instead of imprisonment. According to Article 19, a UK-based organization that takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, on freedom of expression, the most advanced nations in this process are Argentina, Grenada, Jamaica and Mexico (at the federal level, in the Federal District, and in 17 of its 31 states). Although lacking a federal statute, the United States also has a working decriminalized system, although criminal defamation is still on the books in 16 of the 50 states. Costa Rica and Peru have partially decriminalized libel but *desacato* rules (special protection for public officials) continue to punish reporters under military (as in Chile) or criminal codes, and occasionally press laws. Other countries, including Uruguay and Paraguay, strictly maintain the Roman law tradition of full criminal libel even in matters of public interest.

#### *Antimonopoly Regulation*

Antitrust or pro-competition legislation has been a priority in countries with constant tensions between the government and opposition media, such as Argentina, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Other Latin American countries, Panama and Colombia among them, have raised similar concerns. Knowing that freedom of expression, speech or the press are not absolute rights, communication policy experts legitimize government efforts to pursue market democratization or diversity in media ownership. Nevertheless, antimonopoly regulations that use selective or discriminatory criteria

violate national constitutions and international law.

On October 29, 2013, after four years of litigation, the Argentine Supreme Court of Justice ruled in favor of the national government and against Grupo Clarín S.A. et al., declaring that Law 26.522 of 2009 on Audiovisual Communication Services was consistent with the federal constitution and international accords. Under this decision, Clarín is obligated to divest or separate its media holdings. A major judicial controversy is also expected in Peru following Grupo El Comercio's acquisition of a controlling interest in Grupo Epensa, its closest competitor. Together, the two companies control a combined 78% of the Peruvian newspaper market. It has also become fashionable for some Latin American states to threaten to suspend, revoke or refuse renewal of broadcast licenses for critical media, charging alleged violations of the public interest or the terms of their concessions—as in the case of Venezuela's RCTV and Globovisión. These stations have been driven out of business or forced to sell to actors friendly to the licensor.

#### *Internet Restrictions*

Across the Americas, government regulators and lawmakers have proposed or imposed increasing numbers of antiterrorism measures, police inspections, license withdrawals, content monitoring, privacy intrusions, sanctions for blogging, and other website or online restrictions. In Cuba, for example, despite the population's limited access to online services, the Cuban authorities implement strict surveillance and Internet controls. This topic deserves detailed and

dedicated analysis, but merits at least a mention here.

#### **A Tool for the Future**

Thanks to digital communications, experts predicted the early twenty-first century would be a period of unprecedented global economic progress and stability, widespread knowledge and education, increased social justice, and harmony with mutual understanding. This optimism has evaporated quickly. Despite extraordinary breakthroughs in the physical and social sciences, the planet is more polluted and stressed than ever, with more mismanagement and abuse, fear of sudden lethal violence or devastation, inequality and unfairness. Intolerance of a free press is simply another sign of our ongoing degradation. Unless we act now and together, reinvent ourselves, and stop looking at the media as a mere instrument to manipulate voters or buyers, we will be missing a golden opportunity to build a humane and viable future. □

*Leonardo Ferreira is Worlds Ahead Scholar in International Communication and Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at Florida International University. He is an expert on ethnic mass media, mass media communication and international communication policy, and has served as a consultant for UNESCO, OAS, CIESPAL, UNICEF, IAPA, Bloomberg News and Grupo de Diarios América, among others.*

*Additional contributors include MMC 5440 students: Vanessa Arango, Natalia Bolívar, Esther Emergui, Juan Camilo Gómez, Manuela Guardia, Stephanie Harrison, Andrea León, Mayra Quiroz, Grisell Rodríguez, Ana María Solís and César Vigo.*

# The Two Americas and the Freedom of Expression Disconnect

By Alejandro J. Aguirre



In recent years, an obvious breach has opened within the Western Hemisphere, especially with regard to Latin America. Analysts frequently describe the division as the Atlantic bloc vs. the Pacific bloc, and it is mostly a South American phenomena. The political changes that created this divide have had profound effects on freedom of the press in the hemisphere and on journalists who try to practice their profession.

Generally speaking, the Atlantic-facing countries can be described as those that favor greater state control in different aspects of their citizen's lives and economies, and the Pacific basin countries as looking more toward free-market models, individual freedoms and entrepreneurship. This continental divide is the product of complex economic, social, and political issues that have taken on a new dimension but date back many years, in some cases as far back as the Cuban

Revolution of 1959.

The dream of an integrated Western Hemisphere seemed closer to becoming a reality when President Clinton convened the Hemispheric Summit of the Americas in 1994. The policies that grew out of that summit and continued under the George W. Bush administration, however, were thwarted by political and economic events in Latin America.

At a time when the last dictatorship of the twentieth century

seemed to be floundering amidst its own failed economic and social policies and the loss of its Soviet benefactor, a new player came to the Cuban government's rescue: Lieut. Col. Hugo Chávez, who sought the violent overthrow of the government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez in Venezuela and later went on to become that country's democratically elected president.

As is well known, Mr. Chávez turned his country into what he described as a 21st-Century Bolivarian Socialist Republic.

Ironically, it was the liberalization of economies all over the world, including China, that enabled him to pursue this course. As economies improved and production grew, demand for crude oil rose. Prices reached record highs, allowing the Venezuelan government to gain tremendous influence in the hemisphere.

Chávez frequently praised the Cuban model of government and cited Fidel Castro as his mentor. In Cuba, the Venezuelan president used oil diplomacy in exchange for the only commodity the island had to trade - the transfer of systems to impose stricter government controls in Venezuela and systematically cut off most opposition from access to due process, rule of law and the democratic institutions that, however imperfect, existed to prevent authoritarian and dictatorial rule.

Cuba has long lost any semblance of a free press. In recent years, many brave women and men have challenged the government and reported on events that the official media ignore. Technological

advances have made it possible for these "independent journalists" to do their work with some measure of success. Such efforts are dangerous, however, and those who attempt them are aware that they are constantly being monitored. On occasion, they are subjected to mental and/or physical abuse.

For many years, the plight of the Cuban journalist has not been considered newsworthy, with some exceptions: Several organizations, including the Inter American Press Association and the Committee

among other things, live broadcast of any speech or "presidential event" he decreed. This practice is now in effect in Ecuador, Bolivia and Nicaragua, as well.

Making matters worse, Chávez, who was very fond of his own presence in the media, had his own television show, "Aló Presidente." He used this forum to speak for hours on end, frequently making policy out of ad-libbed content from the show. In the days following one of his broadcasts, people were sometimes arrested and investigated

because of comments the President made on his show.

In addition to the laws that were being institutionalized to control the press, Chávez assumed powers and authority that put journalists' work and lives in peril. His attacks on Globovision, RCTV, Correo de Caroni and El Nacional, among others, were constant and unrelenting. His abuse and misuse of rules and regulations to financially

strangle any media not toeing the government line was notorious, and the atmosphere of fear that surrounded advertising created tremendous economic pressure on such outlets.

A common method to discredit media not in synch with the official government message was to accuse the organization or its owners of being CIA operatives. Those who follow Latin American politics know that this is a tactic various governments have used for the past 60 years.

What was not so apparent at the time of Chávez's first election was his ambition to take "his revolution" beyond the borders of his country.

# GOVERNMENT CENSORSHIP PROTECTING YOU FROM REALITY

to Protect Journalists, have fought for the right of the people of Cuba to have a free press. Certainly, the activities of blogger Yoani Sánchez have created a buzz all around the world and generated great interest.

With Cuba's support, Chávez became the leader and principal spokesperson for all those seeking to move their countries into a non-democratic socialist realm while maintaining the appearance of a democratic regime. Invoking classic anti-Washington rhetoric, the Venezuelan leader was able to rally people to his cause and create a critical mass that allowed him to rewrite the nation's constitution and enact oppressive laws that required,

Once in office, he helped finance elections in Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina, using the monies pouring in from the high price of oil. Venezuelan economic support helped establish governments that eventually became part of the ALBA bloc, which followed Chávez's model and declared war on independent media.

In all of the ALBA nations, internal economic, social and political problems helped fuel the rise and initial popularity of these governments. After the

governments a political advantage. With social mobility stagnant and the promises made by the new wave of democratic governments that succeeded the military dictatorships failing to improve standards of living for the lower economic classes, ALBA presidents were able to frame the issues within the context of the bourgeois media's abuses at the expense of the common person. This strategy has allowed governments to bypass serious discussion of the free flow of information and create a dialogue with mostly false options.

phenomenon was growing in many parts of the hemisphere, especially Honduras and Mexico. Particularly worrisome was the fact that many of these crimes were being committed with impunity. During the years of military dictatorship, attacks on journalists were frequently at the direction of national governments. In the post-dictatorship era, state and municipal governments were orchestrating many of the abuses, targeting journalists on the trail of corruption. Organized crime syndicates tied to the drug trade

---

*One journalist I met in Durango, Mexico pleaded with me, "Please tell people what is happening here... you are our only hope, that we will not be forgotten by the rest of the world!"*

---

military dictatorships and the Berlin Wall fell, Latin Americans and observers outside the region shared renewed optimism that the new era would bring respect for human rights, including the free flow of information, real economic growth and social progress. This optimism faded as government after government, plagued with corruption and inefficiency, failed to resolve its constituents' problems.

ALBA leaders tended to personalize their attacks on the independent media, creating arbitrary mechanisms to control the message by destroying the messenger. In many ways, these personalized attacks gave the ALBA

Basically, the conversation has been one way.

Unfortunately, these are not the only countries that have tried to exert control over the media. In addition to Cuba and the ALBA countries, other examples exist of institutional corruption and organized crime coming together in volatile ways to create an environment of violence, resulting in the death and injury of journalists as part of a larger attempt to create an information vacuum in which illegal activities can flourish.

When I became president of the Inter American Press Association in 2009, violence against journalists was of utmost concern. The

also worked to silence reporters by intimidation or assassination.

A reporter in Mexico City who asked that I not use his name acknowledged that he found it terribly ironic for one journalist to speak to another and request anonymity. "The situation has gotten so bad in the northern part of the country that we frequently get our news from the capital because local sources are afraid to give it out," he told me. "The army and the local police are frequently intimidated and corrupted by the gangs, and also at times realize that they are totally ineffective."

When asked what kept him motivated, he replied that as a

young man it was his dream to see Mexico as a free and open society with respect for the rule of law. He thought that as a journalist he could play some role in the transformation, but that now he wasn't sure if that was ever going to become a reality. "I have a wife and children now, and I don't know how long I can keep going. I'm not even sure I'm safe anywhere in the country. We've talked about leaving," he said.

During the year of my IAPA presidency, I traveled frequently to different parts of the hemisphere. The most common request made of me by journalists in difficult circumstances was to find a way to disseminate stories about their plight and the dangers of practicing their profession under threat from both government and nongovernment groups. One journalist I met in Durango, Mexico pleaded with me, "Please tell people what is happening here...you are our only hope, that we will not be forgotten by the rest of the world!"

In the US media, as we all know, news about Latin America and the Caribbean frequently takes third and fourth place behind news about Asia, Europe and Africa. As I write this article, the second meeting of the Community of Caribbean and Latin American States (CELAC) has just concluded in Cuba and a quick Google search shows that it received little coverage in the United States. In fact, the US media devoted more space to the photo ops with Fidel Castro and the inauguration of the new deepwater port of Mariel, built with financing from Brazil. The government crackdown on opposition leaders and the barring of international human rights

activists from entering the country were for the most part ignored, even as many of the democratically elected and legitimately governing leaders ratified concepts and documents they were fully aware their colleagues had been violating for years. The surreal political reality of Latin America becomes an item of interest on rare occasions, usually in stories regarding immigration and organized crime, but important news regarding an organization that includes every country in the hemisphere except for the United States and Canada barely makes a blip on the radar.

Asia and even Iran are showing increased interest in Latin America, increasing their investments and signing trade agreements with the region. The so-called Two Americas, which at one time played a significant role in the development of democracy and multilateral cooperation, must now decide how they will interact with each other and with the rest of the world. Like the United States, they now have their own East-West focus.

Assaults on media freedoms are not exclusive to Latin America and the Caribbean. In the United States, the Obama Administration, like many before it, has violated many of the principles of a free press, including monitoring reporters at the Associated Press and FOX News. The real surprise was that, in a post-McCarthy and Watergate era, the press and the public did not react more strongly. The scandal faded relatively quickly with few reassurances from the government.

Between the general disinterest in the North regarding Latin American and Caribbean news in general and the restrictions that journalists face

in practicing their profession in their own countries, it is difficult to see how the Western Hemisphere democracies will develop. It is hard to even discern whether or not the Americas will one day be completely free and democratic. So much of the information in the region is reduced to economic trends and the need for countries and corporations to adapt to protect their investments. It is almost as if the lives and the realities of almost 600,000,000 people and the journalists who try to report on them don't matter very much. This is a tremendous shame.

A piece such as this one cannot end on such a pessimistic note, however. This would be a great disservice to the hundreds of journalists I have met throughout the years; men and women who struggle day in and day out with little or no protection to realize their dream of educating and informing their fellow citizens. During my tenure as president of the Inter American Press Association, meeting these people was my greatest honor. Some of these reporters had points of view very different from my own and the institution I represented, but I understood that they had as much equity in their position as I had in mine. They were truly risking their lives to uphold the free exchange of information and ideas that is one of the cornerstones of democracy. We owe them all an enormous debt of gratitude. □

*Alejandro Aguirre is a media consultant and a member of the Board of Directors at Terrabank, NA. He is former Deputy Editor and Publisher of *Diario las Américas* and Past President of the Inter American Press Association.*

A large graphic of a map of Latin America, composed of numerous small icons representing digital media, technology, and communication. The icons include a camera, microphone, TV, newspaper, globe, Wi-Fi symbol, smartphone, and various social media symbols. The map is filled with these icons, creating a textured, digital appearance.

# Digital Media Ethics: Reinventing Journalism in Latin America

*By Leonardo Ferreira*

**L**atin American reporters facing inequality, conflict and corruption every day recognize but distrust even the most basic notion of professional journalism ethics, and they are right to do so.

When only eight out of 27 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean score above 50 on Transparency International's CPI (Corruption Perceptions Index), where zero means extremely corrupt and 100 signifies very clean, there is good reason to doubt the practical value of ethical standards.

A number of Caribbean islands are the region's best performers on the CPI: the four English-speaking states of Barbados (ranked 15<sup>th</sup> of 177 nations with a score of 75, the second best in the Western Hemisphere after Canada), the Bahamas and Saint Lucia (both at 71), and Dominica (58), plus the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (62). Just three continental Latin American republics are among the least corrupt: Uruguay (no. 19 with a score of 73, tied with the

United States), Chile (71), and Costa Rica (53). The rest of Latin America scores below 50, starting with Cuba (rank 63, score 46). The richest and biggest countries rank even lower, with Brazil scoring 42 and Argentina and Mexico tying with Bolivia at 34. Venezuela and Haiti are near the bottom of the list, scoring 20 and 19, respectively.

For journalists, and societies in general, corruption plus violence is a deadly combination. Since 1992, when the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) first began counting fatalities in the profession, 152 reporters have been murdered in Latin America. Reporters without Borders—RSF in French—registered 121 murders in the region over the last decade, including nine media assistants. About half of these involved work-related activities exposing some form of corruption in government, politics or business, primarily in provincial cities or rural areas. If we include cases with unconfirmed motives, the last five years have been the most lethal.

No easy correlations can be drawn between public corruption and left- or right-wing administrations. Chile, for instance, praised for its decent record against public sector corruption, has had only two elected conservative governments since 1925, while Uruguay, ruled by the center-left Frente Amplio for the last decade, has consistently been one of the least corrupt countries in the Americas. Many other countries—Paraguay, Honduras and Nicaragua among them—despite leadership shifts, party coalitions, or ideological reorientations, are still perceived as some of the least transparent.

### **Corruption and Freedom of the Press**

In terms of press freedoms, countries that appear democratic are not always as free as expected, nor are authoritarian systems as deadly as might be assumed, even if they are repressive. Quantitatively, which Latin American countries are most dangerous for reporters? Since 1992, the CPJ has recorded 45 murders of journalists in Colombia, 29 in Mexico and 27 in Brazil, most of them with “complete impunity” after the victims denounced various forms of organized crime and dishonesty. The RSF lists the same countries but in different order: Mexico first, with 43 murders between 2002 and 2013; then Brazil with 23 deaths; Colombia with 18; and Honduras, 12.

Remarkably, despite major student protests, press freedom monitors have listed not a single murder of journalists in Chile since its return to democracy, nor have they reported any slayings in the English-speaking Caribbean. Cuba does not kill journalists (at least not in recent decades), but it persecutes them, forces them into exile (19 since 2007), arrests them, or sentences them to degrading prison terms (24 imprisoned in 2007 and 21 in 2008). With its secret political and para-police forces, which conduct sustained but bloodless censorship campaigns, Cuba, according to the CPJ, is one of the world’s most structurally repressive and censored countries.

In this harsh environment, albeit not as bad as the dark days of the Southern Cone’s Operation Condor and the Cold War dictatorships of the 1950s through ‘80s, it is

logical for Latin American reporters to be skeptical when outside experts advocate the need for fair play, truth telling, independence, responsibility, impartiality, accountability and other conventional journalism ethics.

### **Traditional Media Ethics**

Latin Americans have little trust in government agencies, political campaigns, public services or corporations. How do they feel about the media?

During the tragic times of drug terrorism in Colombia (mid to late 1980s), columnist María Jimena Duzán wrote: “[when] narcotraffickers threatened the stability and democracy of our country, ... journalists were the first to recognize and to speak out publicly about this illegal and corrupting usurpation of power by the cartels. [W]hether people agree or disagree with what we write, the public in general respect us because we unmask hypocrisy and fraud.” Thirty years later, with journalism in a complex transition, reporters again are expected to confront crimes assailing democracy worldwide, from drug cartels or deadly cartelitos to unlawful trade in conventional and chemical weapons; human beings; personal, corporate and government data; and other illegal activities.

Colombian author, former priest and columnist Javier Darío Restrepo, respected for his pioneering work at Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano (FNPI, today the Gabriel García Márquez Foundation), defines journalistic ethics as “not about finding formulas to resolve complex situations [the ethics of doing]. It is

about how to direct our professional life, how to be a reporter of excellence [the ethics of being]. And we were debating this when the Internet arrived, bringing the same problems and ethical ideals of traditional media but amplified.” For Restrepo, “the focus and the problems [may be] different, but the values and principles are the same” in the digital era.

Social media ethics need not be created from scratch, nor should we dismiss centuries of ethical principles simply because we have new and influential digital media technologies and products. Like it or not, any new Latin American deontology will build upon historical discussions of ethics, starting with classical European philosophers such as Aristotle, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. The biggest influences in Latin America include Catholic and other Christian values, Kantian categorical imperatives, and principles of utilitarianism. Jeremy Bentham, for instance, personally advised liberators Francisco de Miranda, Alexandre Pétion, Simón Bolívar, Bernardo O’Higgins, José de San Martín and José Cecilio del Valle.

Latin America has had eloquent promoters of ancient, medieval, renaissance and modern European ethics, notably in religious schools, mostly Jesuit. It has a much shorter history of addressing ethics in journalism and mass communication, with Restrepo a remarkable exception. Surprisingly, however, the greatest influence in Latin American journalism ethics has come from evangelicals, not Catholics.

Walter Williams’ 1914 “Journalist’s Creed”—belief in the profession, in public trust

and service, in truth, accuracy, fairness, honesty, and freedom—was translated into more than 100 languages and spread across the globe, although actual professional ethics were not codified until the early 1920s. On July 30, 1935, The New York Times poetically described the Creed as “exactly what Walter Williams believed and advocated for the American democracy, for the Japanese Empire, for the struggling Chinese Republic, for lands where kings rule or dictators beat their breast, and all the rest.” From Chicago to Tokyo to London, Williams, the founding dean of the Missouri School of Journalism, was “everywhere,” wrote biographer Ronald T. Farrar, including Mexico City in 1926. He lectured college students there on the expanding US philosophy of journalism education, the so-called “Missouri Model,” combining hands-on lessons with academic instruction. Following the event, Mexican historian Henry Lepidus commented: “Many practicing journalists attended the course and those who satisfactorily passed an examination at the end were awarded suitable diplomas. Since the dean’s trip, plans to establish a school of journalism in Mexico have gained momentum.” Student and faculty exchanges with the US became more common, expanding Anglo-American perspectives of journalism, ethics and common law across Latin America.

Also in 1926, the First Pan American Congress of Journalists called for the establishment of a permanent Inter American Press Association (IAPA). US broadcast networks (NBC/CBS), news guilds (the American Society of

Newspaper Editors, or ASNE) and awards programs at internationally oriented journalism schools (mainly Columbia University’s Maria Moors Cabot Prize, which, to this day, recognizes Latin American media figures for distinguished contributions to “Inter-American understanding”), helped spread Protestant ethical values to the Latin American media. At the Sixth General Assembly in New York City (October 13, 1950), the IAPA officially adopted the Journalist’s Creed as its own. Not an oath, not even a code, explained Farrar, William’s commandments were an affirmation, instructions to keep the faith in journalism.

In keeping with this crusading spirit, ASNE adopted its Canons of Journalism in 1922, only to secularize, revise and rename them a Statement of Principles 53 years later. A journalistic fraternity originally known as Sigma Delta Chi (SDX, today’s Society of Professional Journalists) borrowed its code of ethics from ASNE’s Canons in 1926, honoring them for nearly five decades until SPJ created its own version. US broadcasters were not far behind and, before the decade ended, adopted The National Association of Broadcasters Codes of Practices (1929), a text that became the target of repeat antitrust and First Amendment challenges. Its general philosophy, along with loyalty to private media and commercialization, would flow into the Inter-American Association of Broadcasters (IAB), an entity established in Mexico City in 1946 and expanded into an international body in Madrid in 1984 to accommodate Spain and a few other European nations.



Less than a month before the Chilean military coup of September 11, 1973, the IAPA and IAB signed an agreement in Caracas, Venezuela confirming the “Doctrine of Panama,” in which both associations declared that “any aggression against the freedom or the dignity of the individual or any act tending to suppress or curtail [...] any person or society defending or practicing said freedoms by means of the press or radio, shall constitute an aggression against all [their] members.”

In October 1959, with UNESCO’s support and the initiative of the Ecuadorian government and the National Union of Journalists, the Quito-based CIESPAL (International Center for Higher Learning in Journalism—now Communication—Studies for Latin America) began promoting media research and journalism training for development, including lessons on press freedom and ethics. Dreams of a Williams-styled global structure based on

the 1950 International Code of Ethics for Information Personnel (search for truth, the public good, news accuracy, honesty, fairness, respect for privacy and professional secrets, and avoidance of harm), vanished amidst Cold War tensions and the New World Information Order debate. Joining scholarly critics who denounced the 1960s as a time when Latin Americans received “uncritically and without consideration or adaptations the fashionable theories and methods of North American social science as part of a process of modernization,” CIESPAL’s director, Marco Ordóñez, denounced “an ideology of domination.”

After a serious crisis at UNESCO following the withdrawal of the US and Britain in the 1980s (the so-called “lost” decade in Latin America), and well into the global deregulation and liberalization fueled by the collapse of the Soviet Union during the 1990s, the Internet and social media emerged into prominence at the turn of the century.

### Fresh Online Ethics

Anxious about the lack of ethics and potential abuses in cyberspace, UNESCO invited journalism-training centers such as the revamped CIESPAL, the Latin American Federation of Schools of Communication, García Márquez’s FNPI, and the Press and Society Institute to promote the study of ethical dilemmas in virtual and non-virtual events.

One of the most successful examples of these workshops is the series of FNPI seminars Javier Darío Restrepo led in Cartagena, Colombia, beginning in August 5, 1995. Their purpose, he explained, was to follow the “Aristotelian definition of ethics as a practical knowledge,” with journalistic ethics meeting professional skills. Apparently, it was here, in a conversation between Restrepo and García-Márquez, that the Nobel Laureate first coined his famous phrase: “*La ética no es una condición ocasional, sino que debe acompañar siempre al periodismo como el zumbido al moscardón*” (Ethics is

not an occasional circumstance, but must accompany journalism always, just as the buzz comes with the horsefly).

In *El zumbido y el moscardón* (2004), Restrepo confessed his fears before the first workshop, especially with “Gabo” as a participant. Everyone knew how suspicious the Colombian novelist was of scholars, their teachings, and their theories, both in journalism and literature. “Organizing workshops about photography or how to write chronicles, reportages, investigative reports, and TV narratives had not been that difficult; after all, such had been the Foundation’s goal since embarking on the rescue of the true origins of the craft and helping journalists learn everyday practices of the profession from experienced colleagues, something closer to a gathering of friends rather than formal university classes,” Restrepo recounted. “But delivering a workshop on journalistic ethics for the first time could mean a long and abstract presentation of ideas or a lecture dominated by theoretical contemplation. Neither was a good idea.”

Today, in spite of nearly two decades of constructive seminars on journalism ethics, hundreds of inquiries handled by FNPI’s Ethics Clinic, and financing from the Inter-American Development Bank’s Institute for Economic and Social Development and CAF (Latin America’s development bank), the challenge remains: Do we need a new ethics for social media? Must there be a new ethics for online journalism and blogging?

“The Internet requires no new ethics and no new journalism,” is the categorical reply of the Ethics

Clinic. “It will make our customary ethics more rigorous and it will create new technical conditions in the journalism profession as we know it; however, neither ethics nor the codes change, although the demands do increase, which means that [emerging] ethical dilemmas are not new, only more intense.”

“Will the Internet end traditional journalism?” asked a Clinic participant online. On the contrary, reads the reply, “It will make it more necessary. Ample citizen access to a mass diffusion medium such as Internet demonstrates that information and opinions, as public services, should be in the hands of specialized personnel. Data online is so abundant that it is indispensable to count on professional help to evaluate it, order it, and make it understandable and credible.”

Questions abound, along with major ethical challenges. Should there be a code of ethics for citizen or online journalists? How many codes of journalistic ethics exist and what is their central idea? Will online citizen reporting replace traditional journalism? Are Twitter or Facebook storytellers journalists? The answers involve philosophical, deontological and epistemological discussion.

“Ethical principles will define the true journalism of the digital era,” says Rosental Alves, professor and director of the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas at the University of Texas-Austin. “What distinguishes journalism from what appears to be journalism but is not is ethics.” This echoes what modern ethicists have been saying about online journalism and other electronic communications. In November 2000, Josep Maria Casasús, Ombudman of

La Vanguardia newspaper in Barcelona, Spain, wrote: If “ethical commitment is what will distinguish digital journalism from digital communication in general, ethics will be the *raison d’être* of the digital era, the only element that will identify journalists vis-à-vis other network information providers in search of solidarity and progressive ethical goals in society and the pursuit of truth via a wide consensus.”

Colombian journalist Guillermo Franco, former Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, is one of those who wonders whether online journalism does in fact require new ethical approaches. In a presentation entitled “Ethics and Journalistic Quality in Online Environments” during the IX Seminar of the Grupo de Diarios América (GDA) in Santiago, Chile (August 25-26, 2011), Franco questioned the traditionalist assumption that “there is only one ethics, that ethics does not have to change simply because there is a new platform delivery, or that the ethics good for Gutenberg is good for anyone using Internet.” For any netizen, increased transmission speed, information overloads, processing capacity, multimedia features, automatization, robotics, cybernetics and all forms of artificial intelligence (IA) are not only quantitatively but also qualitatively different from print and broadcast communications, just as the radio spectrum differs in quantity and quality from the light spectrum, Franco argued. Conventional and new media belong to the spectrum of human communication and while comparable basic principles apply to both, they need different models and categories to define their different characteristics.

Different media deserve different press freedom standards, and ethical criteria cannot simply be one and the same for all media interactions.

In what Franco calls the furious and fast-paced journalism of Internet reporters, new dilemmas concern how to walk the fine line between the urgent and the accurate; the unfolding and the confirmed or verified; and the expected, worthy, or opportune and the researched, elaborate or carefully considered. As never before, speed is unavoidable and unstoppable. Unfortunately, warns Franco, because “it is clear that rules in Internet and social media are still relaxed, we must create standards for journalists to use online.”

Another dilemma concerns how to achieve an adequate balance between the journalist’s private life and his/her professional persona in social media platforms. Should reporters have their own personal blogs? What is the significance or implication of friending or following someone on the web? How advisable is it for reporters and their media employers to vent personal opinions in social media? How about opinions entered anonymously in a personal or third party blog or under a pseudonym? Should user-generated content be expected to observe the same ethical standards as journalists? Should we edit their comments and, if so, what guidelines apply? “The inventory of questions is endless,” notes Franco. Clearly, a new interactive ethics could help resolve conflicts on the web, not just digital reporting issues but also matters of speed and thoroughness, content quantity and quality, multimedia transparency and credibility, user-generated information and

accuracy, community participation, commercialization and automatization.

To spark the conversation in Santiago de Chile, Franco introduced two documents: the Poynter Institute’s Online Journalism Ethics and ASNE’s 10 Best Practices for Social Media: Helpful Guidelines for News Organizations. Curiously, the former makes only occasional specific references to social media and both publications work predictably from a First Amendment perspective, despite their goal of offering self-governing guidelines for an international medium like the Internet and the practice of journalism in global social contexts. Once again, as is typical of historically dependent populations (especially in communications technology), Latin Americans waited for the US signal to morally regulate their own websites and social media activities.

Venezuela’s *El Nacional* and Ecuador’s *El Comercio*, dailies constantly criticized by government officials for alleged legal violations and lack of ethics, were actively represented at the GDA conference in Chile. On the spot, Franco and this author received invitations to conduct seminars in Caracas and Quito. Like the FNPI’s Ethical Clinic and its seminar on Ethics, Quality and Journalistic Enterprise in Latin America (Monterrey, Mexico, September 2003), the Grupo de Diarios has been ready to discuss issues of law and ethics in new media environments, social and corporate responsibility, the need to revisit traditional ethics in multimedia publications, and content quality in the digital era.

The Caracas seminar reviewed

the history of media ethics, citing twentieth-century codes with particular attention to those adopted in response to new media challenges. By 1980, UNESCO had counted at least 60 countries with codes of journalistic ethics; today, the number is in the hundreds worldwide. The ASNE portal, for instance, has 55 statements of principles from US news entities, and on January 1, 2011, the 10 Best Practices for Social Media reported that nearly 20 news organizations—including NPR, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Britain’s BBC and The Guardian—had formal ethical policies for social networks. Smaller media companies, not big conglomerates, were the true pioneers of this trend, at least in the United States.

Whereas some codes are excessively detailed and difficult to retain, others are so broad that their general principles become almost meaningless. If some are parochial, others are global; some are direct and simple, others sophisticated, and a few are anecdotal. ASNE’s Best Practices carries an amusing mandate by the Greensboro North Carolina News and Record: “We have a code of ethics and professionalism that covers our behavior, period. That said, I’ve told my staff that [our] social media policy is this: Don’t be stupid.” The caution “Don’t do anything stupid” is also popular at the BBC. In their laconism, these warnings are similar to the Hearst Newspapers’ command of the 1930s: “write good stuff.” Assertively, The Washington Post prescribes that “when using social networks [...] for reporting or for personal [reasons, employees] must protect their

professional integrity and remember: Washington Post journalists are always Washington Post journalists.” This statement contrasts with The Journal Gazette’s policy in Fort Wayne, Indiana: “Staff members are welcome to have personal pages on social networking sites [...]. But they should remember that those sites are public sites and can be seen by more than their circle of friends. They should not post on such pages information about JG stories or sources, nor should they comment on JG matters.” Most Latin American reporters, with the probable exception of some editors, seem to prefer The Journal Gazette’s approach.

Do any codes govern social networking in Latin America? Of the GDA’s 11 member companies, the region’s largest, five of them have specific social network guidelines. They are Costa Rica’s La Nación, Mexico’s El Universal, Ecuador’s El Comercio, Venezuela’s El Nacional and Colombia’s El Tiempo. Adopted around 2010-2011, they all reflect different, more or less participatory management or decision-making styles.

At El Nacional, open debate between journalists and editors led to new ethical guidelines for online reporting. Two days of intense deliberation showed evident mistrust of the term “code,” with journalists preferring guide or guideline, statement, declaration, handbook or policy. The concept “code of ethics” evokes bygone eras of religious and political imposition, paternalism and restraint. If norms such as “assume everything online will be public,” “break your news on your website, not on Twitter,” and “be transparent” in social media

cause little or no disagreement, others, especially “always identify yourself as a journalist,” produce significant criticism in countries such as Venezuela, where state agents and random violence target reporters. Latin American journalists tend to sympathize with the desire to conceal one’s identity, given a past of civil unrest, clashes with dictators and battles with organized criminals. They are also skeptical of the notion of objectivity. As Colombian journalist Maria Jimena Duzán explained: “In Latin America you cannot be neutral. You cannot be neutral under a dictatorship. You have to take a position—either for or against the dictator. We do not have the tradition of being objective.”

During the XI GDA training seminar on Data Journalism and Interactivity at Quito’s El Comercio (September 19-20, 2013), a community Internet reporter commented: “We really don’t care about these imposed rules, ethical or otherwise, in our stories or productions. That’s why we are bloggers.” Giannina Segnini, a notable Costa Rican investigative reporter, admits that younger communicators—whom she calls *tecnoperiodistas*—who have revolutionized today’s journalism with their ability to “do everything at the same time” (edit videos, map, tweet, storify, absorb applications, and even program to generate multimedia content), often work “without the rigor, the historical knowledge, or the sufficient journalistic experience” required in a newsroom, and editors expect them to make big decisions in online and mobile news. The presumption is that these techno-reporters are a bunch of kids playing games with

serious stuff; a guideline in Best Practices even reminds newsrooms: “Social networks are tools not toys.” But these younger journalists, Segnini maintains, could well be the bridge between science and journalism.

These are great times to be a journalist, as observers have claimed over the last two decades, comparing the turn of the twenty-first century with the twentieth in terms of media innovation. But besides passion, commitment, empathy and humanism, and despite their intermittent vanity and stubbornness, journalists need to keep studying their field if the goal is to redefine or reinvent journalism to be not only more technologically savvy but also contextually prepared—in other words, more, not less educated in journalism history, news theory and research methodology, environmental science, social and media economics, political communication, cultural studies, media anthropology and sociology, and media law and ethics. With the time constraints that characterize journalism, collaboration with media academics could be helpful, so long as both parties are willing to drop their pride and recognize each other’s strengths.

### **Redefining while Reinventing**

An online survey of 200 GDA journalists between November 22 and December 1, 2011 concluded that 83.7% of respondents knew their newsroom had an ethical code or handbook. Latin American journalists have a decent understanding of traditional ethics; that is, the socialization process of modeling behavior on philosophical principles and social norms. As communications research pioneer Luis Ramiro Beltrán put it a decade

ago in Bolivia, journalistic ethics is “the reporter’s moral way of being and doing, governed by a profound adherence to [standards of] truth, equity, respect for individual dignity and intimacy, and the practice of social responsibility in search of the common good.” In general, this is consistent with ASNE’s first best practice: “Traditional ethics rules still apply online.”

But 66.9%—two out of three GDA reporters—deplored the lack of norms specifically designed for social networks. Even when we count the 33.1% with access to digital media guidelines, the dominant opinion is that new and autonomous principles are needed to respond to new forms of journalism and industry challenges in Latin American settings. Where social networking rules are non-existent, reasons for this absence include the slow evolution of new media in the newsroom; hesitation and endless discussions about what to do with online applications between owners and editors; concerns over the real significance and impact of social media; lack of a perceived need for online ethics among managers and reporters (who think they can sort out any Internet issue or avoid any potential conflict); and the seemingly endless challenge of integrating media technologies. Where rules exist, time will tell whether they fall short or are too intrusive, or if the adoption of new media rules was a mere response to peer pressure.

On September 11, 2013, the Poynter Institute proudly ran a story titled “Poynter Publishes Definitive New Journalism Ethics Book.” Drawing ideas from a

dozen authors, mainly practicing reporters, and hoping to shed light on issues raised by emerging technologies and shifting business models, the compilation advocates a “new ethics of journalism” to “accommodate technological changes governing the gathering, processing and understanding of news today, unless journalists wish to become irrelevant or even harmful to democratic society.”

Fortunately, US media ethicists no longer endorse moral creeds or cannons and believe that ethical principles are constantly evolving.

In transition and uncertain about the future, amid exponential rates of technological change, “the ethical perspective of digital journalism cannot be prospective without being retrospective,” media scholar J. M. Casasús concludes. History, in ethics as in everything else, should not be underestimated. In this crucial and irrevocable mixed revolution of amateurs and professionals, media ethicists are compelled to revisit and redefine their field. As Professor Stephen Ward of the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Center for Journalism Ethics argues, we are required to keep asking, what is journalism? Who is a (citizen)



## Inter American Press Association

72 years defending and promoting  
press freedom throughout the Americas

*Be part of our press freedom events*

Santiago, Chile | October 2014

Panama City, Panama | March 2015

Charleston, SC, USA | October 2015

[www.sipiapa.org](http://www.sipiapa.org)

journalist? What norms apply when anonymity, speed, rumor, inaccuracy, fanaticism, greed, conflict of interests and other threats predominate?

Reinventing ethics has been a pattern in world journalism, especially in the last century. Decades ago, Walter Williams invited us to rethink the profession every time and everywhere. We could emulate his vigor across the region, imagining a new journalism and a new media ethics for a new Latin America. It is a challenge worth trying. □

*Leonardo Ferreira is Worlds Ahead Scholar in International Communication and Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at Florida International University.*

# Press Freedom, Democracy and Climate Change Reporting in Latin America

By Juliet Pinto and Mercedes Vigón

**H**ow do and should the media report on climate change, and what does their reporting tell us about freedom of the press in democracies and democratizing nations? Social scientists have grappled with discussions of the normative and actual functions of a nation's press, while a growing body of research in recent years has examined reporting on issues related to climate change. For the purposes of this article, we use the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's definition of this term as "any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity." In terms of human understanding of this phenomenon, Maxwell Boykoff notes, the media play a crucial role "as powerful and important interpreters of climate science and policy... Media workers and institutions powerfully shape and negotiate meaning, influencing how citizens make sense of and value the world" (Boykoff, 2011, p. 167). Their role is especially vital in regions such as Latin America, where citizens can be among the first to suffer the impacts of climate change but the last to have a voice in and access to policy discussions (Newell, 2008).

## Democracy and Freedom of the Press

Media scholars and others take into account linkages between media



content, public opinion and political agendas in examining the contextual settings for agenda shifts and news content. Both the Habermasian view of the media as essential in communicating information and perspectives to citizens in a democracy, as well as providing

arenas for public deliberation, and their functioning as what Castells (2008, p. 13) called the "cultural/informational repository of the ideas and projects that feed public debate," see the independent media as a necessary condition for healthy democracies and robust political life.

Normative theories suggest that a free press keeps citizens better informed regarding climate change, helping shape policy accordingly. Conversely, as press freedom becomes restricted in terms of scope and tone of coverage, the ability to influence public awareness regarding important topics such as climate change decreases in certain respects. Scholars from various disciplines have examined the linkages among political regime, press independence and environmental outcomes. Payne (1995) and Schultz & Crockett (1990) both argued that freedom of information and political rights contribute to positive public opinion on pro-environmental legislation. Barrett & Graddy (2000) found that as civil and political freedoms—including freedom of the press—increase, environmental quality across a number of markers increases significantly. Neumayer (2002) also found strong correlation between democratic quality and environmental commitment. Others, however, argue that the opposite is true: that democracies may not mitigate environmental destruction or can even contribute to it (see, e.g. Dryzek, 1987; Gleditsch & Sverdrup, 2003; Hardin, 1968). Indeed, Li & Reuveny (2006) studied 143 countries over decades and determined that while higher levels of democracy lessen the extent of human activities that degrade the environment, a rise in democracy noticeably increases environmental degradation.

Beyond political decision-making, media messaging can become an important informer of societal meaning and understanding of information, with significant

implications for citizenship constructions. When citizenship is construed as a “cultural agreement among groups,” rather than “the relationship between the individual citizen and the nation-state,” (Hermes, 2006), variables such as identity, agency and political recognition may interface with content related to climate change with significant import for policy and opinion direction. In their examinations of environmental citizenship, Latta and Wittman (2012) noted the ways hegemony, development, modernization and globalization can manifest in struggles for recognition, access and justice in Latin America in a time of accelerating climate change.

### **Climate Change Coverage in Latin American Media**

Latin America presents an important region in which to explore news content dealing with climate change, as it is a region particularly vulnerable to climate change and with economies based on natural resource exports (Magrin et al., 2007; Waisbord, 2013). Beyond climate change vulnerabilities, it is also a region where citizens increasingly cite environmental problems as top global threats (Pew Global, 2007).

At the same time, booming commodity prices, increased oil and gas exploration and growing economies have placed pressures on natural systems. As Waisbord (2013) notes, Latin America’s legacy of global extractivism and environmental degradation has as its root causes political incentives for extractive industries; weak regulation and a lack of enforcement of environmental legislation; and problems with accountability and

corruption. Media portrayals of budding environmental movements that oppose corporate and state-owned extractive projects in Latin America are favorable or not depending on their political traction and alignment with news values.

Scholars have consistently made note of the scarcity of news on climate change in developing countries, despite public interest in the subject (Anderson, 2009; Shanahan, 2009). In terms of research, the vast majority of scholarly investigations of mediated expressions of climate change focuses on the US or UK media rather than on developing nations (e.g. Boykoff & Boykoff, 2004, 2007; Carvalho, 2007; Carvalho and Burgess, 2005).

While the region as a whole remains understudied in terms of media coverage of climate change issues, a small but growing body of research has examined its coverage in the global press, particularly in Latin America. In their comparative survey of a month of press coverage in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela, Kitzberger & Pérez (2008) found that climate change coverage represented a very small percentage of total coverage, in most cases less than 2%; Mexico and Brazil had the most stories on climate change during this period, which the authors attribute to the debate over using rural community land for biofuel production in Mexico and the political debate over ethanol production in Brazil. Other studies have produced similar results. Gordon et al. (2010) found that while journalists at Mexico’s top newspapers considered global warming important, they did not necessarily identify it as “most

important.” Zamith et al. (2013) noted that the Brazilian and US press published more articles on climate change than their counterparts in Argentina and Colombia. In Argentina, Mercado (2012) argued that climate change is viewed largely as an international controversy between industrialized and developing nations. During a summit on climate change, the Peruvian press framed the issue largely in terms of political strategy rather than science, with little coverage (Takahashi, 2011). In their longitudinal study of Peruvian press coverage of climate change, Takahashi and Meisner (2013) found a reliance on Western wire services, essentially limiting coverage to international news flow routines and parameters.

Finally, Latin America is also a region that has struggled with issues of press freedom, as legacies of state and market intervention in media have meant compromises in media independence. News media have been caught between what Waisbord (2000) terms the “rock of the state and hard place of the market.” He describes media-state relations as difficult over much of the 20th century, as: “[b]oth authoritarian and populist regimes used state resources to control media markets and suppress deliberation and criticism. Powerful business, in turn, influenced government policies to expand and consolidate power” (Waisbord, 2009, p. 5).

Oligarchic media structures, direct and indirect forms of violence against journalists, instrumental use of media to meet particular political or financial goals, and weak rule of law have all impacted

the degree to which media actors may independently report on a variety of issues (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Harlow, 2012; Hughes & Lawson, 2005; Pinto, 2008; Porto, 2007).

This leads us to ask how lower measures of press freedom affect coverage of climate change. Are elite news outlets reporting on climate changes in countries with lower scores of media independence and/or democratic freedoms? How does this relate to normative theories of press function in democratic and democratizing societies?

### **Method**

For the purposes of this study, we examine how media have fared when reporting on climate change in democratic and democratizing Latin American nations with varying levels of press freedoms.

We examine online news reports from Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, three of the most populous countries in Latin America with the potential for substantive policy direction, and home to important bio systems and natural resources. All three are understudied in terms of longitudinal coverage of climate change. We also chose them because of their ratings on Freedom House’s Freedom of the Press scale: “not free” (Mexico, with a score of 131 out of 196) or “partly free” (Brazil and Argentina, 91 and 109, respectively). In terms of quality of political rights and civil liberties, hallmarks of democracy, Brazil and Argentina scored as “Free” countries in 2013, while Mexico scored only as “Partly Free” (Freedom House, 2013 a & b).

Our study examined the online platforms of elite national

newspapers and TV channels with 24-hour continuous coverage in each country. For Argentina, we analyzed La Nación, which caters to higher-income audiences in greater Buenos Aires province and is one of the country’s top dailies (Silvestri & Vassolo, 2009), and Todo Noticias (also known as TN), an Argentine news cable channel owned by Grupo Clarín. For Mexico, we analyzed the conservative newspaper Reforma, one of the most circulated and top advertised papers in Mexico, and CNN’s independent feed for Mexico (Gutiérrez-Rentería, 2009). In Brazil, we looked at Folha de São Paulo, an influential liberal newspaper (Clark, 2009), and Rede Globo, the leading Brazilian television network.

With the exception of a few studies (e.g. Dotson et al., 2012; Takahashi & Meisner, 2013), most analyses have not examined press coverage over longer periods of time, instead choosing to focus on event-driven coverage over a few weeks. This study adds to current understanding by engaging in a comparative examination of press in three countries over a five-year period to better understand more longitudinal trends in terms of climate change reporting in Latin America. Two coders, both fluent in Spanish and one fluent in Portuguese, examined all articles that included the terms *calentamiento global* or *aquecimento global* (global warming in Spanish and Portuguese) or *cambio climático* (climate change) in the headline or first three paragraphs for the previous five years (2009-2013). The years were constructed from Nov. 14 of the previous year to Nov. 15 of the current year to assure 12 months

for each coded year. The coders read the first paragraph of each story to make sure not only that it contained the appropriate term, but that the term was relevant to the story. We also eliminated duplicates during this process.

**Results**

In total, the study located 2,659 articles from 2009-2013, after coders removed repeat articles and those that were irrelevant to the topic. As a general trend, news

coverage peaked in 2010 and fell after that, with a slight increase in 2013 (see Fig. 1).

Press coverage heavily outperformed television in the countries analyzed here, particularly in 2009-2010. From 2011-2013, the differences were not as dramatic, with television coverage for the three countries peaking in 2011 (see Figure 2).

The Brazilian and Mexican media covered climate change far more frequently than their Argentine counterparts, with Brazil slightly edging out Mexico in terms of total numbers of articles (see Figure 3).

Over time, all three countries' media decreased their coverage of climate change from a high in 2009 for Brazil and 2010 for Mexico and Argentina (see Figure 4).

Nuances among countries when analyzed by medium paint a different picture, however. Mexico's television news regarding climate change was less than half that of Reforma, but Folha news on climate

Figure 1. Total news coverage

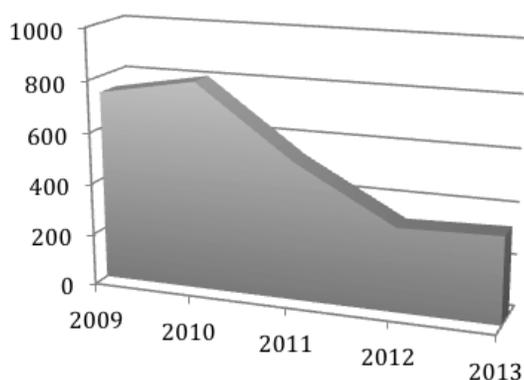


Figure 3. News coverage per country

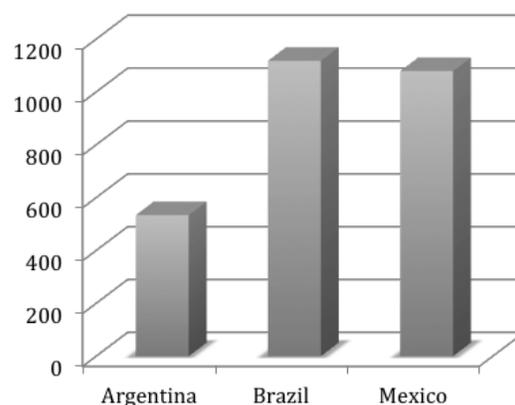


Figure 2. Total press and television coverage for the three countries

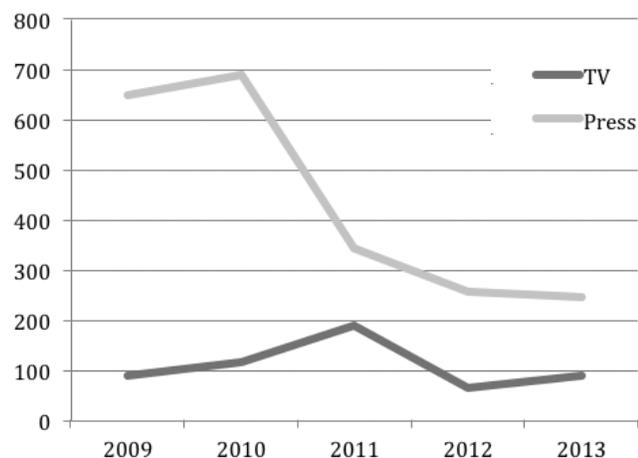


Figure 4. Climate change coverage over time

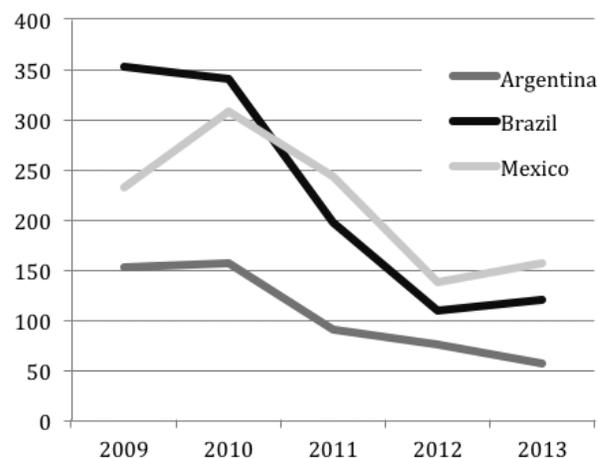


Figure 5. Total press and television by country

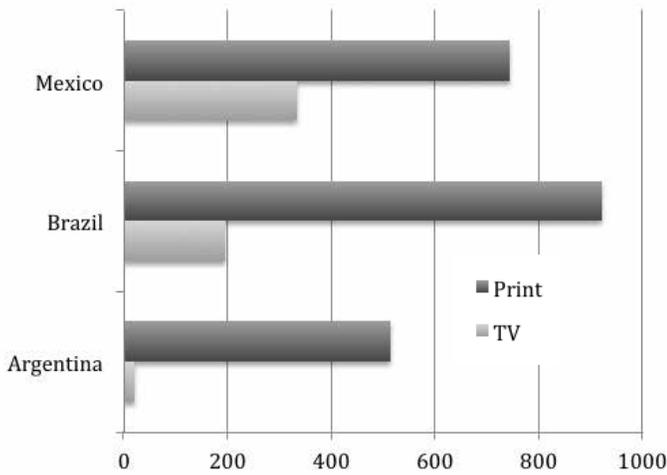


Figure 7. Brazilian media coverage of climate change

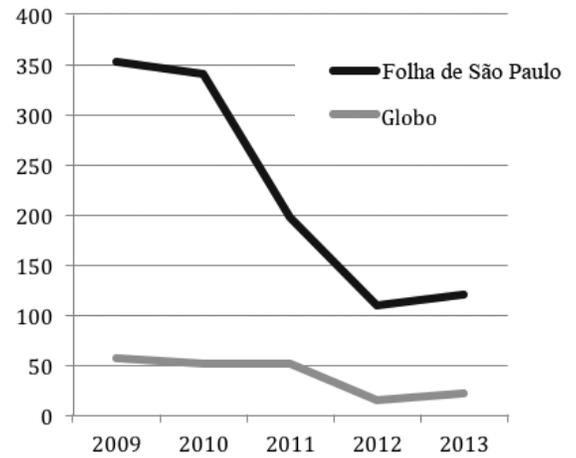


Figure 6. Argentine media coverage of climate change

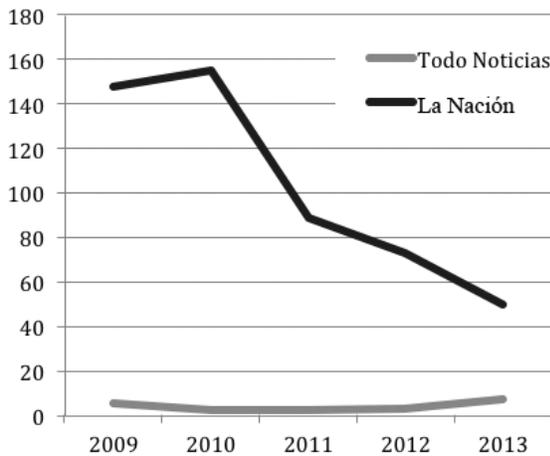
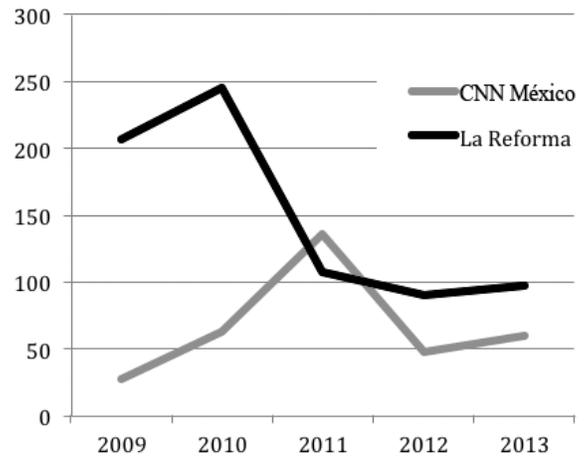


Figure 8. Mexican media coverage of climate change



change in Brazil was almost four times that of Globo. In Argentina, televised content was almost non-existent, while La Nación’s content almost equaled that of Globo’s and Todo Noticias’ content combined (see Fig. 5).

In Argentina, it was almost entirely La Nación’s content that told the story of climate change. The same type of disparity was evident in Brazil, although over time the sharpness of the demarcations

softened; in 2012, press reporting had fallen sharply as well, but was rising slightly in 2013. Mexican news coverage followed a different path. Press coverage peaked and then fell sharply in 2011, leveling off by 2013. However, television coverage rose to a peak in 2011, fell in 2012 and saw a slight increase in 2013 (see Figures 6, 7 and 8).

When viewed together, press and televised coverage diverged in terms of trends. Mexico’s television

coverage was by far the most prevalent, peaking in 2011, while Todo Noticias, never very prevalent, all but disappeared in 2011. Globo’s coverage fell sharply by 2012, as well. Press coverage followed similar trends across the three countries, with Reforma and La Nación covering climate change the most in 2010 and dropping off sharply in 2011. La Nación continued its decline in climate change news, while Folha and Reforma saw slight

Figure 9. Climate change coverage on television

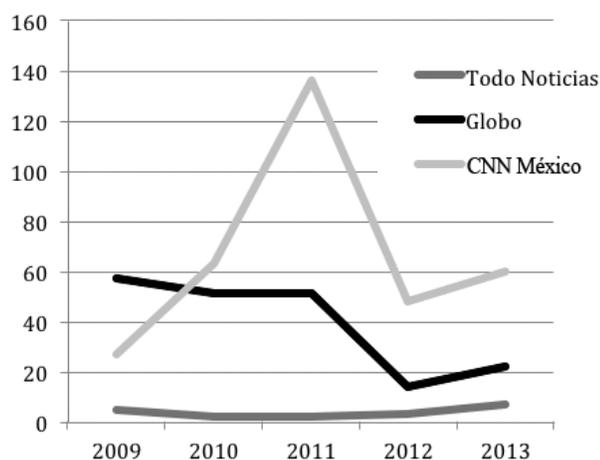
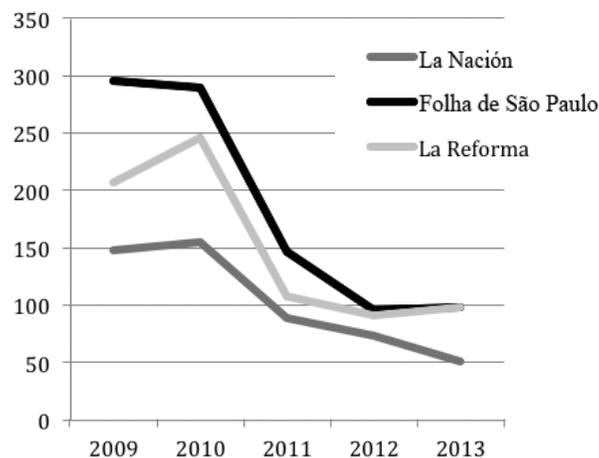


Figure 10. Total press by country



increases in 2013, but nowhere near 2009 levels (see Figures 9 and 10).

### Discussion

This study examined frequencies of climate change reporting in elite, Latin American legacy media with digital presences as initial indicators of the degree to which media across multiple platforms are providing information to their publics on the issue, and as theoretical hallmarks of normative functions in a democratic society. In theory, a press free to report on issues of import for its citizens would bring important information regarding climate change to its public, who would then influence policy outcomes, while a press less able to perform this function due to restricted press freedom or political liberties would not. If people are informed about the causes, consequences, debates and choices involved in climate change, then democratic decision-making will be facilitated and enhanced, as public opinion informs policymaking. As Boykoff (2011, p. 181) noted, “mass media constitute community where climate science,

policy and politics can be readily addressed, analyzed and discussed.”

This has important implications in democratic and democratizing systems like those found in much of Latin America. If media content influences and is influenced by public opinion and political will, then what are the possible linkages between freedom of the press and issues related to climate change?

We found that press freedom measures did not necessarily directly affect the environmental outcome measured here: frequency of coverage of climate change. Media in the press system that was rated “Not Free,” Mexico’s *La Reforma* and *CNN México*, outperformed media in the “Partly Free” systems of Argentina and Brazil. When looked at from the perspective of political liberties and civil rights, climate change news was reported more frequently in Mexico, the country rated only “Partly Free,” and only minimally in Argentina, a country rated “Free.”

Contextual factors during peak years or times when coverage decreased may account for shifts in

frequencies as media agendas turned to other issues. Most media have undergone tremendous structural reorganizations during the past decade. In addition, economic and sociopolitical problems in all three countries require much airtime and space. The media in Mexico, however, which saw the most restrictive press environment during a time of extreme violence from groups involved in illegal narcotics trafficking, heavily covered climate change, perhaps because the topic does not bring with it fear of retribution from political or organized crime. Further, during the past five years, Brazil and Mexico have shared regional leadership and worked together on climate change issues and have been active in securing domestic legislation on climate change. Elite actors are making statements and taking action on the issue in these two countries, resulting in news coverage as journalists follow elite figures and lines of debate (Bennett, 1990; Sigal, 1973). Both Brazil and Mexico hosted important summits during the period of this study: the



United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties in Cancún, Mexico in 2010, and the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. These conferences both came on the heels of the heavily reported United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009, which not only had failed expectations of revisiting the Kyoto global climate agreements but also coincided with the “Climategate” emails leaked from the Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia.

The fact that Mexican coverage peaked in 2010 for the Cancún conference is not surprising, but what remains to be explained is why Brazilian coverage crashed in 2012, the year of Rio+20, and why Argentine coverage was running a distant third. One speculation could be that Argentine climate change coverage remained relatively stable for 2009-2010, during the summits, but began to decline in 2011 during contested presidential and legislative elections, as well as the announcement that the president, Cristina Fernández de

Kirchner, had fallen ill with cancer. The following year saw riots and protests over high inflation rates and a stagnating economy in Argentina (Popper, 2012), while in Brazil, riots beginning in 2012 and continuing through 2013 have been attributed to widespread anger regarding inflation, political corruption, lack of infrastructure and lavish spending on World Cup projects (Panja & Biller, 2013).

With elite attention waning after conferences that failed to produce any significant measures regarding climate change, and pressing sociopolitical and economic issues within their own borders, the media frequencies observed here may be the result of journalistic routines favoring elite cues and influenced by structural changes that limited resources and affected coverage scope.

### Conclusions

This study takes a closer look at initial interfaces among measures of press freedom, democratic liberties and environmental news coverage of climate change on a national level as a step toward understanding the role of media

coverage in issues related to public opinion, citizenship and policymaking. We found that these relationships are nuanced and deserving of deeper analysis, particularly in an interdisciplinary context. We observed coverage pegged somewhat to events related to climate change, but also that these pegs were not absolute.

Limitations of our study included the fact that we used frequency of coverage as an initial indicator and therefore could not determine causation. As Boykoff (2011, p. 168, 180) noted in his study of climate change news:

*More media coverage of climate change – even supremely fair and accurately portrayed – is not a panacea.... At best, media reporting helps address, analyse and discuss the issues, but not answer them.... Yet, media portrayals continue to influence... perceptions of climate science and governance.*

If what Bernard Cohen (1963) famously said is still the case, that the media don't tell us what to think, but do tell us what to think about, then understanding how media create awareness of climate change is of utmost importance when thinking about societal response and political machinations. Future research would do well to examine this point. □

*Juliet Pinto is an associate professor in Florida International University's School of Journalism and Mass Communication.*

*Mercedes Vigón is the associate director of the International Media Center and an associate professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Florida International University.*

## References

- Barrett, S., & Graddy, K. (2000). "Freedom, Growth and the Environment." *Environment & Development Economics* 5: 433-456.
- Bennett, W.L. (1990). "Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States." *Journal of Communication* 40(2): 103-127.
- Boykoff, M. (2011). *Who Speaks for the Climate? Making Sense of Media Reporting on Climate Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boykoff, M. T. & Boykoff, J.M. (2004). "Balance as Bias: Global Warming and the US Prestige Press." *Global Environmental Change* 14(2): 125-136.
- Boykoff, M. T. & Boykoff, J.M. (2007). "Climate Change and Journalistic Norms: A Case-Study of US Mass-Media Coverage." *Geoforum* 38(6): 1190-1204.
- Carvalho, A. (2007). "Ideological Cultures and Media Discourses on Scientific Knowledge: Re-reading News on Climate Change." *Public Understanding of Science* 16(2): 223-243.
- Carvalho, A. & Burgess, J. (2005). "Cultural Circuits of Climate Change in U.K. Broadsheet Newspapers, 1985-2003." *Risk Analysis* 25(6): 1457-1469.
- Castells, M. (2008). "The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks and Global Governance." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616: 78-93.
- Clark, A. (2009, October 11). "Brazilian Newspapers Celebrate a Rise in Circulation: Print Media Booms in South America's Largest Economy." Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/oct/12/brazil-newspapers-circulation/print> (Last accessed Dec. 10, 2013).
- Cohen, B. (1963). *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dotson, D. M., Jacobson, S. K., Kaid, L. L., & Carlton, J. S. (2012). "Media Coverage of Climate Change in Chile: A Content Analysis of Conservative and Liberal Newspapers." *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* 6 (1): 64-81.
- Dryzek, J. S. (1987). *Rational Ecology: Environment and Political Economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Edwards, G., & Zeger, C. (2012). *Can Mexico and Brazil Join Forces on Climate Change?* Thomson Reuters Foundation. Available online: <http://www.trust.org/item/?map=can-mexico-and-brazil-join-forces-on-climate-change/> (last accessed Nov. 22, 2013).
- Freedom House. (2013a). "Global Press Freedom Rankings." Available online: [freedomhouse.org](http://freedomhouse.org) (last accessed Nov. 22, 2013).
- Freedom House. (2013b). "Freedom in the World." Available online: [freedomhouse.org](http://freedomhouse.org) (last accessed Dec. 6, 2013).
- Gleditsch, N. P., & Sverdrup, B. O. (2003). "Democracy and the Environment." In E. Paper & M. Redclift (eds.), *Human Security and the Environment: International Comparisons* (pp. 45-71). London: Elgar.
- Gordon, J. C., Deines, T., & Havice, J. (2010). "Global Warming Coverage in the Media: Trends in a Mexico City Newspaper." *Science Communication* 32: 143-170.
- Gutiérrez-Rentería, M. (2009). "The Media Industry in Mexico." In A. Albaran (ed.), *The Handbook of Spanish Language Media* (pp. 34-46). New York: Routledge.
- Hallin, D., & Papathanassopoulos, S. (2002). "Political Clientelism and the Media: Southern Europe and Latin America in Comparative Perspective." *Media, Culture & Society* 24(2): 175-195.
- Hardin, G. (1968). "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 162: 1243-1248.
- Hermes, J. (2006). "Citizenship in the Age of the Internet." *European Journal of Communication* 21(3): 295-309.
- Harlow, S. (2012). "A Political Boss and the Press: The Impact on Democracy of Two Brazilian Newspapers." *Journalism* 13: 340-353.
- Hughes, S., & Lawson, C. (2005). "The Barriers to Media Opening in Latin America." *Political Communication* 22: 9-25.
- IPCC. (2007). "Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007." Available online: [http://www.ipcc.ch/publications\\_and\\_data/ar4/syrl/en/mains1.html](http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/syrl/en/mains1.html) (last accessed Nov. 22, 2013).
- Kitzberger, D., & Pérez, G. (2008). *El tratamiento del cambio climático en la prensa latinoamericana. Report of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation*. Available online: [www.kas.de](http://www.kas.de) (last accessed Nov. 21, 2013).
- Latta, A., & Wittman, H. (2012). *Environmental Citizenship in Latin America: Natures, Subjects and Struggles*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Magrin, G., García, C., et al. (2007). "Latin America Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability." In M.L. Parry, O.F. Canziani, et al. (eds.), *Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (pp. 581-615). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moreira, S.V. (2005). "Trends and New Challenges in Journalism Research in Brazil." *Brazilian Journalism Research* 1(2): 9-24.
- Mercado, M.T. (2012). "Media Representations of Climate Change in the Argentine Press." *Journalism Studies* 13(2): 193-209.
- Neumayer, J. (2002). "Do Democracies Exhibit Stronger International Environmental Commitment? A Cross-Country Analysis." *Journal of Peace Research* 39(2): 139-164.
- Newell, P. (2008). "Civil Society, Corporate Accountability and the Politics of Climate Change." *Global Environmental Politics* 8(3): 122-153.
- Panja, T., & Biller, D. (2013, Oct. 23). "Brazil Riots Threaten World Cup as Nation Prepares for Games." *Bloomberg.com*. Available online: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-10-23/brazil-world-cup-disruption-seen-outcome-of-rio-violent-protests.html> (last accessed Dec. 12, 2013).
- Payner, O. (1995). "Freedom and the Environment." *Journal of Democracy* 6: 41-55.
- Pew Global Attitudes Project. (2007, June 27). *Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey: Global Unease with Major World Powers*. Washington, DC.
- Pinto, J. (2008). "Muzzling the Watchdog: The Case of Disappearing Watchdog Journalism from Argentine Mainstream News." *Journalism* 9(6): 750-774.
- Popper, H. (2012, Nov. 8). "Argentines Flood Streets in Anti-government Protests." *Reuters.com*. Available online: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/09/argentina-protest-idUSL1E8M8AQP20121109> (last accessed Dec. 12, 2013).
- Porto, M. (2007). "TV News and Political Change in Brazil: The Impact of Democratization on TV Globo's Journalism." *Journalism* 8(4): 363-384.
- Reis, R. (1999). "Environmental News: Coverage of the Earth Summit by Brazilian Newspapers." *Science Communication* 21(2): 137-155.
- Schultz, C., & Crockett, T. (1990). "Economic Development, Democratization and Environmental Protection in Eastern Europe." *Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review* 18: 53-84.
- Sigal, L. (1973). *Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking*. New York: DC Heath.
- Silvestri, L., & Vassolo, R. S. (2009). "Media and Entertainment in Argentina: Doing Business in a Fragmented Society." In A. Albarán (ed.), *The Handbook of Spanish-language Media* (pp. 151-170). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Takahashi, B., & Meisner, M. (2013). "Climate Change in Peruvian Newspapers: The Role of Foreign Voices in a Context of Vulnerability." *Public Understanding of Science* 22(4): 427-442.
- Waisbord, S. (2000). "Media in South America: Between the Rock of the State and the Hard Place of the Market." In J. Curran & M. Park (eds.), *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. London: Arnold.
- Waisbord, S. (2013). "Contesting Extractivism: Media and Environmental Citizenship in Latin America." In L. Libby & B. Hutchins (eds.), *Environmental Conflict and the Media* (pp. 105-123). New York: Peter Lang.
- Waisbord, S. (2009). "Press and the Public Sphere in Contemporary Latin America." In P. Norris (ed.), *Public Sentinel: News Media and Governance Reform* (pp. 305-328). Washington: World Bank.
- Waisbord, S., & Peruzzotti, E. (2009). "The Environmental Story that Wasn't: Advocacy, Journalism and the *asamblea* Movement in Argentina." *Media, Culture & Society* 31(5): 691-709.
- Zamith, R., Pinto, J., & Villar, M. (2013). "Constructing Climate Change in the Americas: An Analysis of News Coverage in U.S. and South American Newspapers." *Science Communication* 35 (3): 334-357.

# What Can I Say?

## Freedom of Expression in Cuba

By Jorge Dalmau and John Virtue

In mid September 2013, the Cuban Ministry of Culture suspended musician Robertico Carcassés because of a few verses he improvised at a public performance. Events over the following days afford rare glimpses of the tenuous, elusive and subtly shifting line that separates what one can and cannot say on the island.

Mr. Carcassés and his group, a timba-funk band called Interactivo, were performing in an open space across from the United States Interest Section in Havana that the Cuban government calls Tribuna Antimperialista and Cubans have dubbed Protestódromo, a synthesis of “protest” with Rio de Janeiro’s Carnival reviewing stand, the Sambódromo. It is in fact a standing platform on which the government periodically stages public demonstrations against the latest outrage by the Empire to the north.

The September 12 event demanded the return of the Five Heroes, members of the Wasp Network imprisoned in the United States for terms ranging from 15 years to life on charges of spying. US authorities arrested the five after Cuban Air Force jet fighters shot down two Miami-based Brothers to the Rescue planes in 1996, killing the four pilots onboard.

Mr. Carcassés’ performance can be seen on video clips posted on YouTube. Standing next to a three-woman backup group hammering

*Cuban blogger and independent journalist Yoani Sánchez, named one of Time magazine’s “100 Most Influential People in the World,” gives a lecture at Florida International University’s Wertheim Performing Arts Center on April 1, 2013. Photo by FIU External Relations.*



home the refrain “*Quiero. Acuérdate que siempre quiero*” (I want. Remember that I always want), Mr. Carcassés dutifully called for “the return of our brothers” but then soloed into uncharted territory, calling for freedom for María (marijuana) and “free access to information, so I can have my own opinion... I want to elect the president by direct vote and not by other means... neither militants nor dissidents, Cubans all, with the same rights... the end of the embargo, and the self embargo.” He ended by making a plea for “only one Cuba, for Cubans, that our brothers may return.”

In the context, one could fairly conclude that in the opening salvo, the “return of our brothers” referred to the Five, only four of whom are still in prison, and just as fairly conclude that the “brothers” in the closing verse alluded to the million-plus Cubans living outside the

island, a very different kettle of fish, politically speaking.

Some observers have pointed out the possibility that few if any of those present even noticed what Mr. Carcassés was saying. But at least someone was listening and evidently took exception to Mr. Carcassés’ inspiration. The next day, a Friday, he was summoned to the Ministry of Culture and notified that, as of that moment, all his contracts were cancelled and he would not be performing in the foreseeable future. Musically, he had become a nonperson.

“Perhaps I was wrong to hope that my words would show an image of tolerance and evolution on the part of the present Cuban government,” Mr. Carcassés said later in a Facebook posting.

And then something unusual happened.

Singer-songwriter Silvio Rodríguez, known to his many

fans worldwide simply as Silvio, announced that Mr. Carcassés would be joining him onstage at a couple of forthcoming concerts in various neighborhoods around the island, part of an ongoing series billed as *conciertos en los barrios*.

On Tuesday, September 17, Mr. Rodríguez stipulated in his blog that he hadn't invited Mr. Carcassés, or any other artists, to perform with him at the concerts, but that, rather, "... he had taken notice of the colleagues who voluntarily offered to join him. That is the case of Robertico (Mr. Carcassés)." And then he added the following paragraph:

"I decided it [Mr. Carcassés' participation] should happen precisely at the next two concerts when I learned that he had been sanctioned to an indefinite suspension from his social function." He then went on: "I believe Robertico committed a grave blunder" when he chose the performance asking for the liberation of the Five to issue his manifesto: "Unfortunately, my colleague's blunder was followed by another blunder by the institution that rules the work of music professionals in Cuba."

There followed a reasoned discourse to the effect that Mr. Carcassés had a right to express his opinion, even if he had chosen the wrong time and place to do so.

Right below the initial blog post, for which no time is given —Mr. Rodríguez usually posts early in the morning— appeared the following:

"NEWS ITEM: Havana, Tuesday September 17, 2013, 17:45 (5:45 p.m.)

Officials of the Ministry of Culture met today with Robertico Carcassés and the conversation was

so positive that they have decided to vacate the sanction.

It is said that people, by talking, may understand each other. May it always be that way."

Whether Mr. Rodríguez's careful and somewhat muted defiance of the Ministry's decision was instrumental in the final outcome of the incident, it is impossible to say, although surely partisans on either side of the debate will have strong views about it. What is evident from both Mr. Carcassés' performance and Mr. Rodríguez's subsequent blog posts, however, is that things are not as they used to be on the island.

The incident says a lot about freedom of expression in Cuba and the role of the Internet. The government is no longer able to suppress the news the way it did when it came in printed and broadcast form. Even the state-run media, the only media allowed in Cuba, reflect a modest lifting of restrictions. On October 9, 2013, *Granma*, the Communist Party daily, replaced its longtime editor with the editor of *Juventud Rebelde*, the official organ of the Communist Youth, who was in turn replaced by his managing editor. Rumor had it that the changes were decided at a summer meeting of the Party after members called for less censorship and more news in the newspapers.

Critics point out that at the same time the regime was discussing changes in the media —one of them called it a "timid opening"— the Cuban police arrested five independent journalists who were covering anti-government protests. All were released on October 14. The opening leaves unchanged the ban on foreign newspapers

and magazines and the jamming of radio and television signals, let alone private media on the island.

Few Cubans have Internet access in their homes. The government is opening Internet cafes, although the cost of a few hours' connection might be the equivalent of a month's salary. Cuba has the second lowest average Internet access speed in the world, which is ironic since Cubans pioneered radio and television in Latin America. The first radio station on the island was inaugurated in 1922 and the first television station in 1952. Cubans did much of the installation and programming of radio and TV in other Latin American countries.

A media opening would be consistent with President Raúl Castro's easing of economic and social restrictions since replacing brother Fidel in 2008. Cubans now have the right to travel abroad, and some independent journalists and other dissidents have traveled to the United States and elsewhere and returned home.

The foreign journalist who probably knows more about Cubans and Cuba than any of his colleagues, *The New Yorker's* Jon Lee Anderson, made a trip to the island while the media opening was being discussed. Anderson spent much of his time with Leonardo Padura Fuentes, a former *Juventud Rebelde* reporter and social critic who has written a series of novels featuring a Cuban police detective. Despite what he writes and says, Mr. Padura was awarded Cuba's National Literature Prize in 2012. "There is no current policy of what should or should not be published," he said in a speech attended by Mr. Anderson. "I believe enough

space has been achieved for almost everything to be published in Cuba.”

Mr. Anderson, in an October 21, 2013 *New Yorker* article, offers Mr. Padura, who is 58 years old, as a barometer of what’s permissible in terms of freedom of expression on the island. “People think that what I say is a measure of what can or can’t be said in Cuba,” he told Mr. Anderson. He acknowledged, however, that what he says in private can be at odds with what he says in public.

Some of Cuba’s independent journalists have criticized Mr. Padura for not speaking out last summer against the five-year prison sentence given to writer and blogger Ángel Santiesteban-Prats, who was accused of domestic violence. Mr. Santiesteban is the 2013 winner of the Franz Kafka Prize, worth \$10,000, which honors writers who

chronicle their times. In awarding the prize to Mr. Santiesteban, the City of Prague and the Franz Kafka Society, the prize’s co-sponsors, mentioned “*El verano en que Dios dormía*,” his novel about rafters fleeing Cuba.

Blogger Yoani Sánchez, who is 38, is proving to be well situated to get her message to an international public. She and her husband left Cuba in 2002 for Switzerland but returned home in 2004 knowledgeable about the uses of the Internet. She started blogging in 2007; by 2008, *Time* magazine had named her one of the “100 Most Influential People in the World” and the newspaper *El País* had awarded her the Ortega y Gasset Prize, Spain’s highest journalism award. This was followed by Columbia University’s Maria Moors Cabot Prize in 2009, the

International Press Institute’s World Press Freedom award, and the Netherlands’ Prince Claus award, both in 2010.

Ms. Sánchez’s sudden international recognition caught the Cuban government off guard. The more famous she became, the less the government was inclined to use traditional methods of arrest and harassment to silence her. The *Huffington Post* and *Miami Herald*, among other media, post her *Generación Y* blogs on life in Cuba, and her followers translate them into 17 languages.

Dissidents are replacing traditional journalism with blogging as a way to get their message out to the world, including Cuba. Few dissident journalists anywhere have encountered the obstacles that Cuba’s independent journalists have faced. Since Cuba is an island, the

---

## A Surprise Witness for the Prosecution

*By John Virtue*

My sixth and last trip to Cuba had more consequences than the previous five combined. The first five visits were when I was a foreign correspondent for United Press International news agency. I made the last trip as deputy director of the International Media Center at Florida International University with a grant from the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to train Cuba’s independent journalists with a distance-learning course mailed by friends in my native Canada.

When Vicky Huddleston, then the chief of mission at the US Interests Section in Havana, realized that I was a dual citizen, she advised me to go to Cuba on my Canadian passport. “Act like a tourist for four or five days, give your workshop, and then leave on the next flight before State Security realizes you’re there,” she counseled me. She warned, however, that the State Department could not help me if I was arrested; that would be up to Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

A year went by before I traveled, 9/11 intervened, and Huddleston was no longer in Cuba; she was ambassador to Mozambique. Instead of taking a 30-minute flight from Miami, I flew to Toronto on December 11, 2002. Assuming that my hotel room in Havana would be searched, I left all toiletries that were made in the United States with a friend and replaced them with Canadian ones. The next day I checked into LACSA, a Costa

Rican airline that flew to Havana, and paid \$25 for a Cuban visa. My seatmate on the flight told he was going to Havana for the annual jazz festival, so I now had an explanation for Cuban immigration if asked why I was visiting the island.

There was neither hassle nor questions at immigration and customs. Had an inspector looked, he or she would have found no didactic material. Talking points for my workshop were margin notes spread throughout the book I was reading. When I checked into my hotel in Old Havana, I noticed a man in aviator sunglasses seated beside the registration desk. After I had checked in and was walking away, I overheard the man tell the clerk he was waiting for a Señor García and was I him. “No,” said the clerk. “That’s Señor Virtue.” Since I had been in Cuba before, I assumed State Security had just checked me in, too.

As I was unpacking my suitcase, I realized that my toothbrush was printed with the telephone number of my Miami dentist. I tried unsuccessfully to remove it with a nail file. Toothbrushes are not available for sale in Cuban pharmacies, so I put mine in my pocket when I left the hotel. I later discovered a wall safe where I left it after brushing my teeth.

I followed Huddleston’s instructions over the next couple of days. I only spoke English in the hotel, reserving Spanish for my chats with Cubans in the street. I tried to go to the jazz festival, but no tickets were available.

government effectively suppressed dissident reporting until the Internet started making inroads. State Security has prevented the printing and distribution of any dissident publications.

“The will of the Party is that there be no secrets,” Rolando Alfonso Borges of the Communist Party’s central committee told the Union of Journalists of Cuba three days after the announcement of the top-level changes in personnel at the government dailies. “We understand that there is a movement in that sense. The country needs that and needs balance.” Vice President Miguel Díaz Canel, widely viewed as President Raúl Castro’s heir apparent, anticipated Mr. Borges’ remarks when he told state media journalists in July that they should cover what average Cubans are talking about. The media, he said,

“should be capable of reflecting the Cuban reality in all its diversity, reporting in an opportune, objective, systematic and transparent way, the work of the Revolution...” Under its new editor, Granma has acknowledged public criticism of a government crackdown on illegal clothing and hardware sales at prices below those in government stores. State television is carrying items about what doesn’t work in Cuba.

Professor Max Salvadori, who taught at Smith College from 1947 to 1973 after spending the first half of his life fighting fascism in Italy, once pointed out that in a medieval monastery, a monk was free to question the abbot on issues such as the quality of the gruel or the living accommodations. But, Professor Salvadori would ask pointedly, was the monk at liberty to question the dogma of the Church?

In the same vein, one might ask, Cubans can now sound off on such issues as prices and government services, but are they free to question the tenets of the Revolution? □

*Jorge Dalmau is Editor at Florida International University’s International Media Center, and leads the Center’s project, Professional Support for Cuba’s Independent Journalists, designed to strengthen professional communication media in Cuba.*

*John Virtue is a veteran journalist and editor who covered Latin America and the Caribbean for over two decades. He is the director of the International Media Center at Florida International University and founding publisher of Pulso del periodismo. He has led workshops on ethics and the role of the press in democracy to 2,000 mid-career journalists in sixteen Latin American countries.*

On December 16, the day of my workshop, I checked out and took a taxi to the Hotel Nacional, which is located a short distance from the Interests Section. From there I pulled my suitcase to the Interests Section, showed my passport to a Cuban security agent at a kiosk and entered the building, the former American embassy.

The workshop was held at the residence of the Public Affairs Officer. When we arrived at 10 a.m., 18 journalists were waiting outside. I had planned to review our activities and the five-part course we had mailed and then give a workshop on ethics, my specialty. I started by explaining that we were editing articles from independent journalists posted on the CubaNet website and offering them to Latin American newspapers. This was a requirement of our USAID grant, and I was pleased to tell them that the newspapers were using the articles. Few of the journalists showed any enthusiasm about having their works read by people in Argentina or Mexico. They let me know that their commitment was to denounce Fidel Castro to their fellow Cubans in exile, not to inform other Latin Americans. As for editing their writing, they viewed this as tantamount to censorship. If even one word were changed, an article should not be offered for publication outside of Cuba.

Being independent journalists, they had never worked under an editor. The websites to which they submitted their articles only corrected spelling and grammatical errors. I explained that all articles used by media in the rest of the hemisphere are subject to editing. I was grateful to one journalist who backed me

up, Manuel David Orrio. He was one of five invited journalists for whom I had brought certificates of completion for our distance-learning course.

My presence at the residence was scheduled for two and a half hours, allowing me enough time to get to the airport for a flight to Canada that afternoon. I spent so much time justifying the role of an editor that I barely had a chance to begin my ethics workshop. “Don’t worry,” Orrio told me. “I know enough about ethics to do the workshop myself.” I promised Orrio that we’d send him examples of codes of ethics and other material. He said the residence we were at was too small for what he had in mind. He would like to invite 50 to 60 journalists, so he would ask the new chief of mission, James Cason, for permission to use his residence. Cason agreed.

Orrio held his workshop on Thursday, March 13, 2003. The following Monday, Fidel Castro said that Cason had exceeded his diplomatic role by permitting dissidents to congregate in his official residence. Castro announced the arrest of 75 dissidents, including 27 independent journalists. They were charged with crimes against the state; specifically, associating with Americans.

Closed trials were held the following month. All of those arrested were convicted and given sentences of up to 28 years in prison.

A surprise witness testified against the journalists: Manuel David Orrio. It turns out he was a State Security agent who broke 12 years undercover as an independent journalist to testify against his unsuspecting “colleagues.” □

# 90 Miles to Freedom of the Press

*Article and Photos by Patrick Farrell*

**E**ven simple street photography can be difficult in Cuba, where censorship is the worst in the western hemisphere. Two years ago, I traveled to Santiago, Cuba, to cover Pope Benedict XVI's visit. Getting there was the easy part.

It wasn't always that way. Relations between the Cuban government and The Miami Herald have always been rocky, with the Castro regime accusing the newspaper of being a propaganda arm of Miami's Cuban exile community. Historically, Cuba has refused journalist visa requests from employees of The Miami Herald and its Spanish-language sister paper, El Nuevo Herald.

This time around, however, Miami Herald staff writer Mimi Whitefield and I both received seven-day visas. Almost 20 staffers at the paper had applied, but we were still excited because it was the first time in more than a decade that anybody at The Herald had been granted legal permission to enter the country.

With our access limited to seven days, we flew directly into Santiago, where the Pope would appear first. We breezed through customs and immigration lines. Checking into the hotel where most of the media were staying was easy, too. But, due to confusion about our travel plans, our press credentials were still in Havana, more than 500 miles away.

We were assured this wouldn't be a problem and that they would be delivered to us the next day.

We weren't concerned. It's not unusual for an important event – in the United States or any other country – to require media credentials. Since the Pope wasn't expected for another two days for his mass at the Plaza de la Revolución Antonio Maceo, why worry?

The next day, Mimi and I walked to the *Basílica del Cobre* (photo opposite page), where the Pope was scheduled to visit after Mass to pray to the *Virgen de la Caridad*. Mimi became engrossed in interviews, so I explored the neighborhood. Like I often do in Miami and any place I visit, I started photographing scenes of daily life along the crumbling colonial brick streets. I shot a young boy getting his hair cut at a small barbershop, its walls covered with posters about the Papal Mass. I photographed people walking by a giant Che Guevara mural on a quiet street.

I've traveled to Haiti, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Turkey, the Bahamas, Antigua and the Mexican border, among other places, on assignments. I've never been stopped in the street in any of those places for taking photographs.

Until now.

"Señor! Señor!"

A serious-looking man in street clothes hustled up to me and

demanded in Spanish to see my press pass. I flashed my Miami Herald ID, but that didn't satisfy him, so I quickly explained that I was still waiting for my credentials and just shooting photos of the neighborhood. I walked away. He followed. After I hurried through several blocks, taking sharp twists and turns, he seemed to give up.

I had almost made it back to the *Basílica del Cobre* when he reappeared – this time on the back of a small motorcycle driven by a man in uniform. They glared at me. Speaking English, the uniformed man demanded my credentials. He wasn't satisfied with my story, either, so he pointed me back to the cathedral and sternly told me not to roam around.

The next day, our credentials safely in hand, I forgot my two watchdogs in the flurry of the Pope's visit. The Miami Herald had paid for a wireless connection code to transmit images directly from the risers by the stage, where the media were required to stay. After the Pope's grand entrance, I sat down with my laptop and began sending the first images.

Suddenly, a man, later identified as Andrés Carrión (photo page 38), began running toward the altar. "Down with Communism!" he yelled. I slid the laptop off my lap and jumped up, snapping off a few photos as authorities quickly corralled him out of the square. I



## Reports from the Field

immediately got back on my laptop and tried to send these pictures, but our Internet connection had vanished.

Other journalists complained they were having the same trouble. Frustrated and in a hurry to get the images back to Miami, I received permission to leave – as long as I headed straight to the hotel a mile away and agreed not to take any more photos.

The Internet at the hotel was now having problems, too. It seemed impossible to get a consistent connection. It took several hours to move a handful of pictures, but they finally went through.

Maybe I was being paranoid. But the sensation of being watched never went away.

The next morning, the Pope's visit to El Cobre was off limits to the media, so Mimi and I hung out in the crowds gathering in the surrounding streets. We reached the barricade across from the cathedral, where men in uniform were keeping the throng organized. I looked up and recognized the same stern face in plainclothes that had stopped me on the street. He ordered us to follow him.

We headed back through the enormous crowd now winding down the road. What a sight. I raised my camera and snapped a photo. Our "guide" swung around and shouted, "No pictures!" He moved behind me and put his hand in the middle of my back, firmly guiding us down the hill to a small, unmarked house. Between the sharp prodding in my back and the nondescript house, I started to get nervous.

My colleagues who have been stopped by authorities in Cuba have been held and questioned for hours. Still, the worst thing that has ever



happened to them was being forced back on a plane and sent home. Was our trip ending here? Were these renegade officers who wanted to rough us up? Would we face some trumped-up charge?

In Cuba, where the media are supervised by the Communist Party, censorship is the most intense in the Western Hemisphere. Reporters without Borders repeatedly ranks the country low on its Press Freedom Index. The Inter American Press Association reports that "repression against independent journalists, mistreatment of jailed reporters and very strict government surveillance" continue to limit people's access to information. Special permits required to use the Internet are only available to select Cubans. Mobile phones are rare.

It's a long 90 miles back to Florida and the First Amendment.

Several men were in the house. One of them took Mimi's bag. Another took my two cameras and

disappeared into a back room. We were ordered to sit on a small sofa. I didn't have much time to worry about what was happening as 10 minutes later, they returned our gear to us and led us out of the house.

Instead of being sent back to the hotel, this time they guided us back up the hill and steered us through the barricade right onto the steps of the cathedral. Hours later, I was able to photograph the Pope as he came out to bless the crowd.

Making my way down the street afterward with Mimi, I looked up and made eye contact with a familiar face in the crowd. My plainclothes friend. He stared at me.

"Gracias," I mouthed. He didn't smile. □

*Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Patrick Farrell has been a professional photojournalist for more than 25 years and a staff photographer at The Miami Herald since 1987.*



*School girl walks in front of street art in Haiti.*  
PATRICK FARRELL

# Haiti: Land of Radios

By Bernard Diederich

“We fought for 50 years for press freedom, and we are not going to ever allow Haiti to return to the silence of the cemetery,” veteran freedom fighter Liliane Pierre Paul of Radio Kiskeya declares. “We are today benefiting from the struggle and you can talk. There are those who would like to roll back the media to the days of the *babouket* (muzzle), but our blood, sweat and tears have not been in vain.”

Other radio station owners agree and more than half of Haiti’s 11 to 12 million people who live in urban areas have around 40 radio stations to choose from (and dozens more in the country’s 10 provinces) to satisfy their politics and points of view. Haiti has more radio and TV stations than any other country in the Caribbean, but few of its residents can afford TVs to watch its 30-odd television stations. Instead, they tune into the capital’s airwaves, which are jammed with options for music, news, sports, public announcements and live interviews.

In March 1970, Herbie Widmaier moved away from his music recording business to open Radio Métropole. His new station was innovative and acquired talented reporters. It quickly established a position rivaling Radio Haiti-Inter and other leading airwave outlets. Sadly, Radio Haiti-Inter is now off the air. That has not been the fate of Radio Métropole and its television station, which celebrated



Liliane Pierre-Paul co-founded Radio Kiskeya in 1994 and it remains one of Haiti’s leading news sources. Pierre-Paul stated, “[It is] a one-of-a-kind commercial station, founded by independent journalists of all political views, progressive, pro-democracy, with the people. We lived through enormous tension during the second mandate of Jean-Bertrand Aristide; attempted assassinations, fires and vandalism.” BERNARD DIEDERICH

44 years this year; however, it too has undergone change. Many from Radio Métropole have branched out on their own, including popular journalist Kompè Filo, whose masterful Haitian Creole is heard today over Radio Guinea, which devotes an hour to songs out of the Vodou Lakou. One of the best professional radio stations is that of the UN Stabilization Mission

in Haiti (MINUSTAH), which operates with reporters hired away from local stations.

Does having so many options translate into high levels of press freedom, broad dissemination of high-quality news programming and well-trained journalists? Unfortunately, as well-known journalist Marcus García explains, “...quantity does not translate

into quality. There is a lack of professionalism and journalists have lost prestige.” He adds, “Young people are desperately seeking leadership, mentors and role models.”

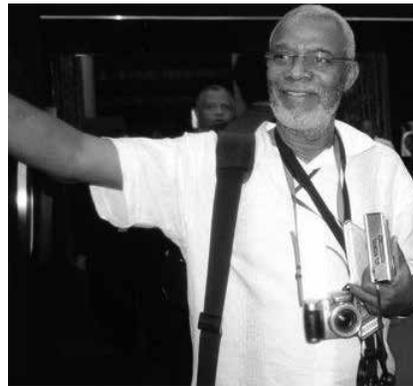
García, a lawyer by training who studied journalism in France and the United States, was arrested and forced into exile, along with the rest of Haiti’s “independent” media, by former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1980. Columbia University awarded García and his colleague, Elsie Ethéart, the prestigious Maria Moors Cabot Award for their work with the PBS radio station in Miami. Today they have their own station, Radio Mélodie FM, and Marcus’s daily editorials often appear in their feisty weekly, *Haiti en Marche*.

Critics complain that many radio hosts don’t know how to conduct live interviews and allow their guests to make the most outrageous declarations unchallenged. Sometimes, the results can be riotously entertaining. Some stations stick to music but others strain the limits of their hard-won freedom of the press with pure theater to assure themselves an audience and ratings. Recently, a lawyer for former dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier warned on the air that if the courts condemned his client, civil war would break out. Listeners laughed. It was comedy hour.

The country’s defamation laws are seldom applied. In fact, some congressmen are famous for making outlandish accusations, knowing their congressional immunity protects them from lawsuits. The post-Duvalier constitution, mindful of the dictatorship’s treatment of lawmakers who dared to criticize him – exile, jail and disappearance

– gives members of Congress full protection.

One recent Wednesday, I encountered surprisingly little traffic upon returning to Port-au-Prince. Residents of the capital were glued to their TVs and radios: Manchester United was playing in Europe. Haitians are passionate about soccer and matches are more important even than political scandals. The latest was a senator who punched a constituent, knocking out one of his teeth. Ironically, the senator is also a dentist.



*Marcus García, a veteran journalist with over four decades of experience, was imprisoned and exiled to the United States in 1980 while he was a reporter with Radio Métropole. In 2001, he won the Jean Dominique Human Rights and Freedom of the Press Award, given by the United Nations to support the work of journalists in Haiti.*

Tuning in and hearing a shrill voice announce demonstrations against President Michel Martelly by a faction of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s Lavalas party has been routine since the day the new leader took power. Over the airwaves, they accuse President Martelly of failing to end Haiti’s endemic misery and corruption. Aristide himself remains cloistered behind high walls at his Tabarre residence since returning from exile in South Africa. He is a silent political player. Many others choose

to engage by using media platforms to speak out openly, expressing concern and criticism regarding the situation in Haiti and what may lie ahead.

Economist Camille Chalmers, the executive secretary of la Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif (PAPDA), spoke this week on Radio Métropolis, declaring that the crisis in Venezuela could have grave consequences for the future of the Petro Caribe agreement that funds the majority of projects underway in Haiti. Chalmers stated that it is regrettable that Petro Caribe funds have not been used for sustainable development in the interest of the population. “That debt grows, passing \$100 million and, what is worse, nothing serious has been done in the way of serious investments of a social nature to help with hunger and housing,” Chalmers added.

Despite seemingly never-ending challenges in Haiti, the year began on a surprisingly good note for not only the media in Haiti, but also for its judicial system. Finally, in one of the most politically explosive cases of recent times and after 14 years and seven judges, Judge Yvikel Dabrézil issued Port-au-Prince’s Appeal Court an indictment against nine people accused of the murder of radio journalist Jean Leopold Dominique. At 6 a.m. on April 3, 2000, Dominique, an outspoken and controversial newscaster, was shot to death execution style as he arrived at his radio station, Radio Haiti-Inter. Radio Haiti-Inter’s security guard, Jean-Claude Louissaint, was killed as well. At Dominique’s state funeral, thousands of mourners filled Haiti’s soccer stadium. A week later, a hundred Haitian journalists marched in Port-au-Prince demanding justice.



*Haitian journalist, Jean Léopold Dominique, who was murdered outside of his radio station on April 13, 2000.*

Not everyone hailed the long-awaited decision. Aristide's Lavalas party, now splintered, charged that the decision and its timing were politically motivated. Reporters Without Borders greeted the ruling with a mix of "satisfaction and prudence," stating, "We urge the authorities to take the necessary steps to ensure that Myrlande Lubérisse appears in court in Haiti. A former senator for Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party, she is named in Judge Yvikel Dabrésil's report as the person who ordered Dominique's murder. The authorities in the United States, where she now resides, should authorize her extradition if required."

According to journalist Guyler C. Delva, head of the Haitian press freedom group SOS Journalistes, a November 2013 report states the motive for the killing was to silence outspoken journalists prior to the 2000 elections. He (Dominique) was described as posing an obstacle to Aristide's return to power. People, many journalists included, are still calling for justice.

Skeptics believe the accused will never be brought to trial, pointing to the case of dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier, which has tied up Haiti's judicial system for years and made Haiti the land of impunity. Since his surprise return from 25 years of exile in France on January 16, 2011, Duvalier has showed complete contempt for the justice system and his victims by failing to appear at initial hearings for his alleged involvement in crimes against humanity. The ex-dictator is at ease, repairing one of the family homes in a chic section of Petionville.

Most journalists agree that Duvalier benefits from his closeness to Martelly. The president, considered a neo-Duvalierist and showman, has even hinted at pardoning the former dictator. Regardless of whatever else Martelly might accomplish, including more public works than any former government, the Duvalier case will remain a stain on his name. Meanwhile, and to the surprise of many, the former dictator has continued to take part in public events despite having been placed under house arrest while charges against him are investigated. Particularly insulting to many was his presence on the official stage during the government's January 12, 2012 commemoration of the devastating earthquake that struck the country two years earlier. The ceremony was held at Titayan, the site of mass graves of earthquake victims as well as victims of the Duvalier regime. He was welcomed as a former head of state and even photographed shaking hands with former U.S. President Bill Clinton, who was obviously caught off guard.

"If the country has to cleanse itself

and end impunity, Jean-Claude Duvalier, as well as ex-President Aristide and others accused of crimes, must be tried," says a young member of the judiciary who asked that his name not be used.

From time to time the radio reports the lack of progress in repatriating \$7 million from Switzerland in "valid assets obtained illicitly by the Duvalier family." Duvalier and his followers are accused of plundering hundreds of millions of dollars of state funds during his reign, which ended when he was toppled in 1986. Ever since, a number of Swiss accounts have remained frozen, leading to protracted court battles.

International lawyer Bill O'Neill comments, "After the January 12, 2010 earthquake, the new mantras are 'building Haiti back better' and 'Haiti's open for business.' Neither statement can be true unless Haiti first faces its past and identifies the reasons for its deep poverty and predatory governments." O'Neill adds, "The impunity enjoyed by Duvalier is directly connected to Haiti's enduring ills."

Free and robust media serve as a bulwark against impunity and are key to development.

The January 2010 earthquake itself was a major test case for the Haitian media. *Le Nouvelliste* newspaper has stood for many decades at 183 Rue du Centre in downtown Port-au-Prince. The building that houses the paper resisted the devastating earthquake that reduced many of its neighbors to rubble; however, its printing press was destroyed and operations were brought to a halt.

"We met the challenge and were back in print within a month,"



Max E. Chauvet, the owner of *Le Nouvelliste*, seated at his desk at the newspaper's headquarters in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, with Frantz Duval, Editor-in-Chief and Pierre-Raymond Dumas, the head of the culture section and one of the daily's editorialists. *Le Nouvelliste* is the only remaining daily in Haiti and the oldest French-language daily in the Americas. JUNIOR PLÉSIUS/LE NOUVELLISTE

recalls Max E. Chauvet, the fourth generation to run the family daily, the only one of its type remaining in Haiti. Founded in 1898, *Le Nouvelliste* is the oldest French-language daily in the Americas. Editor Frantz Duval says the earthquake was a turning point for the paper. "The earthquake was an awakening," Duval states on *Le Nouvelliste* online, adding, "We had been too lax. Since then we have been more critical towards the authorities and asking questions. The image of the newspaper changed. We analyze more." *Le Nouvelliste* also has a radio station, Magik 9, over which Duval and other writers read the day's editorial. Chauvet would like to hear more editorials coming out over the airwaves. Today, he notes there are only three such radio stations,

including that of veteran Marcus Garcia (Mélodie FM 103.3) and of course, *Le Nouvelliste*'s Magik 9.

As for the written press, Chauvet says, "We have an advantage over radios in that we are there in black and white," figuratively, as the paper's 30-odd pages have color, too. Meaning, he says, "We can see what we publish and fulfill our duty as responsible journalists." Readers who were victims of the dictatorship were outraged by a note placed in the paper by Francois-Nicolas Duvalier praising his grandfather Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier, a man who allowed no opposition media and killed those suspected of dissent.

The Haitian Constitution, enacted in 1987 and updated in January 2002, guarantees all Haitians the right to express their opinions freely on all matters and by any means

they choose (Article 28). It also stated that journalists may freely exercise their profession within the framework of the law, and such exercise may not be subject to any authorization or censorship, except in the case of war.

Journalists may not be compelled to reveal their sources; however, it is their duty to verify the authenticity and accuracy of information. It is also their obligation to respect the ethics of their profession. Article 28-3 of the Haitian Constitution stipulates that all offenses involving the press and abuses of the right of expression should come under the code of criminal law.

The Press Freedom Index of Reporters without Borders shows some minor improvement, with Haiti's rank moving from 49 in 2013 to 47 in 2014. Freedom House's Index ranks Haiti as "partly free" and notes that the country has experienced "modest improvement" with regards to press freedom since 2012.

We are once again reminded of the words of veteran Haitian journalist and freedom of the press defender Liliane Pierre Paul: "We fought for 50 years for press freedom, and we are not going to ever allow Haiti to return to the silence...our blood, sweat and tears have not been in vain." □

*Bernard Diederich is a widely-published author and a veteran journalist who has covered Latin America and the Caribbean for over six decades. While living in Haiti, he launched the English-language weekly newspaper, Haiti Sun, and became the resident correspondent for The Associated Press, The New York Times, Time Magazine, and London's Daily Telegraph.*



If we look at the last quarter century, the figures are decidedly macabre. Between 1987 and 2013, according to the Inter American Press Association (IAPA), 419 journalists died while working and 25 went missing. Of these, 129 died in Colombia; 116 in Mexico; 47 in Brazil; 26 in Guatemala; 23 in Honduras; and 22 in Peru.

In Latin America, violence against journalists and citizens seeking to freely express their points of view continues to be an ominous reality and causes widespread self-censorship in the industry. Murders and attacks on journalists are significant not only in terms of the actual deaths of those targeted, but also in terms of the killing of the message – a message that is no longer delivered to its audience. The death of a journalist implies that people are left misinformed about those matters that interest them most. The death of a journalist also encourages other journalists to resort to self-censorship out of their fear of dying at the hands of organized criminals.

In March 2013, at an IAPA meeting in Puebla, Mexico, the publisher of a newspaper, whose name I will not reveal for reasons of security, mentioned to me that he had decided to stop publishing information about drug trafficking gangs in his community. When I asked him why, he looked at me with surprise and said, straight to the point, “Well, because I don’t want to die!”

Impunity – sadly, the rule in nearly all countries – is the fuel for murderers to continue their loutish behavior. If those in power are not capable of prosecuting the perpetrators and masterminds

behind the crimes, the criminals will continue to kill and intimidate at will. This is a problem of national security. Censorship, self-imposed or otherwise, leads to a poorly informed public and challenges the long-term stability of democratic institutions.

### **The Demolition**

In many Latin American countries, demagogues attack press freedom as part of their strategy to besiege democratic institutions. Messianic leaders engage in popular discourse, pretending to pursue noble causes. However, their only real interest is to remain in power. Since the late 1990s, a “Bolivarian cancer” has spread throughout Latin America and has posed an enormous threat to freedom of expression. Conceived in a masterly manner in Cuba – home to the longest-prevailing dictatorship in the region’s history – the disease has metastasized to and throughout Venezuela.

In a departure from the simple repression enacted by the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, new leaders began to seek more novel methods to crack down on freedom of expression. A more nuanced approach was needed – something more “palatable” for the Latin American people, a society fed up with the arrogance of the generals in power. In order to win elections, politicians pledged to value the most elemental standards of democracy. Once in power, however, the new regimes gradually implemented meticulous programs to “legally” destroy the very institutional structures that got them elected. Leaders continue to call themselves “democrats”

but actually the new institutions that they themselves put in place transform democracy into a caricature of itself. These are so-called “imperfect democracies” or “legal dictatorships” – regimes of legitimate origin but unequivocally illegitimate in their ability to function. State power is handed off to the “leader,” who laughs in the face of Montesquieu and swiftly delivers tailor-made laws and even constitutions, negating judiciary independence and progressively eliminating press freedom.

There they stand, the governments of Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Argentina, telling us when, what and how we read, view or listen to the news.

Since mid-2013, Ecuador has had the sad “privilege” of having a “communications law” that makes censorship official. The Ecuadorean law is one of the year’s worst assaults on the foundations of freedom of expression. The government has taken full control of the flow of information, requiring media to regulate themselves according to the whims of President Rafael Correa. Among other absurdities, “media lynching” – defined as the repeated publication or broadcasting of information intended to smear a person’s reputation or reduce his/her credibility – is now punishable by law, and mandatory licensing of journalists has been reinstated after years of efforts to eradicate the requirement due to its adverse effect on freedom of expression.

It is worth mentioning that the problem extends far beyond the governments of the five aforementioned countries. They are not alone; sympathizers exist throughout Latin America. Even in



The chairman of the Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA), Uruguayan Claudio Paolillo (C), answers questions during a press conference next to IAPA members Danilo Arbill (L), Edward Seaton (2-L), Hernan Molinos (2-R) and Fernando Trotti in Guatemala City on February 21, 2014. JOHAN ORDONEZ/AFP/Getty Images

the most democratic countries, some factions are strongly campaigning – with Venezuelan oil dollars – for the spread of the same anti-democratic, anti-republican and anti-liberal ideas found in Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia and Argentina. For defenders of freedom of expression, therefore, the struggle consists not only in the challenge to recover freedom of expression in the quasi-dictatorships and sole dictatorship (Cuba) in the region, but also to conserve it in those countries where it is still alive.

### A Serious Setback

Until recently, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has been able to halt many attempts at censorship. It has issued numerous rulings over the last 20 years, constituting one of the world's most advanced jurisprudences regarding press freedom.

On November 4, 2013, however, it published a ruling that amounts to the worst setback for freedom of expression since the court's creation in 1979. In a divided vote – with Judges Diego García-Sayán (Peru), Alberto Pérez Pérez (Uruguay), Humberto Sierra Porto (Colombia) and Roberto Caldas (Brazil) voting for, and Manuel Ventura Robles (Costa Rica), Eduardo Ferrer MacGregor (Mexico) and Eduardo Vio Grossi (Chile) voting against – the court contradicted its own case law, declaring that:

- 1) it is not a matter of public interest if a private person irregularly handles licensed public assets, as this concerns private persons and not government officials;
- 2) it is possible to convict a person (journalist or not) for issuing opinions (all of the court's

previous case law says that opinions are not litigious);

- 3) courts are not obliged to uphold the principle of *exceptio veritatis* (a motion that allows a defendant accused of calumny to clear his name by proving the validity of allegations made against another person);
- 4) It does not matter if a civil conviction affects the right to freedom of expression if it is produced as the result of a legal process initiated due to alleged damages caused by exercising that freedom.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights' Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression stressed the seriousness of this ruling. "Today, no journalist in the region can feel at ease if he or she denounces corruption or bad handling by private persons of

public assets (such as roads, ports or health resources),” it warned. National judges will be the only ones able to declare libel in such cases without regional human rights protections ensuring a rigorous trial. It will not matter whether the journalists are limited to giving an opinion or if they can prove the denunciations are true. This is very bad news for journalists and press freedom in general, and very good news for governments or government contractors seeking to avoid media scrutiny of their use of public monies.

### **The National Security Excuse**

In 2013 we were also able to prove that we should not only fear governments that disregard press freedom, but also those that proclaim its protection and defense.

The United States government has surprised us the most by spying on the online activities of its people and foreign allies, using the excuse that national security supersedes everything else – even the basic principles enshrined in the Constitution’s Bill of Rights.

Other governments in the Americas have used the same argument to obstruct access to information. In Canada, the authorities increasingly cite “classified information” to deny citizens access. The Congresses of El Salvador and Paraguay refuse to release information about their members’ assets despite legal requirements to make this information public.

But let us go back to the United States on September 2001...

Osama bin Laden publicly said during the late 1990s that he would do everything in his power to make

the United States disappear from the map. He attacked American embassies and ships, but the public did not know who he was at that time, much less that he was Al Qaeda. It came as a shock when Al Qaeda and bin Laden knocked down New York’s Twin Towers and attacked the Pentagon. Thus, it is not surprising that the spying debate following the US government’s confession of decade-long telephone and email tapping of its citizens and other nations did not give rise to a wave of general indignation. This would not have been the case 40 years ago, when the American press defended the right to freedom of expression tooth and nail.

Let us imagine for a minute that in 1972 President Richard Nixon officially communicated to the American people that his government knew who was talking to whom on the telephone and that his security services tapped the private correspondence of US citizens. Certainly, Congress, the judiciary, the press and American society would not have kept him in office a minute longer.

The Obama administration’s confession to government spying activities, in contrast, has met with Congressional approval, judicial support, timid protests by the press and widespread public agreement.

It is safe to say, then, that if President Nixon had the power that President Obama proclaims to have now, he would not have had to resign over Watergate; he would have known who the journalists’ confidential sources were. And, if Nixon had known that the number two man at the FBI, Mark Felt, was the confidential source for *The Washington Post*, then the famous

Watergate investigation would have never taken place.

It is worth asking ourselves: Is it true that Osama bin Laden died? Are the constitutional stipulations that guarantee US citizens’ basic rights still in effect? What about the First and Fourth Amendments to the Constitution? Are they still enforced?

The US security agencies’ spying techniques show that, in its desire to combat terrorism, Washington fell into a trap that could be fatal: violating its citizens’ basic rights in an effort to achieve its objectives, and running the risk of eroding from within the institutional pillars that have defined the nation since its creation.

Following the precedent set by his predecessor, former president George W. Bush, President Obama has said in his defense that one cannot enjoy security and privacy at the same time. Privacy is not the main dilemma, however, but rather freedom, rights and basic guarantees. The United States was built on these principles and they are the foundation of modern democracies. Millions of individuals have fought wars and died in defense of these principles. If, in order to survive, they have to be infringed upon, then the pillars on which this nation stands will also end up collapsing. And in that case, Osama bin Laden will have gotten what he wanted. □

*Claudio Paolillo is a journalist and writer, university professor, chairman of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information, and editor of the Montevideo, Uruguay weekly Búsqueda.*

# Knight Innovator in Residence

## Help Us Transform Journalism Education



The School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Florida International University invites applications for a Knight Innovator in Residence position. We are looking for media innovators who want to shape the future of digital media and journalism education and add to the growing innovation ecosystem in Miami. The Knight Innovator will work with students and faculty to develop groundbreaking media projects, as well as to create new courses and teaching techniques in digital media.

**Apply:** [go.fiu.edu/innovator](http://go.fiu.edu/innovator)

**Contact:** Meira Langsam

**e-Mail:** [langsam@fiu.edu](mailto:langsam@fiu.edu)

Applications reviewed until position is filled

Residency requirements are flexible. We are looking for a seasoned technology entrepreneur who can really make a difference working with our students, faculty and helping to shape the forward mission of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication. To apply: [go.fiu.edu/innovator](http://go.fiu.edu/innovator).

Located in the tropical paradise of Miami, Florida International University is the seventh-largest university in the United States, and graduates more Hispanic students than any other US institution.

### Join Our Innovation and Entrepreneurship Team

FIU-SJMC recently launched a \$100k Media Innovation Incubator Lab, stocked with the latest hardware and software for Web and mobile media development. We are engaged in several media research and development projects, including:

- Innovation Challenge - A new initiative to help our students research and develop innovative ideas and start up their own businesses in Miami's growing media and technology entrepreneurship community.
- Sea Level Rise: South Florida — This project, funded by a consortium that includes the Knight Foundation, combines reporting, crowdsourcing, public data and personal technology to help inform South Florida citizens about the impact of sea-level rise on their homes and businesses.
- WebGIS for Journalists — Our new course combines GIS savvy with Web publishing skills to help journalism students integrate location data into reporting.



**Journalism & Mass Communication**  
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY



## → LACC and the Media: Thirty-Five Years of Collaboration

Working together to ensure that people following Latin America and the Caribbean have access to dependable, accurate and current information about the issues that matter most.

### LACC supports enhanced coverage of the region through:

- Immediate access to more than 200 LACC faculty experts
- High-quality analysis as events unfold
- Multilingual contributors that reach audiences across the globe
- Critical training programs to educate a new generation of media professionals



Latin American and  
Caribbean Center

School of International and Public Affairs

[lacc.fiu.edu](http://lacc.fiu.edu)



# U.S. Department of State Launches Diplomacy Lab at LACC

Reaching Out Together to Bring Americans  
into the World of Foreign Policy

## Where?

The Diplomacy Lab at LACC was selected as 1 of only 4 sites in the U.S.

## What?

The Diplomacy Lab allows students to engage beyond the classroom, develop new ideas and solutions to the world's toughest challenges, and contribute directly to the policy-making process.

## Why?

Helps the U.S. Department of State tap into an underutilized reservoir of intellectual capital and bring American people into the world of foreign policy.

## How?

Faculty-led teams of students at FIU are focusing on prison violence in Latin America and the Caribbean and the U.S. Department of State is channeling those findings directly into policy-making.

[state.gov/s/sacsed/diplomacylab](https://state.gov/s/sacsed/diplomacylab)

**FIU**

Latin American and  
Caribbean Center

School of International and Public Affairs

*Forging Linkages across the Americas through education, research, outreach, and dialogue.*

[lacc.fiu.edu](http://lacc.fiu.edu)