

# Silence or Death in Mexico's Press

Crime, Violence, and Corruption Are Destroying the Country's Journalism

A special report of the Committee to Protect Journalists

Issued September 2010

Founded in 1981, the Committee to Protect Journalists responds to attacks on the press worldwide. CPJ documents hundreds of cases every year and takes action on behalf of journalists and news organizations without regard to political ideology. To maintain its independence, CPJ accepts no government funding. CPJ is funded entirely by private contributions from individuals, foundations, and corporations.

*Silence or Death in Mexico's Press:  
Crime, Violence, and Corruption Are Destroying the  
Country's Journalism*

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Top: Soldiers patrol the dangerous streets of Reynosa. (AP/Alexandre Meneghini)  
Bottom: A photographer covers a crime scene in Tijuana. (AP/Guillermo Arias)  
Back cover: Journalists call for justice in the murder of Acapulco reporter Amado Ramírez Dillanes. (AFP/Cecilia del Olmo)

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# About This Report

This report was researched and written by **Carlos Lauría**, CPJ senior program coordinator for the Americas, and **Mike O'Connor**, CPJ's representative in Mexico. **Monica Campbell**, a freelance journalist and former CPJ Mexico representative, and **José Barbeito**, CPJ's research associate for the Americas, provided additional reporting.

CPJ research has identified Mexico as one of the deadliest countries in the world for the press and one of the worst nations in solving crimes against journalists. CPJ researchers have traveled the breadth of the country over the course of four years, interviewing dozens of journalists about the dangers of their work and the devastating self-censorship that has resulted from anti-press violence. CPJ delegations have met with high-ranking Mexican officials, including President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, to discuss the grave problem of impunity in attacks on the press.

This report examines the murders of 22 journalists and three media support workers, along with the disappearances of seven journalists, during the Calderón presidency, which began in December 2006. The report identifies systemic law enforcement failures and offers potential solutions.

CPJ gratefully acknowledges the vital work of contributing writers. The Chapter 3 sidebar, "Why I Went Into Exile," was written by the former Ciudad

Juárez reporter **Luis Horacio Nájera**. Colombian journalist and CPJ board member **María Teresa Ronderos** wrote "How Colombian Media Met Dangerous Times," the sidebar to Chapter 4. "In Tijuana, an Unlikely Anniversary," the sidebar to Chapter 5, was written by **Adela Navarro Bello**, editor of the newsweekly *Zeta*. More complete author information accompanies each piece.

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# Preface

By Joel Simon

*Plomo o plata.* Lead or silver. It's a well-worn phrase in Mexico, one that's all too familiar to the country's journalists. It means, simply, we own you. Take our *plata* (slang for money) and publish what we tell you. Or we kill you.

The *plomo* is highly visible.

Bodies of journalists litter the streets in Mexico, from Durango to Villahermosa. More than 30 journalists have been murdered or have gone missing since December 2006, when President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa came to power. CPJ has confirmed that at least eight of these journalists were killed in direct reprisal for their work.

What has been less visible is the *plata*. Journalists don't generally talk about it, understandably. In this report, we reveal the culture of bribery and extortion that is producing devastating self-censorship in Mexico. Journalists in Reynosa confided in CPJ and told us the whole story—the threats, the violence, *and* the corruption.

Why do criminal organizations care so much about what's printed in the newspapers or broadcast on radio and TV? It's not a simple matter of suppressing some damaging stories. Their motives are much more complicated, and much more sinister.

When I was a reporter in Mexico in the 1980s and '90s, journalists used to tell me that they didn't worry

about printing the names and faces of the country's most powerful cartel leaders. In fact, the journalists claimed, the capos loved the attention because reports on their ruthlessness stirred fear among their enemies.

Reporting on the web of corruption that supported the drug trade was another matter. The cartels made investments in buying the cooperation of corrupt police, mayors, governors, soldiers, and customs agents, all of whom became integral to their operations. If you exposed this network and got some official fired, you were disrupting their business. That was dangerous, although some brave reporters still took the risk.

In 2004, I traveled to Tijuana to carry out a CPJ investigation into the murder of my friend and colleague Francisco Ortiz Franco, an editor at the muckraking newsweekly *Zeta*. In the course of my reporting, I came to understand the new ways in which rival cartels were using the media to further their illicit interests.

First, they suppressed stories about their own violence while paying journalists to play up the savagery of their rivals. More important, they used the media to damage competing operations by planting stories about corrupt officials. The impact of these stories was profound; a corrupt police chief in whom one cartel had invested huge sums might be forced

to resign. And not all the journalists who played the game were corrupt. They didn't know that their sources, often in law enforcement, were working as public relations agents for the cartels.

In the ensuing years, competing cartels throughout the country developed aggressive media tactics. They use corrupt journalists as a key component in their all-out battle for control of the "plaza," as the narcos call the drug market.

The traffickers rely on media outlets they control to discredit their rivals, expose corrupt officials working for competing cartels, defend themselves against government allegations, and influence public opinion. They use the media in a manner not that different from that of a traditional political party—except they are willing to use deadly means to attain their public relations goals. It is unsurprising then that as the drug war has intensified, violence against the press has escalated. U.S. correspondents, once ignored, are threatened regularly now.

Competing criminal organizations are controlling the information agenda in many cities across Mexico. Some news organizations have tried to opt out, refusing to cover anything related to the drug trade, even if that means ignoring shootouts in the street. But the traffickers don't always take no for an answer; journalists report being forced to publish stories attacking rival cartels.

President Calderón and the Mexican federal government need to do more—much more—to defend the media and create an environment in which journalists can do their jobs with some degree of safety. Calderón needs to take decisive action not only because the federal government has a constitutional responsibility to guarantee free expression. Safeguarding press freedom is in his own strategic interest. He cannot win the drug war if he cedes control of public information to the narcos.

Journalists should be reporting on the carnage wrought by the competing cartels. They should be reporting aggressively and fairly on the underlying corruption that supports the drug traffickers. They should be reporting on government efforts to battle the drug trade, highlighting both the failures and successes.

In many cities, they are doing none of these things. The reality is that the government is being outflanked in the information war, just as it is on the streets. As this report makes clear, the battle for the free flow of information in Mexico has reached a crucial phase. Unless the Mexican government takes bold action, the narcos will continue to define what is news and what is not. That is no way to win the drug war. ♦

*Joel Simon is executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists.*

# 1 | Summary

Violence against the press has swept the nation and destroyed Mexicans' right to freedom of expression. This national crisis demands a full-scale federal response.

The Committee to Protect Journalists prepared this report to highlight the alarming problem of impunity in attacks on the press in Mexico. CPJ's analysis points to systemic failures that if left unaddressed will further erode freedom of expression and the rule of law. Vital national and international interests are at stake.

## **Attacks on journalists endanger the nation**

Twenty-two journalists have been murdered since President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa took office in December 2006, at least eight in direct reprisal for reporting on crime and corruption. Three media support workers have been slain and at least seven other journalists have gone missing during this period. In addition, dozens of journalists have been attacked, kidnapped, or forced into exile.

Systemic impunity has taken root at the state and local levels where most anti-press crimes are investigated. The criminal justice system has failed to successfully prosecute more than 90 percent of press-related crimes over the last decade, CPJ research shows. Mexico is ranked ninth-worst worldwide on CPJ's Impunity Index, which calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of a country's population.

In case after case, CPJ has found negligent work by state prosecutors and police. Authorities have used unlawful methods, including coercion of witnesses and fabrication of evidence, on several occasions. Complicity between police and criminals is so common that many people interviewed by CPJ see the justice system as being controlled by the criminals. Pervasive self-censorship is a debilitating product of this lawlessness. News outlets, fearful of reprisals, are abandoning not only investigative reporting but basic

daily coverage of crime and corruption.

The federal government has only intermittently recognized anti-press violence as a national problem. In 2006, under the presidency of Vicente Fox, the government created a federal special prosecutor's office to investigate crimes against the press. Although the office was initially considered a step forward in combating impunity, it has proved ineffective.

CPJ believes the federal government must intervene directly to guarantee the right of free expression enshrined in the Mexican Constitution. Journalists themselves must contribute more to this effort. Reporters and editors have been corrupted by the same drug cartels that have infiltrated nearly every sector of society. And Mexico's polarized media have yet to unify behind a set of principles to protect the nation's journalists.

## **Case study: Murder goes unexamined, unpunished**

Assailants in two vehicles intercepted reporter Vladimir Antuna García's SUV as he was driving on a main street in the northwestern city of Durango in November 2009. Witnesses said five men with assault rifles ripped the reporter from his vehicle and drove off. Antuna's body was found 12 hours later; his captors had tortured and strangled him.

Antuna was considered the top crime reporter in Durango. A prolific writer, he turned out several stories a day, some of them exclusives that reflected good sources in the army and police. Antuna started receiving threatening phone calls in late 2008, at least some from people identifying themselves as members of the Zetas criminal group. In April 2009, an assailant opened fire on his house.



Antuna reported the threats and attack to the state attorney general's office, but no agents ever contacted him directly, he told fellow journalists. The state attorney general said Antuna never signed a complaint so the office could take no action. But the claim appears to be contradicted by records on file at the attorney general's office. Those records include an official complaint signed by Antuna.

State authorities took little action after Antuna was murdered. A state prosecutor told CPJ that detectives conducted only cursory interviews with witnesses and the victim's wife. Virtually no other investigative work was done. Many local journalists have concluded that authorities don't want to solve the murder. Because the killers have gone unpunished, journalists said, in-depth crime reporting has essentially stopped in Durango.

### **Case study: Ceding information to the cartels**

The Gulf cartel controls much of the local government in the eastern city of Reynosa, from law enforcement down to street vendor permitting, journalists and residents told CPJ. That story has not been reported in the local news media, however, because the cartel also controls the press.

Drug traffickers enforce censorship in Reynosa with threats, attacks, and payoffs. Many reporters take bribes from the cartel to slant or withhold coverage, journalists told CPJ. Some types of coverage are strictly prohibited. Reporters know, for example, to ignore kidnappings and extortion.

Journalists also know the grave consequences of defying the traffickers. Said one editor: "They will abduct you; they will torture you for hours; they will kill you, and then dismember you." In a chilling illustration of the traffickers' enforcement methods, three Reynosa journalists disappeared in March 2010 and are feared dead.

Events in 2010 illustrate how deeply censorship has taken hold. In February 2010, gunfights erupted in the streets as the Gulf cartel and the Zetas warred over control of the area. Reports in the U.S. press put deaths among gangsters in the dozens, but the local press provided virtually no coverage. In April 2010, in a brazen assault on the army, gangsters drove a convoy of SUVs to the front of a Reynosa military base and attacked with assault rifles and hand grenades. The military issued a press release, but there was virtually no independent reporting on the assault.

### **A national crisis is a federal responsibility**

Four years after launching a national offensive against organized crime, the federal government has failed to take responsibility for widespread attacks on free expression. Corrupt state and local authorities remain largely in charge of fighting crimes against the press. Federal authorities take jurisdiction only if they conclude an offense is linked to organized crime or if military firearms are involved.

But the federal government has national and international responsibilities. Articles 6 and 7 of the Mexican Constitution guarantee individual rights to freedom of expression and freedom of the press. As a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Mexico has an obligation to uphold the right to free expression enshrined in that document.

CPJ and other press advocates support sweeping reforms that would add crimes against free expression to the federal penal code, and make federal authorities responsible for investigating and prosecuting attacks on the press. Other steps should be taken as well. A stronger federal special prosecutor for crimes against free expression is vital. The creation of a government committee to provide direct protection for at-risk journalists would help as well.

Since 2008, the executive branch and Congress have moved haltingly to federalize anti-press crimes. Meeting with a CPJ delegation in June 2008, President Calderón declared support for a constitutional amendment to federalize crimes against freedom of expression. His proposal has failed to advance, however, as have other measures introduced in the legislature. Gridlock in Congress and opposition in the states are dimming prospects for reform. With many state-level politicians in league with criminal gangs, corrupt officials have much to fear from federalization.

Federalization will not end violence caused by drug trafficking and other criminal activities. CPJ has found numerous instances in which corrupt or lax federal authorities have failed to respond to anti-press violence. But federalization would send an important message that national leaders recognize the gravity of the situation. The more Mexico allows the news to be controlled by criminals, the more it erodes its status as a reliable global partner. Federal authorities are better trained, subject to greater scrutiny, and have greater resources than their local counterparts. They must be given responsibility to address this national crisis. ♦

## 2 | A Nation in Crisis

More than 30 journalists and media workers have been murdered or have vanished since December 2006. As vast self-censorship takes hold, Mexico's future as a free and democratic society is at risk.

Mexico is at war in many important respects, with institutions corrupted and security compromised, but the front-line journalism that would allow its citizens and leaders to understand and combat its enemies is nearing extinction. The drug traffickers, violent criminals, and corrupt officials who threaten Mexico's future have killed, terrorized, and co-opted journalists, knowing that controlling the flow of information will further their needs. They have been increasingly successful, the Committee to Protect Journalists has found, and the results have been devastating.

Since President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa launched a government offensive against Mexico's powerful drug cartels after taking office in December 2006, more than 22,000 people have died in drug-related murders, according to a March 2010 administration report to Congress, an astonishing toll more likely associated with a conflict zone than a peace-time democracy. The influence of organized crime over nearly every aspect of society, including government, police, and prosecutors, has made Mexico the deadliest nation for the press in the Western hemisphere and one of the world's most dangerous places to exercise the fundamental human right of free expression. Twenty-two journalists have been murdered during the president's tenure, at least eight in direct reprisal for reporting on crime and corruption, twin plagues that are undermining the country's stability. Three media support workers were slain for the crime of delivering newspapers. At least seven other journalists are missing since the president took office, all of them almost certainly dead.

Beginning in late 2006, the Calderón administration has deployed 45,000 army troops and 20,000 federal police in crime-ravaged areas across Mexico. The government argues that federal intervention is needed

because state and municipal police are heavily corrupted by drug gangs, making it impossible to combat crime on the local level. The crackdown has been accompanied by escalating violence that has reached record levels across society. A March 2010 study by San Diego University's Trans-Border Institute found a complex set of reasons for the spike: the vicious rivalries caused by the breakup of large criminal organizations, the growing domestic consumption of narcotics, the heightened security on the U.S. border, and the changing dynamics of political corruption after the Institutional Revolutionary Party lost its grip on power. While the vast majority of killings occur among criminal organizations, reporters and newsrooms have increasingly come under fire from drug traffickers in recent years, CPJ research has shown.

In addition to those who have been murdered, dozens of journalists have been attacked, kidnapped, or forced into exile in connection with their coverage of crime and corruption. Reporting basic information about criminal activities—including the names of drug lords, smuggling routes, and prices—places journalists at direct risk. Being careful in what you publish helps somewhat, Luz Sosa, a police reporter in Ciudad Juárez, told CPJ in a 2009 interview. "But even that may not be enough if the reporter starts to ask delicate questions," she said. "The criminals may kill you not for what you publish, but for what they think you know."

María Esther Aguilar Cansimbe, a seasoned crime reporter in Michoacán state, knew and wrote a lot. She broke a series of stories on government corruption, police abuses, and the arrest of a La Familia drug cartel leader before she vanished in November 2009. Her husband, David Silva, himself a former police chief,

told CPJ that drug traffickers' influence is so strong in the area that he has no faith in police. "With most of the police here you don't know who you're talking to—a detective or a representative of organized crime," he said. The inquiry into Aguilar's disappearance has produced no tangible results.

Even journalists who don't aggressively cover crime or security fall victim to criminal groups. Valentín Valdés Espinosa, a 29-year-old reporter who handled general assignments for the daily *Zócalo de Saltillo* in Coahuila state, was ripped from his vehicle on a downtown Saltillo street in January 2010, tortured, and brutally murdered. The young journalist didn't report on crime regularly, but he had been part of a reporting team that covered a military raid in which a reputed Gulf cartel leader was arrested. Colleagues told CPJ that Valdés did what his profession dictated: He reported the arrest. But in Mexico, the cartels set the rules these days. His killers left a note next to the reporter's bullet-ridden body, a warning to the entire Saltillo press corps: "This is going to happen to those who don't understand. The message is for everyone."

Pervasive self-censorship throughout vast areas of the country is the ruinous product of this lethal violence. As organized crime, corruption, and lawlessness spread, reporters and news outlets are abandoning not only investigative reporting but basic daily coverage of sensitive issues such as the drug trade and municipal malfeasance.

In the border city of Reynosa, in Tamaulipas state, several journalists were abducted over three weeks in early 2010. But the local press, fearing further reprisals, avoided reporting on the kidnappings; the story was finally broken by Alfredo Corchado, a veteran U.S. correspondent for *The Dallas Morning News*. At least three Reynosa journalists are still missing, a lasting signal to the local press corps that the drug traffickers call the shots. In a series of interviews with CPJ, more than 20 Reynosa journalists told CPJ that the Gulf cartel controls local government and dictates what can and cannot be covered in the press.

In Ciudad Juárez, also along the U.S. border, the killing of veteran crime reporter Armando Rodríguez Carreón in November 2008 has terrified much of the local press corps into self-censorship. The major newspaper *Norte de Ciudad Juárez* has adopted a strict policy of not publishing information about anything that could be associated with drug cartels. "We have learned the lesson: To survive, we publish the minimum," said Editor-in-Chief Alfredo Quijano, who

acknowledged that cartel money flowed easily into local political campaigns, that police are bought off or scared off from investigating, and that the cartels had expanded into kidnapping and extortion. "We don't investigate," he said. "Even at that, most of what we know stays in the reporter's notebook."

Yet self-censorship is not always enough. In Hermosillo, the daily *Cambio de Sonora* had stopped publishing in-depth reports on organized crime and the narcotics trade but was still subjected to two grenade attacks and a series of threats in 2007. No one was injured, but the paper itself was a casualty. It suspended publication.

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*An editor in Ciudad Juárez says he has learned a lesson: To survive, he publishes the minimum.*

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A decade ago, drug violence was concentrated along the U.S.-Mexico border, but it has now spread from one end of the country to the other, particularly in the last three years. The fierce battle between drug cartels for smuggling routes, agricultural land, and domestic markets has moved south to the states of Michoacán and Guerrero, along with Tabasco, Veracruz, and Quintana Roo. The state of Chihuahua was the most violent in 2009, followed by Sinaloa, Guerrero, Baja California, Michoacán, and Durango.

Monterrey, in Nuevo León state, was once considered to be among Latin America's safest cities. But since early 2007, violence has spread as drug gangs battled for control of the city and its nearby drug route into Texas. One of Mexico's most prominent publishers, Alejandro Junco de la Vega, of Grupo Reforma, finally moved to Austin, Texas, in 2008 after finding Monterrey unsafe. The disappearance of a two-man crew for the national broadcaster TV Azteca in May 2007 contributed to that sense of insecurity.

Systemic impunity allows insecurity to take root. Mexico's overburdened and dysfunctional criminal justice system has failed to successfully prosecute more than 90 percent of press freedom-related crimes, CPJ research shows, perpetuating a climate of fear and intimidation in which unsolved attacks become the norm. The failure to prosecute the killings of journalists successfully has made Mexico the ninth-worst country in the world on CPJ's Impunity Index, which calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of the population. Mexico's

low ranking puts it among conflict-ravaged countries such as Iraq and Somalia.

The problem is rooted in widespread corruption among law enforcement, the judiciary, and the political system, especially at the state level. Complicity between police and drug gangs is so common that it routinely undermines justice and creates the widespread perception that the system is controlled by the criminals. In case after case, CPJ has found botched or negligent detective work by state prosecutors and police, many of whom complain they lack training and resources. The investigation into the 2009 murder of Bladimir Antuna García in Durango reflects this breakdown in law enforcement. Juan López Ramírez, a state prosecutor, acknowledged in a March 2010 interview with CPJ that detectives had conducted only cursory interviews with witnesses and the victim's wife. Virtually no other investigative work was done. Such inattention fuels speculation among local journalists that authorities don't want to solve the crime. "They are either afraid of who did it or they are in business with them," said Víctor Garza Ayala, Antuna's boss and publisher of *El Tiempo de Durango*.

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*In case after case, CPJ finds evidence of botched or negligent detective work by state prosecutors and police.*

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On several occasions, authorities have resorted to unlawful methods to produce questionable results, including coercion of witnesses and fabrication of evidence. The National Human Rights Commission, an independent government agency, has found systematic violations within the criminal justice system. When authorities in Iguala, in Guerrero state, arrested a suspect in the 2009 killing of reporter Jean Paul Ibarra Ramírez, for example, journalists and human rights defenders immediately cast doubt on the investigation, saying the defendant's confession might have been coerced.

The federal government has only intermittently recognized violence against the press as a national problem. In 2006, under the presidency of Vicente Fox, the government created a special prosecutor's office to investigate crimes against the press. Although the office was initially considered a step forward in combating impunity, it has proved

ineffective. That the office was given insufficient jurisdiction to undertake its own inquiries has led in part to its failures, but the special prosecutors themselves have seemed uninterested in their mission at times. In 2007, then-special prosecutor Octavio Orellana Wiarco minimized the problem of anti-press violence by telling Durango reporters: "Aside from drug trafficking, in general there are no big troubles to work in journalism." The Calderón administration has announced plans to give the office greater authority to undertake investigations, but political will is just as necessary.

CPJ and other press groups believe that the federal government must intervene more forcefully to address this national crisis, that it must assume primary responsibility for guaranteeing the right of free expression enshrined in Articles 6 and 7 of the Mexican Constitution. In practice, it is a right that millions of Mexicans, including journalists, can no longer exercise. But the Calderón administration, overwhelmed as the drug wars spiral out of control, has not prioritized freedom of the press on its national agenda. Members of Congress, for their part, have been pressured by powerful governors and state politicians whose interests are best served by maintaining local jurisdiction—and local inaction—in anti-press crimes. As a result, reforms that would give the federal government broad authority to prosecute crimes against free expression have stalled in Congress.

Critics say that federal oversight is no panacea, and they are right. CPJ has documented numerous instances in which the military and federal police have harassed and attacked journalists. In 2007, for example, Mexican troops detained, punched, blindfolded, and aggressively interrogated four reporters in the northern state of Coahuila. The reporters, all of whom had press credentials, were held for three days on vague accusations of paramilitary activity before they were finally released. Federal law enforcement is itself beset by drug-related corruption, further undermining confidence in the national government's response. But a national crisis that has stripped citizens of the basic constitutional and human right to free expression demands a full-scale national response in which the federal government is accountable.

Journalists themselves must contribute to this effort. Mexican media have not traditionally been unified in defending the rights of their colleagues to work without fear of reprisal. Such unity is crucial, as evidenced in Colombia, where strong press freedom

groups and a unified media have helped curb the scourge of deadly, unpunished violence. Mexican media groups and journalists have not yet forged strong alliances, although the severity of the crisis has started to bring them together. News outlets are now giving greater coverage to attacks on the press, and press support groups are undertaking more rigorous research.

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*A national crisis that has stripped citizens of a basic right demands a full-scale federal response.*

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Reporters and editors have also been corrupted by the same drug cartels that have infiltrated nearly every sector of society. In dozens of interviews conducted by CPJ over several years, journalists acknowledge that criminals routinely bribe them to act as cartel publicists or to buy their silence. In some instances, journalists themselves pass along bribes to their colleagues. Corruption among members of the media raises sensitive questions about whether certain journalists are killed as a result of their work or because of involvement with drug cartels, complicating the work of press advocates and tainting the reputation of the media as a whole.

Reforms must be undertaken if citizens are to reassert control over their country. In border cities such as Reynosa and Ciudad Juárez, where criminal groups exert great control and the press practices wide self-censorship, an information vacuum has taken hold. In the absence of press reports, citizens are increasingly turning to social media such as Facebook and Twitter to fill the void on vital issues such as street violence. Reynosa officials say social media networks are spreading rumors and false information, but they also recognize that the use of social media reflects a population yearning for information and struggling to understand what is happening in their communities. They know they are at war; they want to understand what is happening and how to combat it. Social media will continue to fill an important role, but political stability will ultimately depend on the restoration of the news media's ability to report freely and without fear of reprisal. ♦

## An Era of Promises and Fear

### Key events involving the press, crime, and politics during the Calderón era

**December 1, 2006:** Felipe Calderón Hinojosa takes office as president after defeating Andrés Manuel López Obrador in a hotly contested race. "Today, organized crime is trying to terrify and immobilize the public and the government," Calderón says in his inaugural speech.

**December 21, 2006:** The Chamber of Deputies creates a committee to examine attacks on the press. Gerardo Priego Tapia is appointed head of the committee. The committee disbands in 2009 but is soon recreated.

**January 20, 2007:** Rodolfo Rincón Taracena, a crime reporter in Villahermosa, Tabasco state, vanishes after leaving his newsroom. His disappearance is part of a rash of missing-person cases involving Mexican police reporters.

**May 24, 2007:** The Hermosillo daily *Cambio de Sonora* suspends publication after two grenade attacks and repeated threats. "We cannot give ourselves the luxury of waiting" for security conditions to improve, an executive says.

**July 13, 2007:** The Association of Foreign Correspondents in Mexico issues a warning to reporters traveling in Nuevo Laredo in northern Mexico. The association says it has received "information from reliable sources" that any "foreign journalist in the area could become a target for assassination."

**August 14, 2007:** Four reporters in Coahuila state are detained, beaten, and interrogated by Mexican soldiers. The reporters, who are covering military operations near Monclova, are held on vague accusations for three days before being released.

**December 8, 2007:** Three delivery workers for the daily *El Imparcial del Istmo* are shot and killed while driving a truck bearing the paper's logo in Oaxaca state. Shortly before the attack, the newspaper receives threatening e-mails and letters telling staff to tone down coverage of drug gangs.

**January 25, 2008:** Carlos Huerta Muñoz, a crime reporter for the newspaper *Norte de Ciudad Juárez*, flees Mexico after receiving anonymous death threats. The newspaper decides to limit crime coverage as a result.

**June 9, 2008:** President Calderón and members of his cabinet meet with a CPJ delegation at the presidential mansion Los Pinos. “The government agrees with the idea of federalizing crimes against freedom of expression,” Calderón tells the delegation.

**June 26, 2008:** The U.S. Congress approves a major aid package, known as the Merida Initiative, to combat drug trafficking in Mexico and Central America. The package, totaling US\$400 million for Mexico, is designed to provide equipment and training to local security agencies.

**September 17, 2008:** Assailants throw grenades into a crowd of Independence Day revelers in Morelia, Michoacán state, killing seven and injuring more than 100. An unprecedented attack on civilians, it is considered a milestone in the battle between the government and organized crime.

**October 24, 2008:** President Calderón sends to Congress a proposed constitutional amendment to make a federal offense any crime related to “violations of society’s fundamental values, national security, human rights, or freedom of expression, or for which their social relevance will transcend the domain of the states.”

**November 13, 2008:** A gunman kills veteran crime reporter Armando Rodríguez Carreón in the driveway of his home in Ciudad Juárez. His horrified 8-year-old daughter witnesses the murder.

**December 9, 2008:** Octavio Orellana Wiarco, the special prosecutor for crimes against the press, denies that Mexico is one of the world’s most dangerous countries for the press. “There is a

wrong perception depicting Mexico as a place with high numbers of journalist killings,” he says.

**January 6, 2009:** Masked gunmen in two pickup trucks fire high-caliber weapons and toss a grenade outside Televisa studios in Monterrey. No injuries are reported, but the network equips crime reporters with protective vests.

**April 6, 2009:** The Chamber of Deputies unanimously approves a bill to make crimes against the press part of the federal criminal code. The initiative takes a different approach than the Calderón proposal, but it stalls in the Senate.

**May 28, 2009:** The government offers a 5 million peso (US\$370,000) reward for information leading to those behind the murder of journalist Eliseo Barrón Hernández. The reward is considered the first of its kind since 1984. Five suspects are later arrested.

**November 2, 2009:** Authorities find the bullet-ridden body of reporter Bladimir Antuna García, about 12 hours after he is abducted on a main street in Durango. Next to his body is a note: “This happened to me for giving information to the military and for writing too much.”

**November 11, 2009:** María Esther Aguilar Cansimbe, a seasoned police reporter in Zamora, Michoacán state, goes missing. Aguilar had covered corruption and organized crime.

**February 15, 2010:** Gustavo Salas Chávez, a former Mexico City prosecutor, is appointed the new special prosecutor for crimes against the press. News reports highlight that the office had not solved any crimes under the two previous officials.

**March 8, 2010:** *The Dallas Morning News* reports that several reporters are abducted in separate episodes in Reynosa, northern Mexico. Three remain missing as of June 2010. •

# 3 | Murder in Durango

Crime reporter Bladimir Antuna García knew all the cops and crooks in Durango. When he received death threats, state investigators ignored them. When he was murdered, they ignored that as well.

Juan López Ramírez, a friendly man in a light gray suit and blue tie, looked over his large, orderly desk toward the full wall of windows in his office high in the Durango state attorney general's building. López is the state of Durango's top prosecutor for crimes against journalists. His most recent case is the abduction and murder of Bladimir Antuna García, by reputation the city of Durango's top crime reporter, the one who always seemed best informed about cops and crooks and where they came together.

López gave a CPJ representative this March day a step-by-step briefing on the investigation. "We talked to the witnesses to the abduction. I think there were two or three. But they had so little information—only that the men used an SUV, maybe a gray one." And Antuna's widow?

"She spoke to investigators twice, once when she reported her husband missing and the next day when she identified his body." But, he was asked, "Were these investigative interviews?"

"Well, a short interview when she made the identification." Since then?

"Since then, no, I don't think we have spoken to her. I doubt it." It seemed astonishing. How could authorities not thoroughly interview the person closest to the victim? The visitor from CPJ persisted: "Who was questioned next?"

"No one," he said. "We have not spoken to anyone else." It had been four and a half months since the murder, and the special prosecutor of crimes against journalists had not had his investigators speak to anyone since the day after the crime. Although López noted the case had temporarily been in the hands of federal authorities, for about three weeks, he acknowledged that state investigators had done

virtually no detective work.

López seemed to be admitting the unpardonable. His staff, he said, was a victim of a "grand chaos" that was not its fault, and certainly not his. The state, like many in Mexico, is changing from a trial process in which testimony is largely written and is handled by attorneys and judges without witnesses in court. The new system will be similar to the U.S. trial system. When it was pointed out that the change had been planned for two years and had little to do with the work of investigators in the Antuna case, López smiled courteously. There was, he repeated, much chaos.

Because no one knows who killed Antuna on November 2, 2009, or why, journalists in the city say the investigation of crime stories has essentially stopped. What reporter would take the chance of unwittingly looking into the same story that caused a group of armed men to rip Antuna out of his old SUV, torture him for hours, and strangle him?

But it's gone further than that. Reporters told CPJ that they won't look into reports of political corruption, or anything that leads to what they believe are ties between authorities, police, and the drug cartels that have so much power in the state. Their fear, they say, comes from a certainty they can't prove—that somehow there's a connection between the people who killed Antuna and a nexus of powers that run the state, powers that wrap together drug cartels, some police, and some politicians. So until journalists are sure the Antuna case is solved, they say they don't know whom to trust. Not with their lives.

Victor Garza Ayala, owner of *El Tiempo de Durango*, Antuna's principal employer, said the people who run the state don't want prosecutor López to do anything. "They know perfectly well who killed him.

They don't need an investigation," he said. "They are either afraid of who did it or they are in business with them." Neither López nor State Attorney General Daniel García Leal responded to CPJ's request for comment on the assertion.

Antuna, 39, first appeared in Durango journalism in the late 1980s, his friends said, and he went from paper to paper to radio stations. His reputation as a reliable investigator with good sources eventually pushed him highest on the police beat. Then several years ago he descended into alcohol and drug use and nearly slipped away. He came back about three years before his death, slowly emerging after rehab, working low-level jobs, getting steadier, and trying to get back into journalism. Still, editors weren't interested in hearing how he'd cleaned up.

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### *Antuna pushed out a dozen crime stories a day. Some were exclusives that reflected good sources.*

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But Garza, an elegant man who can talk about history for hours, had a new paper, *El Tiempo*. He wrote a daily political column, and when he started the paper in 2006, his reporters said, that's what he cared about the most. But then there were sliding newsstand sales, and reporters saw him pace the office in worry.

In May 2008, Antuna asked Garza for a job, one of the journeyman reporter's last prospects, his friends said. Garza thought that crime stories would work for him. Not on his dignified front page, but in the back section, the crime section, with the best of the worst crime pictures on the back page. So Garza told Antuna, yes. Then, the news hawkers sold the paper by showing the back page instead of the front. Circulation turned around, according to staffers.

Antuna was the key, they said. He pushed out eight to 12 crime stories a day, mostly short ones. A lot of them were tabloid fodder, stories covered for the headline they'd produce ("A Shootout in the Cemetery," for example), according to a review of several hundred of his stories. But sometimes there were exclusives, and sometimes there were stories that showed he had very good sources in the army and the police. A close friend said Antuna used to talk about giving the army general in charge of the Durango area tips on where to find large marijuana fields, which suggests he also

had good sources in the remote mountainous areas controlled by drug gangs, areas where marijuana and opium poppies are grown. (Giving information to authorities in this way is not considered unethical in Mexico as it would be in the United States.)

Antuna was coming back, and he was lifting *El Tiempo* with him. He was open with people in the newsroom about his alcoholism and his drug addiction, and he took time off from his shift to go to support group meetings. Antuna reconnected with his older son, the one he told friends he'd failed, and took a second newspaper job to help pay for the son's university studies in Mexico City. He was working 14 hours a day. It was his reputation and his connections that made him valuable to his second employer, *La Voz de Durango*, according to its editor, Juan Nava. Antuna's best crime coverage was going to *El Tiempo*, Nava knew, but even the leftovers were good.

In late October or early November of 2008, the first call came on Antuna's cell phone. He was in bed with his wife. He tried to shield the threatening voice, but she heard it. The caller said, "Knock it off," but in much cruder words. There were more calls, coming over many months. There were threats to stop what he was doing, but never anything specific. Just to stop it or they'd get him. Maybe, he said, it was coming directly from a drug cartel. But then he said the police protect the cartels, so maybe it was from them. He recounted the calls in a series of e-mail interviews with the Mexico City magazine *Buzos* in July 2009 for an article published that month.

He also told the magazine that on April 28, 2009, as he was going to work, a man got out of an SUV and opened fire on him or his house, he couldn't be sure. The bullets missed and he ran back inside. The man left. When Antuna got to work later, his cell phone rang and a voice said, "We've found your home. It's over for you now."

Right away, he said, he reported the assault to the state attorney general's office, a normal procedure in Mexico. Two agents came by his house for a few minutes, he said, but he was not home and that's the last he heard of an investigation. "They never came by again and I haven't heard a thing from them. .... Absolutely nothing," he said in the *Buzos* interview.

A month later, on May 27, reporter Eliseo Barrón Hernández, murdered on the other side of the state, was buried. That day, Antuna's office received a call from a man who said, "He's next, that son of a bitch," Antuna told the magazine.



Antuna also told the Center for Journalism and Public Ethics, a Mexico City-based press support group, about the attack and the threats. His account to the center was consistent with his interviews with *Buzos* and what he was telling his colleagues at *El Tiempo*. He also told the center he had been working with Barrón, the reporter murdered in May, on stories about police corruption in the state of Durango and on the Zetas criminal gang. He said some of the callers making the phone threats identified themselves as members of the Zetas.

He told the magazine and the press support group that he was getting no protection from state authorities. By the fall, he was seldom leaving his home; his boss at *El Tiempo* had set up a computer for him there so he could avoid going to the office.

By October 2009, some of Antuna's friends in the press corps said he seemed despondent and terrified, a man seemingly resigned to his own murder. No help was coming from the government, no investigation of the threats, no protection. A friend told CPJ that Antuna had confided his fears. "It's one thing if they shoot me," he told the friend. "You only feel the first one or two bullets. But I don't want them to torture me." The friend said Antuna wanted to be sure he had money and a will in place to take care of his wife and two sons, 19 and 16. There wasn't much money to partition.

Then came November 2, 10:30 in the morning, when Antuna was driving his red Ford Explorer on a wide street between a large city park and a hospital. An SUV cut him off, and he swerved across two lanes to get away but another car blocked him from behind. Witnesses said it was over in seconds: Five men with assault rifles took Antuna away; his driver's door was still hanging open when police arrived.

Twelve hours after the abduction, Antuna's body was found behind the same hospital near where the abduction had taken place. His captors had tortured him savagely, leaving deep wounds across his upper chest, according to the coroner's report. They strangled him with a belt or a strap. A note left beside Antuna's body warned others not to give information to the military.

Almost immediately, authorities said there were no leads in the case.

Just as quickly, Antuna's colleagues asked officials about the complaint Antuna had filed in April after the series of threats and the shots fired at his home. García, the state attorney general, absolved his office

of any responsibility. He told reporters that Antuna might have mentioned an attack to authorities, but that he never "ratified" the report by signing a complaint. Without "ratification," there could be no investigation. García added that Antuna had not reported the telephone death threats at all, according to journalists. In other words, the attorney general was claiming that Antuna had neglected to tell state authorities what he had been telling his fellow journalists, a news magazine, and a Mexico City press group.

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*After months of threats, Antuna filed a complaint with state officials. They wrote him off as paranoid.*

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But the attorney general's claim appears to be contradicted by records on file in his own office. The records, which were reviewed by CPJ, include an official complaint signed by Antuna and dated April 28, the day of the attack on his house.

The accompanying investigative report raises other troubling contradictions. It quotes Antuna, for example, as saying that the man in the SUV did not have a gun, although the journalist told numerous people that the assailant was not only armed, but had fired his weapon. The report portrays the attorney general's investigators as working overtime on the complaint, although Antuna said he was never directly contacted by authorities. The official follow-up report ultimately writes off Antuna as a paranoid man suffering "hallucinations."

García did not respond to CPJ's request for comment on the apparent contradictions.

The contents of the investigative file on Antuna's murder are more elusive. In a phone conversation with CPJ in early March, special prosecutor López said he would make the file available for review. When CPJ arrived for a scheduled appointment at his office on March 11, however, López said the case file had been transferred to an unspecified department in the federal attorney general's office. Calls made to federal authorities did not turn up the location of the file.

But judging by prosecutor López's description,

authorities failed to take even the simplest steps to solve the crime. Investigators did not interview any friends, enemies, sources, or colleagues. They did not examine the close ties Antuna had with police, or the gangs that control the drug business in the state's mountains. Investigators did not read news stories that Antuna had written to see whom he could have angered or check into his pending investigation into police corruption. They never bothered to check Antuna's statement that phone threats had been made by members of the Zetas criminal gang, as he told the Center for Journalism and Public Ethics. State investigators never contacted the center or retrieved telephone records that could have traced the calls.

Nor did they investigate Antuna's reported associations with an army general in charge of military operations in the state. López told CPJ that his office concluded there was no link between the murder and Antuna's military sources because the military had assured him there was none.

Opportunity after opportunity was wasted or ignored. Any one of the leads might have helped identify suspects and bring results. And while investigators failed in their jobs, the people who threatened and presumably murdered Antuna were still at work, still intimidating the journalist's family.

Antuna's friends say his widow is so terrified she has essentially gone into hiding. They say she's so afraid she won't take phone calls from assistance groups that want to offer her aid. She wouldn't speak with CPJ for this report.

Antuna's eldest son was no longer able to study in the university in Mexico City without his father's financial help. He returned to Durango and took a job in a newspaper. Friends of his family told CPJ that shortly after the killing, as the son was about to enter the newspaper building, he was nearly abducted. Soon after, he was accosted on the street by men who told him to quit his newspaper job. He did. ♦

# Why I Went Into Exile

By Luis Horacio Nájera

So far, I have not been able to figure out whether I was cowardly or brave in fleeing Ciudad Juárez with my family and three bags, leaving everything else behind. Two years into exile, I still grapple with the feelings of abandoning my home, leaving my parents, and stopping my journalism, which I loved so much after 18 years in the profession.

The decision to leave Mexico was complicated, emerging over time but arriving with sudden finality. The idea first came to mind after I received veiled warnings from corrupt police officers who “recommended” that I stop asking questions or taking photos of dead bodies that would shed light on the criminals that they—in their uniforms and badges—had protected. State police once held me at gunpoint while I was covering a shooting.

For nearly two decades I covered the Ciudad Juárez area, West Texas, and New Mexico for Grupo Reforma, one of Mexico’s most prominent publishing houses. I was threatened with death multiple times, followed, harassed, and intimidated as a result of my investigative work. In February 2006, after receiving death threats related to my coverage of the murder of a prominent lawyer, I left Juárez temporarily and went to Nuevo Laredo—where I was again followed and harassed after reporting on the activities of the Gulf cartel. I was back in Juárez a few months later, only to become the target of more threats for reporting on the killing of my colleague Enrique Perea Quintanilla in August 2006.

In pursuing what was not merely my job but my passion, I exceeded sheer reason on many occasions. So it often happened that in trying to capture the best image or dig up a scoop I crossed the thin line into danger. In 2008, I received reliable information that several journalists were named on an organized crime hit list because of their reporting on the Juárez drug wars. My source told me I was on that list. I would learn later that two others were also named: Armando Rodríguez Carreón, who was killed in November of that year, and Jorge Luis Aguirre, who is now living in exile in Texas.

I sometimes think I was like a frog in an experiment, placed in water whose temperature is raised bit by bit until it dies. Despite being photographed at crime scenes by shadowy men in luxury vehicles, despite being followed by individuals carrying assault rifles, I did not sense for some time that my life was at risk. But unlike the frog, I finally recognized I was in imminent danger when the temperature went up suddenly in August 2008.

A massacre at a Juárez drug rehabilitation center that month had exposed the use of such facilities to hide the hit men of criminal gangs. I wrote a piece detailing the complicity of state police and soldiers in concealing these killers, along with articles alleging illegal arrests and torture committed by these soldiers who were supposed to be fighting the drug traffickers.

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*One of my sources passed along a tip: I was on a drug cartel hit list.*  
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Threats came from all sides. In the crossfire, I had no one to turn to for help. Having seen the pervasive climate of violent crime and impunity, I could not trust the government and I could not simply let myself be killed under some lonely streetlight. In September 2008, I left Mexico with my family and went to Vancouver, Canada.

I am still alive, and I am fortunate for that. But I feel the pain of having fled my country and my profession. I now have a part-time job as a janitor, the only work I could find after 14 months of unemployment. My wife, who has expertise in human resources, works as a housekeeper. We are supporting our two sons and our daughter. We are alive, out of the crossfire but having lost so much. ♦

*Luis Horacio Nájera is a former correspondent for Grupo Reforma.*

## 4 | Cartel City

In Reynosa, the Gulf criminal group controls the government, the police, even the street vendors. You won't see that story in the local press. The cartel controls the media, too.

The most important story about the city of Reynosa is the one you won't learn from the local press: The Gulf cartel controls the local government, from major law enforcement all the way down to street vendor permitting. The cartel's control is so extensive that cops and cabbies and street vendors are its spies, watching the Mexican army's patrols, watching for rival drug traffickers, watching for federal investigators, watching, even, their fellow citizens. And the cartel controls the press, too, using a combination of intimidation, violence, and bribery. This is the story that 22 Reynosa journalists told CPJ but can't tell the public. They can't even let their names be published in this report, they say, because they might be killed.

It's a situation that was years in the making, one that government officials, the owners of news organizations, and journalists themselves had a hand in creating. Today in Reynosa—a city of 600,000, the largest on the border in northeast Mexico and home to American-owned assembly plants vital to the economy—everything from horrifying violence to mundane municipal corruption goes uncovered.

Drug smuggling came early to Reynosa. Perhaps 60 years ago or more it was already an important part of the economy. Until recently, drug gangs used the territory they controlled simply to ship product northward. Then, about six years ago, Reynosa became a market for street sales and finally a place to squeeze money from locals through kidnapping and extortion, journalists said. In that shift, Reynosa is on the leading edge of a debilitating pattern occurring in much of Mexico.

Mari is a part of this historical slide. After being laid off from her job at an assembly plant in early 2010,

she began selling tacos from a sidewalk cooking rig that her uncle fashioned from bicycle tires. In doing so, she also became a foot soldier in a system that collects street intelligence for drug traffickers.

As one of the many street vendors who seem to cover the city, Mari said, her assignment is to report anything in her neighborhood that could interest the cartel. At the moment, the Gulf cartel is dominant in Reynosa, and Mari's orders are to watch for any sign of the Zetas, its opponent in a war terrorizing the people of the state of Tamaulipas. The cartel is interested in what the federal police and the Mexican army are doing, of course, but it's especially curious about people who may be informing federal intelligence agents. "They want to know about new people, if they have cars, or where they live," Mari said. "Do they come two or three of them or alone?" To keep her permit to sell tacos Mari has to satisfy city officials who, she said, demand that she pass on the information to the cartel. Knowing the danger of speaking too openly, Mari asked that her last name not be used.

From the standpoint of the public, the arrangement means the city government is supporting a system of espionage against its own citizens. From the standpoint of journalism, it is an example of how the cartels have strangled the press—it's a crucial story that can't be covered without risk of death. Drug gangs have long had lookouts, but in Reynosa in the last three or four years, as the Gulf cartel began to penetrate ever deeper into city life and government, almost anyone in Reynosa can be under surveillance from the street.

Or, from a taxi. Pirate taxis, cruising about without even license plates, massively outnumber legal cabs. The police department hasn't seemed to notice. An officer who would give his name only as López

told CPJ he'd merely seen a couple of pirate cabs, and that was back a couple of months. Journalists said the pirate cabs are protected by the cartel, pay it monthly kickbacks, and are required to use their radios to report on any movement by the army. Eight pirate cabbies interviewed individually told CPJ the same thing. All asked for anonymity. "Driving taxis is the way we live, but it's the way we will die if we talk," one cabbie said. "We are the mobile information units for them." "Them" is the word people in Reynosa use instead of naming the cartel. Between cab drivers, street vendors, and others, the number of well-placed, roving spies might range into the thousands, Reynosa journalists estimate. The activities of the pirate taxis are another story that can get you killed, another topic that has gone unreported in the local press, Reynosa journalists said.

The cartels enforce this censorship with a mixture of threats, attacks, and bribery. On specific stories the cartels don't want covered—such as gunfights between traffickers and the army—they tell the police officers who work for them to tell police reporters that the news is off-limits. Many reporters on the police beat themselves take money to slant coverage in favor of the criminals who pay them, journalists told CPJ. The Gulf cartel also sponsors its own Web site, a sort of public relations outlet, according to a former reporter for the site. If a story is on the site, it is approved for coverage by the press; otherwise, the topic is prohibited, the reporter said. Other stories are prohibited by general threats issued long ago. Reporters know, for example, never to mention the names of cartel members or even the names of the cartels in their stories. They say they are even afraid to report on traffic accidents because it may turn out that one of those involved was a cartel member (or his girlfriend) whose name they did not recognize.

Reporters know they are forbidden to write stories on the widespread kidnappings in the city or the pervasive practice of extortion, which began with large companies and has worked its way down to taco stands. A senior editor who met with CPJ only under conditions of great secrecy said the cartel has made its wishes known in regard to kidnappings and extortions. "Common kidnappings—kidnappings by common criminals—they would tell us about and tell us we could cover them. Otherwise, no coverage of kidnappings. The same for extortion." It's gotten worse of late, he said. "Now they have it all. Their competition is gone, so everything is untouchable."

The editor said journalists also know what it means to go against the cartel. "They will abduct

you; they will torture you for hours; they will kill you, and then dismember you. And your family will always be waiting for you to come home." In a chilling illustration of the traffickers' brutal enforcement methods, three Reynosa journalists disappeared in March and are now feared dead. Colleagues said the three could have done something to anger either the Gulf cartel or the Zetas, or have gotten caught up in the warfare by doing favors for one of the groups.

It's hard to be sure when the Gulf cartel gained the power over the city that it has now; it didn't happen in a single blow, reporters said. Most traced the change to three or four years ago. Before then, the cartel ran a kind of parallel government from which it strongly influenced institutions such as the police and the city government. Reynosa Mayor Oscar Luebbert Gutiérrez did not respond to written questions submitted by CPJ, but journalists say the cartel is fully embedded in the government and gets nearly whatever it wants.

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*The cartel enforces censorship with threats, attacks, and bribes. Even car accidents can be off-limits.*

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For goods crossing the border, the federal government is supposed to set customs duties, and agents are to ensure the payments go to the federal treasury, reporters said. But several journalists say that the cartel, to a significant extent, both sets the fees and receives the revenue. The Treasury Ministry, which oversees customs officials, did not respond to CPJ's request for comment. Within the city government, cartel influence began with areas such as zoning rules and alcohol licensing, journalists said. Now, they said, the control has extended to lower-level officials in many city departments. This, for example, is how the cartel is able to deny Mari a street vendor's license if she refuses to inform for them. Its vast influence over municipal police means that cartel crimes are ignored while street vendor licenses are closely scrutinized, journalists said. Speaking of the police, Mari told CPJ: "Oh, they are always interested in me here and the others, too."

Reporters and editors said part of the cartel's take-over was through straight financing of political campaigns, but much is enforced through death threats. After a union official was abducted and later released, they noted, cartel members suddenly appeared as ghost workers on the city payroll and on the payrolls

of private companies. City officials who don't carry out cartel orders are afraid for their lives, reporters said. These stories, too, are not for the people of Reynosa to read or hear. As the people lost their city, journalists acknowledge, reporters could not share what they knew.

When the Gulf cartel came to the region with payoffs and threats targeting journalists, the gangsters were imposing their own vicious twist on a system already in place, one created in part by the government and the press themselves. Owners of news organizations and local government leaders have long had a shared interest in controlling what the press tells the public, according to many journalists in Reynosa. And over many years, they said, journalists have gotten used to being told to stay away from many topics—being bribed for complying and fired for refusing.

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### *After a union official was abducted, cartel members suddenly appeared on the city payroll.*

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As in most parts of Mexico, the state and local governments have historically been major advertisers in the local press. “Without government contracts maybe most of the media here would have to close,” said the senior editor who met with CPJ. Some of the ads are typical public service announcements, but others are virtual campaign ads. This advertising stream effectively gives government officials veto over stories they don't like, journalists claim, to the point that reporters hardly even think about writing one. A reporter for Reynosa's largest newspaper, *El Mañana*, gave an example. He said that several years ago when he proposed a story on what seemed to be a previous mayor's unexplained wealth, his editor told him: “We have an agreement with the mayor. If you have something bad to say about him, start your own newspaper.”

Helping to enforce the scheme is a dual system of unlivable low wages for reporters and open public payoffs, or *chayo*, from city hall. Even at the large news outlets, reporters make the equivalent of about US\$350 a month. Accepting the bribes seems necessary, but once journalists take payoffs, they are expected to treat city government favorably. Honest coverage will cost them. The president of the statewide Democratic Union of Journalists,

Oscar Alvizo Olmeda, estimated that 90 percent of Reynosa's journalists are on the public payroll, a figure with which local journalists agreed. Reporters say the system is so organized that they sign receipts at city hall when they get their money.

The senior editor said owners of news organizations encouraged the arrangement because it saved them money in salaries and kept them out of trouble with the government. The editor said, “We all know the reporter gets his *chayo* and then he becomes the government's very good friend.” Reynosa, and its state of Tamaulipas, may be Mexico's most extreme example of government payoffs to reporters, according to Mexican organizations that monitor the press.

The very scheme by which reporters and editors ignored local government weaknesses effectively enabled powerful drug traffickers to challenge a city hall too feeble and corrupt to resist. The need for honest reporting on local government was suddenly clear, but the time was past. Now, journalists say, the cartel thugs are giving orders to city authorities; the cartel is the power telling the press what the people of Reynosa can and cannot know. Censorship is enforced with a gun.

In controlling the press, the cartel wants to avoid “heating up the plaza,” a phrase that means drawing too much attention to the drug marketplace, according to journalists. They said the cartel easily controls the local government but wants the federal government to stay away from Reynosa and the state of Tamaulipas, the area the Gulf cartel dominates. “Don't think the federal government doesn't know what we are suffering,” said the senior editor. “But if the plaza is not hot, if there is no news coverage, then the federal government can pretend it doesn't know. If the citizens are kept ignorant, then the pressure for federal intervention is less.”

The situation was appalling enough as the cartel penetrated the government while the press stayed silent. But then in late February vicious combat broke out between the Gulf cartel and the Zetas. In Reynosa and communities nearby, gunfights erupted in the streets. Reports in the U.S. press put the deaths among gangsters in the dozens. But average people were in mortal danger, too, and the reporters knew, usually without being told, that they risked death if they reported the fighting. There was essentially no coverage of the war in the local press, journalists said. The owners of press outlets were threatened directly, according to Gildardo López, president of the local

Chamber of Commerce. “I know them,” López said. “Two of them are close friends. Those two went to Texas and took their families for a while.”

There were dozens of shootouts, some running for more than an hour, and nearby towns were shot up. But you wouldn’t know there was open warfare on the streets from reading the local papers, watching TV, or listening to the radio those days. Only U.S. newspapers and wire services gave it wide coverage. The situation deteriorated to the point that on March 14, the U.S. State Department authorized dependents of Foreign Service workers in the two American consulates closest to Reynosa—Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros—to leave the country.

Then, on April 1, in a spectacular daylight move against the army, one of the two warring cartels drove a convoy of SUVs to the front of a military base in Reynosa and opened fire with assault rifles and hand grenades. While the soldiers tried to react, the gangsters blocked the exits to the base with stolen trucks. The tactic seems to have been to box the soldiers inside their base to give cartel hit men freedom to kill their adversaries without interference. The military issued a press release, but there was virtually no independent information on the success of the assault or the extent of shootings citywide that followed. The local press simply did not cover the story. The main story the next day across the front page of *El Mañana*, the region’s main paper, was on an unexplained lack of interest in people picking up their voter credentials on the last day they were available.

A radio talk show host spoke of the dilemma of trying to warn the audience during the worst of the warfare without being killed for doing so. “What do I say? I can’t tell them the truth. No, not that. But

how can I let them die in a gun battle? So I might say something like, ‘In such a place it’s dangerous for now.’ Or, ‘I hear these are some good streets to stay away from.’ Or, ‘A caller said she heard the director at school X said some of the parents were taking their children home.’”

.....

*The need for honest reporting on government was urgent, but the press could no longer act.*

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The senior editor had similar reflections about the danger of telling the public the truth to help save their lives. “We can’t report that the situation is serious because that is considered heating up the plaza—much less that there are convoys of SUVs driven by killers of the Gulf cartel driving wildly through our towns shooting .50-caliber heavy machine guns down the streets. Forget that.”

But then he added something new. “Can we publish that people are hiding in their homes? Is panic good for business? So, no, we cannot.” In other words, reporting the truth about an area being shot up by gangsters is not good for advertisers, either.

López, the head of the Chamber of Commerce, said much the same. “We thought it was a good idea to censor coverage of the fighting because as a business group it’s against our interest to publish it.” He claimed there was no pressure from his group on the owners of local news organizations. It was, he said, a matter of shared interests. ♦

# How Colombian Media Met Dangerous Times

By María Teresa Ronderos

On December 17, 1986, the Colombian mafia led by Pablo Escobar killed Guillermo Cano, the courageous director of *El Espectador* who denounced drug traffickers and their accomplices by name. He was the seventh journalist killed in reprisal for his work that year. Since then, drug trafficking gangs, guerrillas, paramilitaries, and corrupt government officials have attacked the rights of Colombians to be informed by a free press.

In the face of great risks that have spanned the last quarter of a century, Colombian news media have developed strategies both to protect reporters and to avoid being silenced by illegal, armed criminal organizations.

Right after Cano was killed, the entire Colombian press corps protested. In the following 24 hours, the country received no news of any kind, in print, on radio, or on television. This blackout was a sign of mourning, yet it was also a way to seek support from society and emphasize the importance of journalism in a democracy threatened by the intimidating and brutal power of drug traffickers. To show that it would not be so easy to censor the press, *El Espectador* joined with its main competitor, *El Tiempo*, and other media outlets in the following months to investigate and publish stories about drug trafficking and its many tentacles in society. The message sent to the Medellín cartel bosses: The press would not be silenced.

Unfortunately, such courage and unity faded with time. A decade later, many more journalists had been murdered in Colombia.

So in 1996, prominent journalists joined together again to create the Foundation for a Free Press, or FLIP. The founders included the writer Gabriel García Márquez; Enrique Santos Calderón, a columnist for *El Tiempo* and a leader in the battle against impunity in anti-press crimes with the Inter American Press Association; and Santos' cousin, later the country's vice president, Francisco Santos Calderón. This organization, with initial support from the Committee to Protect Journalists, started advocating on behalf of journalists and media under attack from all sides in the country's armed conflict.

Supported further by the Peru-based Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad, FLIP went on to create a network of volunteer correspondents who have since reported on press freedom violations throughout the country. Reporters then succeeded in getting President Andrés Pastrana Arango's administration to create a special committee to protect endangered journalists. FLIP and other media organizations are part of the committee and, while it is not flawless, it has provided an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration and has succeeded in holding the government accountable for protecting freedom of expression.

Media outlets have developed other collaborative and protection strategies over the past years. At the end of the 20th century, a group of reporters published the *Manual for War and Peace Reporting* (Manual para Cubrir la Guerra y la Paz), while the nongovernmental group Peace Media (Medios para la Paz) published the *Disarming Words Dictionary* (Diccionario para desarmar palabras). Both were aimed at providing guidance for reporters covering the armed conflict, where truth is usually the first victim. In 1999, invited by La Sabana University, about 30 media outlets agreed on how to report on violence without justifying it; to refine journalistic tools such as verifying and contrasting sources; and to prioritize fact-checking to avoid being manipulated. Their slogan: "We would rather miss a piece of news than lose a life." FLIP also published a manual for journalists' self-protection that featured advice on how to deal with pressure from violent sources.

At the initiative of the newspaper publishers association, known as Andiaros, a coalition of print media outlets began working together in 2004 on dangerous assignments such as paramilitary infiltration in the lottery. This and other investigative stories were published simultaneously in 19 Colombian magazines and newspapers. It was a way of fighting self-censorship by bringing important reports to the public while reducing the risk to the local outlets closest to the violent actors. The newsweekly *Semana* led another collaborative effort, the Manizales Project, which was designed to investigate murders and threats against journalists. This collaboration would also work on the very stories



that had been thwarted when the initial reporters had been threatened, killed, or forced to flee the country.

These are valuable experiences that can inspire colleagues who are forced to work under threat of violence. Their main lesson is that when such dire times arrive, it is necessary to adjust our profession by becoming more rigorous and more cautious. Even though competition among media, so healthy under peaceful democracies, may continue, it is important

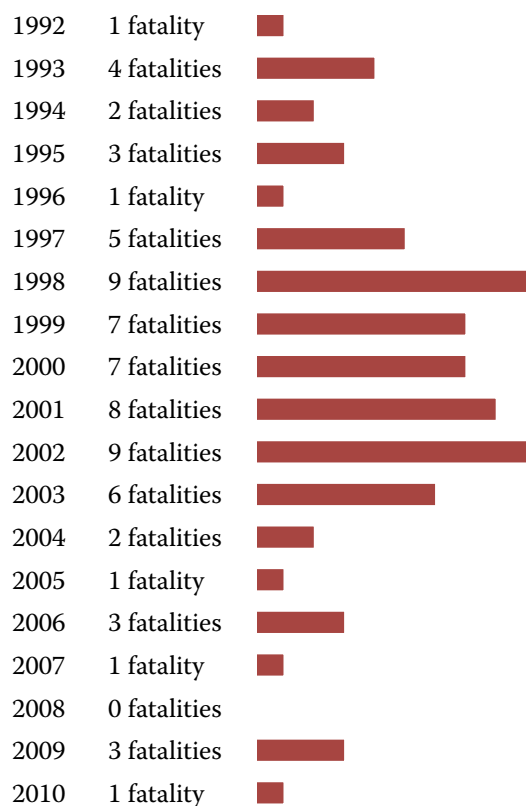
to build bridges between rivals to defend the higher value of freedom of the press and freedom of expression, which society has trusted us to uphold. •

*María Teresa Ronderos is a prominent Colombian journalist who has worked for numerous print and television news outlets. A former managing editor of Semana and former president of FLIP, she is now a member of CPJ's Board of Directors.*

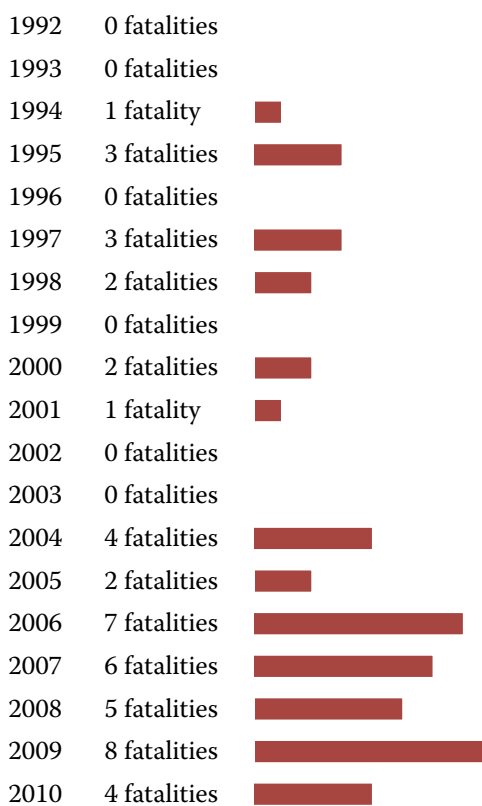
## Heading in Different Directions

Colombia remains a dangerous country for the press, but measures taken by news outlets, press freedom groups, and the government have helped reduce the fatality rate over the last two decades, CPJ research shows. Mexico, once a relatively stable country for the press, has grown increasingly dangerous during that same period. Here is a comparison of fatalities in the two countries since 1992, when CPJ began compiling detailed death records.

### Colombia



### Mexico



The data include cases in which CPJ has confirmed the motive as work-related, and cases in which journalism is a possible but unconfirmed motive.

# A Trail of Violent Repression

More than 30 journalists and media support workers have been murdered or have disappeared during the tenure of President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, who took office on December 1, 2006.

## Journalists murdered/Motive confirmed

Slain in direct relation to their work.

- 1 Rodolfo Rincón Taracena, *Tabasco Hoy*  
January 20, 2007, Villahermosa
- 2 Amado Ramírez Dillanes, Televisa and Rádiorama  
April 6, 2007, Acapulco
- 3 Alejandro Zenón Fonseca Estrada, EXA FM  
September 24, 2008, Villahermosa
- 4 Armando Rodríguez Carreón, *El Diario de Ciudad Juárez*  
November 13, 2008, Ciudad Juárez
- 5 Eliseo Barrón Hernández, *La Opinión*  
May 25, 2009, Gómez Palacio
- 6 Norberto Miranda Madrid, Radio Visión  
September 23, 2009, Nuevo Casas Grandes
- 7 Bladimir Antuna García, *El Tiempo de Durango*  
November 2, 2009, Durango
- 8 Valentín Valdés Espinosa, *Zócalo de Saltillo*  
January 8, 2010, Saltillo

## Media support workers murdered

Slain in the course of their duties.

- 9 Flor Vásquez López, *El Imparcial del Istmo*  
October 8, 2007, between Salina Cruz and Tehuantepec
- 10 Mateo Cortés Martínez, *El Imparcial del Istmo*  
October 8, 2007, between Salina Cruz and Tehuantepec
- 11 Agustín López Nolasco, *El Imparcial del Istmo*  
October 8, 2007, between Salina Cruz and Tehuantepec

## Journalists missing

- 12 Gamaliel López Candanosa, TV Azteca Noreste  
May 10, 2007, Monterrey
- 13 Gerardo Paredes Pérez, TV Azteca Noreste  
May 10, 2007, Monterrey
- 14 María Esther Aguilar Cansimbe,  
*El Diario de Zamora* and *Cambio de Michoacán*  
November 11, 2009, Zamora
- 15 David Silva, *El Mañana* and *La Tarde*  
March 2010, Reynosa
- 16 Pedro Argüello, *El Mañana* and *La Tarde*  
March 2010, Reynosa
- 17 Miguel Angel Domínguez Zamora, *El Mañana*  
March 2010, Reynosa
- 18 Ramón Ángeles Zalpa, *Cambio de Michoacán*  
April 6, 2010, Paracho

## Journalists murdered/Motive unconfirmed

Possibly slain for their work. CPJ is investigating the motives.

- 19 Saúl Noé Martínez Ortega, *Interdiario*  
April 2007, Nuevo Casas Grandes
- 20 Gerardo Israel García Pimentel, *La Opinión de Michoacán*  
December 8, 2007, Uruapan
- 21 Mauricio Estrada Zamora, *La Opinión de Apatzingán*  
February 12, 2008, Apatzingán
- 22 Teresa Bautista Merino, *La Voz que Rompe el Silencio*  
April 7, 2008, Putla de Guerrero
- 23 Felicitas Martínez Sánchez, *La Voz que Rompe el Silencio*  
April 7, 2008, Putla de Guerrero
- 24 Miguel Angel Villagómez Valle, *La Noticia de Michoacán*  
October 10, 2008, between Lázaro Cárdenas and Zihuatanejo
- 25 Jean Paul Ibarra Ramírez, *El Correo*  
February 13, 2009, Iguala
- 26 Carlos Ortega Samper, *El Tiempo de Durango*  
May 3, 2009, Santa María del Oro
- 27 Juan Daniel Martínez Gil, Rádiorama and W Radio  
July 28, 2009, Acapulco
- 28 José Emilio Galindo Robles, Radio Universidad de Guadalajara  
November 24, 2009, Ciudad Guzmán
- 29 José Alberto Velázquez López, *Expresiones de Tulum*  
December 22, 2009, Tulum
- 30 José Luis Romero, Línea Directa  
January 2010, Los Mochis
- 31 Jorge Ochoa Martínez, *El Sol de la Costa*  
January 29, 2010, Ayutla de los Libres
- 32 Evaristo Pacheco Solís, *Visión Informativa*  
March 12, 2010, Chilpancingo



## 5 | A Federal Obligation

In its offensive against criminal organizations, the federal government has left a crucial front unaddressed. Attacks on the constitutional and international right to free expression must be fought at the national level.

When the Calderón administration declared a national offensive against the powerful criminal groups threatening the nation's stability, it signaled that state and local governments were too weak and corrupt to wage a battle so central to Mexico's future. But nearly four years after beginning its offensive, the federal government has failed to take responsibility for one of the war's crucial fronts: the widespread and unpunished attacks that are destroying citizens' constitutionally and internationally protected right to free expression. The same state and local authorities so deeply corrupted by criminal groups remain largely in charge of fighting crimes against free expression, including murder, threats, and attacks on journalists and news outlets. Their record—a near complete failure to enforce the law in crimes against the press—demands that Congress and the executive branch act urgently to take responsibility for this national crisis.

The federal government has national and international responsibilities to address impunity in violence against journalists. Articles 6 and 7 of the Mexican Constitution guarantee individual rights to freedom of expression and freedom of the press, but rampant violence has effectively precluded Mexicans from exercising these rights. As a signatory of international covenants, Mexico's government has the obligation to protect the human rights guaranteed in these agreements. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees the right "to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media." The covenant further requires that governments provide an "effective remedy" for those whose rights are violated. The American Convention on Human Rights guarantees the right to free expression in nearly identical terms and states that

every individual has "the right to simple and prompt recourse ... for protection against acts that violate his fundamental rights."

Yet in the face of obvious, widespread violations of a basic human right, the federal government has not provided effective remedies. The U.N. Human Rights Committee, which evaluates compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, found in March 2010 that the Mexican government had failed to take effective action to protect the press and bring assailants to justice. The committee urged "immediate action to provide effective protection for journalists and human rights activists whose lives and security are at risk because of their professional activities." It also called on the government to "conduct immediate, effective, and impartial investigations into threats, violent attacks, and murders of journalists and human rights activists and bring those responsible to justice." In response, Mexican government representatives pledged to create better ways to protect journalists but gave no specifics.

The most significant reforms, those backed by press freedom advocates, would add crimes against free expression to the federal penal code, make federal authorities responsible for investigating and prosecuting attacks on the press, and establish accountability at senior levels of the national government. Despite some high-level promises and legislative activity, primarily in 2008 and 2009, Congress and the executive branch have thus far failed to seriously advance such reforms, leaving the investigation of anti-press crimes in the hands of state and local authorities.

"There is a consensus among the press freedom

community that federal authorities can produce a better and much stronger response than states in cases where grave violations of freedom of expression have occurred,” said Luis Raúl González Pérez, general counsel for the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, or UNAM, and an analyst who has written extensively on the issue. While the performance of federal authorities has itself been tainted by corruption and negligence at times, they are typically better trained, are subject to greater scrutiny, and have greater financial and personnel resources.

The Inter American Press Association (IAPA), the regional publishers group, has long advocated for the federalization of offenses against freedom of expression. Its press freedom director, Ricardo Trotti, calls federalization essential to the nation’s future as a democracy. Trotti, like González, said state officials “are more vulnerable to pressure from organized crime or political corruption,” which compromises their ability to address crimes against free expression.

A Congressional committee examining attacks on the press was blunter still in assessing state officials’ ability to enforce the law. “The main reason for federalization is that local authorities are often the perpetrators of these crimes,” the committee said in a February 2010 report identifying the federalization of press crimes as one of its strategic goals. CPJ’s own research has found that at least nine of the journalists who have been murdered or have disappeared during the Calderón administration had been actively investigating state or local government corruption.

The Calderón administration has been open to dialogue on the issue in the past; the president and members of his cabinet met with a CPJ delegation in June 2008. The CPJ representatives presented Calderón with a set of principles aimed at protecting freedom of expression for all citizens and creating accountability at the federal level. In those principles, CPJ sought legislation to federalize crimes against free expression and freedom of the press; assurances that federal law would conform to international standards; and reforms to strengthen the authority of the federal special prosecutor for crimes against the press. The federal special prosecutor’s office, created during the Vicente Fox administration with CPJ support, has been one of the few steps taken to address the issue at a federal level. In practice, however, the office has proved largely ineffective.

“The government agrees with the idea of federalizing crimes against freedom of expression,” Calderón told CPJ’s delegation. He pledged to put

forward a proposal, but he said it would come in the context of a broad constitutional amendment to address spiraling violence affecting many sectors of society.

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### *A Congressional committee finds local authorities are often complicit in attacks on the press.*

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Since 2008, the executive branch and Congress have moved in fits and starts to federalize crimes against free expression. Thus far, all of the efforts have fallen short. In October 2008, Calderón did propose a constitutional amendment to make a federal offense of any crime related to “violations of society’s fundamental values, national security, human rights, or freedom of expression, or for which their social relevance will transcend the domain of the states.” CPJ and others expressed concern that broad language allowing the federal government to intervene in cases of “social relevance” could be open to misinterpretation or abuse. That the proposal came in the form of a constitutional amendment further complicated chances for passage; amendments require a two-thirds vote by Congress and approval by a majority of the state legislatures. The IAPA’s Trotti is among those who believe federalization won’t pass if it is dependent on the support of state politicians.

In Congress, other approaches were taken. The committee examining attacks on the press submitted a bill that would have directly changed the federal penal code to include offenses against freedom of expression. Although the bill foundered, the Chamber of Deputies did approve legislation in April 2009 that would have added crimes against “journalistic activity” to the federal penal code and set prison penalties of up to five years for anyone who “impedes, interferes, limits, or attacks” such activities. Sentences would have been doubled if the assailant were a public official. The measure made no progress in the Senate.

The Chamber of Deputies also debated its own version of a constitutional amendment. The proposal, which would have given federal authorities jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute crimes against free expression, stripped out the “social relevance” wording that some had found problematic in the Calderón plan. The measure was approved by the Constitutional Committee of the Chamber of Deputies but progressed no further.

Nearly all of the activity took place before the Congressional elections of July 2009 changed the composition of the legislature. Since then, a lack of consensus among political parties in Congress, an unwillingness to negotiate those differences, and the emergence of other priorities have dimmed the prospects for reform, said UNAM's González. "Congress has moved at a very slow pace," he said, and when it has, its approaches have been flawed and incomplete.

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*Partisan gridlock in Congress and opposition in the states are hindering efforts at reform.*

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It's unsurprising that legislators have shown little urgency, said Gastón Luken, a Baja California deputy and member of the ruling National Action Party, or PAN. Luken, a supporter of federalization, said partisan gridlock in Congress is derailing many types of legislation. Passage of a measure to fight crimes against the press needs the support of all three major parties in Congress, including the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, and the Democratic Revolution Party, or PRD. Members of all three parties have expressed support for federalization at times, but bringing them together behind a single piece of legislation has proved elusive. Political calculations, including which party can claim a victory on the issue, have trumped progress so far, Luken said.

Members of Congress also know that federalization is unpopular among political leaders back in their home states, particularly state governors, said Gerardo Priego Tapia, a former PAN deputy who once led the Congressional committee on press attacks. Many of these politically powerful governors see federalization as an infringement on states' rights, not to mention their own authority. Opposition, said Priego, has been strongest in some of the states with the highest levels of anti-press violence.

With many state-level politicians in league with criminal organizations, Priego said, corrupted officials also have much to fear from federalization. "State authorities don't want the federal government to take over investigations because those ties may be exposed," he said. State attorneys general, who are selected by the governors, now investigate nearly all attacks on the press, which means the inquiries can be guided by narrow political considerations, Priego said.

Federal authorities can claim jurisdiction only if they conclude the offense is linked to organized crime or if military firearms were involved.

Baja California Governor José Guadalupe Osuna Millán disputed assertions of widespread state improprieties, but said he supports federalization nonetheless. "Violence against the press has become a national problem, and it requires a federal solution," Osuna told CPJ. The governor, a PAN member, said he believes at least some governors could be persuaded to support federalization. "It is something that will benefit Mexico, create a more transparent system of accountability, and protect citizens' right to be informed."

The federalization of crimes against free expression is a central element of reform, but other steps must be taken to bolster the effort. A stronger and more autonomous federal special prosecutor for crimes against the press is vital. CPJ research shows the office has failed to take significant prosecutorial steps in any press crime in its four years in existence. Two recent changes offer some hope. Gustavo Salas Chávez, a former Mexico City prosecutor, was named to the special prosecutor's post in February 2010, succeeding Octavio Orellana Wiarco, who was perhaps best remembered for making public comments that played down the severity of crimes against the press. Minister of Interior Fernando Gómez Mont and Attorney General Arturo Chávez Chávez also announced that the special prosecutor's office would operate under the direct supervision of the attorney general, rather than through the attorney general's human rights division.

UNAM's González said the attorney general's office itself should be given greater autonomy, and that prosecutors who deal with press offenses should receive additional training. The creation of a government committee that could provide direct protection for at-risk journalists would help as well, he said. Creation of such a committee, modeled on a decade-old project in Colombia, is being studied in Mexico by the Interior Ministry and has been embraced by a number of press freedom advocates. In Colombia, a committee of government officials and civil society representatives meets regularly to assess the security needs of journalists whose work has put them in danger. In some cases, the committee assigns direct government protection, and in other cases it supports tactics such as relocation. Key to the success of such a committee in Mexico would be the establishment of clear operational guidelines ensuring its independence.

In Colombia, the press freedom group Foundation for a Free Press, or FLIP, was instrumental in creating the official protection committee, as it was with a number of other initiatives credited with reducing anti-press crimes in that country. The Colombian press ultimately spoke as one in pressing the government for these solutions. Mexico's press community, long polarized, has yet to coalesce around a set of principles that would promote greater security for journalists. "Media and press groups have not come together to exert pressure on officials—they haven't been consistent," said IAPA's Trotti. A vocal and unified approach among Mexican media groups would help put reforms back on the national agenda and generate the sort of public support needed to promote passage.

Supporters of federalization know that it will not end the violence being fueled by widespread drug trafficking, extortion, and other criminal activities. CPJ research has found a number of instances in which corrupt or lax federal authorities have failed to respond to anti-press violence. And journalists' safety will always be dependent in good part on the overall security situation.

But federalization would send an important message that national leaders recognize the gravity of the situation and are accountable for correcting it. The international community has an inherent interest in having the federal government address this issue: Criminal groups are increasingly transnational, and the fight against their corrosive influences can be addressed effectively only on a broad scale. The more Mexico allows the flow of information to be controlled by drug cartels and dishonest local officials, the more it erodes its status as a reliable global partner.

Despite the shortcomings of federal investigators

and prosecutors, they are better prepared than their local counterparts in taking on a national problem. The greater resources available at the federal level offer hope for a more effective response; the higher level of scrutiny serves as a check against the corrupting power of criminal organizations.

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*Federalization would send a message that national leaders recognize the gravity of the situation.*  
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When publisher Jorge Ochoa Martínez was killed in Ayutla de los Libres in January 2010, colleagues acknowledged that it could have been the result of a personal dispute. The problem, they said, is that they will never know—and that, in itself, has sown fear and self-censorship. "We just want this investigated to the end, no matter what that end is," said Juan García Castro, a friend of Ochoa and head of the Guerrero state weekly newspaper association. If it was a personal matter, he said, "we can accept that, but we want an honest investigation."

And that does not happen in Mexico much of the time because law enforcement, from Guerrero to Tamaulipas, has been taken over by the criminals. "Nothing harms a people more than a government that does not take care of its citizens," said Armando Prida Huerta, the owner of Síntesis, a chain of regional newspapers, and the head of a press support group called the Foundation for Freedom of Expression "Without federalization of crimes against the press, violence against the media will continue." ♦

# In Tijuana, An Unlikely Anniversary

By Adela Navarro Bello

It might not seem to be much of a journalistic achievement for a newsweekly to reach its 30th anniversary when there are outlets in the Americas that are two centuries old. But this newsweekly is in Mexico, along the dangerous border with the United States.

Mexico's northern border is one of the most dangerous places in the world to exercise free, independent, and investigative journalism. It is not an overstatement to say that, month after month, reporters are murdered or threatened or simply disappear. Since President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa took office nearly four years ago, those attacks have accelerated.

On April 11 of this year, *Zeta* celebrated its 30th anniversary. We did so in the midst of threats, and we carry the burden of our murdered editors, as journalist Miguel Angel Granados Chapa said in a speech to commemorate our anniversary. The assaults on *Zeta*, founded by Jesús Blancornelas and Héctor Félix Miranda in 1980, and its independent and investigative journalism, have indeed been dreadful.

The two founders of the publication were attacked. Félix Miranda was killed in April 1988. Blancornelas miraculously survived an assassination attempt in November 1997 in which his bodyguard and assistant, Luis Lauro Valero, was murdered. The painful loss of yet another colleague would tear at *Zeta's* editorial board in 2004. Editor Francisco Javier Ortiz Franco published photographs and names of Arellano Félix drug cartel members just weeks before being killed in June 2004.

Under such circumstances, it has not been easy to continue our work. The newsweekly almost shut down on a few occasions. "Not another life—how many more do I need to understand it is not worth it?" Blancornelas asked himself during that painful year of 2004. The perseverance of those who stood by Blancornelas in his sorrow allowed *Zeta* to carry on. Our passion for doing what we know, what inspires us, and what our Baja California readers need, has permitted *Zeta* to move forward. Six more years have gone by, and here we stand.

*Zeta* has new management and a revamped editorial board, but press conditions have not changed. Impunity reigns in Mexico, particularly along the northern border where the murders of journalists, including the attacks on *Zeta*, have gone unsolved. With guns and money, drug traffickers have control over police, judges, prosecutors, and entire towns. This makes investigative journalism extraordinarily difficult.

In January 2010, *Zeta's* editors were once again threatened. Members of the Arellano Félix drug cartel disclosed their intentions to kill us and attack our premises. Intelligence officials in the United States and Mexico warned us about this threat, and we were provided with protection. Yet those who allegedly ordered the attack are still free. We can still be their target. And we know from experience that bullet-proof vests and armed bodyguards are not conducive to conducting interviews, pursuing investigations, and gathering news.

Although our physical and editorial freedom is threatened, *Zeta* staffers continue doing our work. Week after week, we inform the people in Baja California about what goes on in the state, about abuses committed by a government that promised change and is increasingly looking like the one it replaced. We report on complicity between authorities and criminals; widespread police corruption; and the names and faces of those who flood our streets with blood, drugs, and lead.

To reach 30 years old then—in a place where the government can provide no guarantees for free expression, for the exercise of investigative journalism, for life itself—is actually a heroic achievement. With the support of our readers, we will uphold the principles and legacy set forth by Jesús Blancornelas.

We have marked 30 long years under threat. And here we stand. ♦

*Navarro is co-editor of the Tijuana-based Zeta and a 2007 recipient of CPJ's International Press Freedom Award.*

## What They Said

“This is going to happen to those who don’t understand. The message is for everyone.”

–A note left beside the body of Valentín Valdés Espinosa, a Saltillo newspaper reporter murdered in January 2010 after reporting details of a drug raid.

“Those crimes where the victim is a journalist, in my opinion, can and should be considered federal crimes.”

–President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, discussing a National Commission on Human Rights report, in March 2010.

“Even though I did not have a passport, I decided to cross the border. ... I knew we would be stopped and detained by immigration authorities, but I rather preferred that than being dead.”

–Mexican journalist Ricardo Chávez Aldana to the Ciudad Juárez station Radio Cañón in December 2009. Chávez had received death threats for his radio commentary.

“We have learned the lesson: To survive, we publish the minimum.”

–*Norte de Ciudad Juárez* Editor-in-Chief Alfredo Quijano to CPJ in June 2009 after the murder of journalist Armando Rodríguez.

“The Mexican government acknowledges that impunity in these crimes favors their repetition and spreads self-censorship among reporters, which in turn undermines freedom of expression and the rule of law.”

–Carlos Aguilar, chief of the federal Office for Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, speaking at a 2008 World Press Freedom Day event.

“A month ago I sat next to a cop, turned on my computer, and opened my blog. The threats were there: ‘My dear Lydia Cacho get ready to be found soon with your throat slit, your pretty head will be left outside your apartment if you think you are so brave bye.’”

–Lydia Cacho, a prominent Mexican journalist, writes on the CPJ Blog in August 2009.

“It is worrisome that attacks against journalists in our country provoke diverse reactions, including outrage, lack of interest, a sort of indulgence, and even veiled attempts to justify them.”

–From a February 2010 report issued by a Chamber of Deputies committee monitoring attacks on the press.

“Aside from drug trafficking, in general there are no big troubles to work in journalism.”

–Octavio Orellana Wiarco, then special prosecutor for crimes against the press, playing down anti-press attacks in comments to Durango reporters in October 2007.

“The main source of danger for journalists is organized crime—and the second is the government. The worst scenario for journalists is when organized crime and the government become partners. And in many parts of this country, they are completely intertwined.”

–Gerardo Priego Tapia, a former member of the Chamber of Deputies, to CPJ in September 2008.

“We are here, journalists. Ask Eliseo Barrón. El Chapo and the cartel do not forgive. Be careful, soldiers and journalists.”

–A banner hung by the Sinaloa cartel on a main avenue in Torreón in May 2009. Barrón, a local reporter, had been slain days earlier. ♦



# 6 | Recommendations

CPJ offers these recommendations to Mexican authorities, the international community, and the journalism community:

## Mexican Authorities

### To President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa

- Use the full power of your office to ensure that all citizens, including members of the media, can exercise their right to freedom of expression as guaranteed in Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitution. Publicly condemn acts of violence against journalists as crimes not only against citizens, but against the public's right to freedom of expression.
- Bring to fruition your pledge to federalize crimes against free expression. Working with Congress, use the power of your office to enact legal reforms that would federalize crimes against free expression and assign responsibility for investigating and prosecuting such crimes to federal authorities. Ensure that all legislation conforms with international standards guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression.
- Until legal reforms are adopted, ensure that federal law enforcement officials take responsibility for all attacks against the press that fall within their existing jurisdiction. Federal authorities are currently empowered to investigate offenses involving links to organized crime and the use of military weapons. Direct federal officials to investigate these cases thoroughly and prosecute the perpetrators to the full extent of the law.
- Until legal reforms are adopted, use your influence to urge that state authorities fully investigate and prosecute all crimes against the press that fall within their existing jurisdiction.
- Promote the creation of a government committee that will provide direct protection for journalists at imminent risk.
- Use your influence to ensure that the office of the federal special prosecutor for crimes against free expression is strengthened so it has sufficient authority and resources to enforce the law.
- Develop new procedures and training to ensure that federal police and military forces understand that journalists have the right to cover law enforcement operations without interference.

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### To Attorney General Arturo Chávez Chávez

- Strengthen the office of the federal special prosecutor for crimes against free expression with the goal of ensuring that it has sufficient authority and resources to enforce the law.
- Ensure that federal law enforcement officials assume responsibility for all attacks against the press that fall within their current jurisdiction under the law. Direct federal law enforcement officials to investigate these cases thoroughly and prosecute the perpetrators to the full extent of the law.
- Use the full resources of your office to bring arrests and win convictions in the November 2008 murder of Armando Rodríguez Carreón in Ciudad Juárez. The case, now in the hands of federal authorities, has been identified by CPJ as one of the 10 emblematic cases of impunity in journalist murders worldwide.
- Provide training to prosecutors assigned to crimes against free expression. Ensure that this training addresses the unique problems facing journalists and the vital national role of a free press.
- Cooperate fully with state attorneys general in current investigations of attacks against the press. Demand that state authorities cooperate and communicate fully with your office.

## To Congress

- Working with the executive branch, enact legal reforms that would federalize crimes against free expression and assign responsibility for investigating and prosecuting such crimes to federal authorities. Ensure that this legislation places accountability at senior levels of the national government. Ensure that all legislation conforms with international standards.
  - The congressional committee that monitors attacks against the press should take a leading role in advocating legal reforms that would federalize crimes against free expression; in examining other systemic problems that thwart justice; in pursuing ongoing reforms; and in advocating on behalf of citizens' rights to free expression.
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## The International Community

### To the U.N. Human Rights Committee

- Hold the Mexican federal government accountable under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights for providing effective remedies for crimes against freedom of expression.
  - Monitor and promote Mexico's compliance with the committee's March 2010 findings, which called for "immediate action to provide effective protection for journalists whose lives and security are at risk."
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### To the Organization of American States

- Hold the Mexican federal government accountable under Principle 9 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Principle 9 states that "the murder, kidnapping, intimidation of and/or threats against social communicators, as well as the material destruction of communications media, violate the fundamental rights of individuals and strongly restrict freedom of expression."
  - Set specific goals to ensure Mexico's compliance with recommendations issued by the office of the special rapporteur for freedom of expression. The special rapporteur has urged implementation of measures to guarantee the lives and safety of journalists at risk, to give federal authorities broader jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute press crimes, and to strengthen the office of the federal special prosecutor for crimes against journalists.
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### To the European Union

- Raise the issue of impunity in attacks against Mexican journalists in the context of the human rights clause of the Economic Partnership, Political Coordination, and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and Mexico. Address the issue in the next session of the EU-Mexico civil society forum, scheduled for October 2010.
  - Based on its March 2010 resolution concerning violence in Mexico, the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs and its human rights subcommittee should convene a hearing on attacks against the press in Mexico.
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### To the U.S. government

- Ensure that the issue of violence against the press in Mexico is regularly addressed as part of bilateral communications. President Barack Obama and high-ranking officials of his administration should make clear that the United States has deep concern about pervasive violence against the Mexican press and considers the issue to be a priority.
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## The Journalism Community

### To the news media

- Consistently cover the issue of violence against the media. Treat attacks against journalists, even those from competing news organizations, as worthy of news coverage. Speak out against attacks on the press in on-air commentary and editorial pages.

### To press freedom organizations

- Forge consensus on a set of principles to protect journalists and work together to ensure adoption. ♦

# Appendix I: Journalists Murdered

## Motive Confirmed

CPJ research shows the following journalists have been murdered in direct relation to their work during the tenure of President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, who took office on December 1, 2006.

### Rodolfo Rincón Taracena *Tabasco Hoy*

January 20, 2007,  
in Villahermosa

Rincón, 54, was last seen leaving the newsroom around 8 p.m. He had just finished an investigative article on a criminal gang targeting cash-machine customers in Villahermosa, capital of the southern Gulf coast state of Tabasco.

Rincón was considered a dogged and seasoned crime reporter. The day before he vanished, the newspaper ran a two-page spread in which he described illicit “drugstores,” or *narcotiendas*, run by traffickers. The story, which named several suspects, was accompanied by a map pinpointing the distribution centers and a photograph showing a family allegedly selling drugs. In his cash-machine story, Rincón specified where the criminals’ safe houses were. “It was his typical exclusive,” Roberto Cuitláhuac, the paper’s crime editor, told CPJ.

Rincón was used to getting threats, according to his longtime partner, Olivia Alaniz Cornelio, but a threat he received a month before his disappearance seemed to unnerve him. At the time, rival crime groups eager to control the state’s strategic drug smuggling routes had begun resorting to beheadings and other forms of horrific violence.

On March 1, 2010, Silvia Cuéllar, the spokesperson for the Tabasco state attorney general’s office, told a press conference that Rincón had been kidnapped and killed by the Zetas criminal group. Five low-level members allegedly confessed to the crime, with the killer identified as a man who had died in a June 2007 gunfight with Tabasco police. The authorities said the burned remains of a body found in 2007 belonged to Rincón, although DNA tests were inconclusive.

The suspects were charged with homicide and participation in organized criminal activity. They were being detained as of June 2010 pending trial.

*Tabasco Hoy* journalists told CPJ that they were very skeptical of the investigation, in part because of the inconclusive DNA tests. Members of the *Tabasco Hoy* staff, who spoke on condition of anonymity for safety reasons, told CPJ that they had received threats in response to their criticism of the probe.

### Amado Ramírez Dillanes Televisa and Radiorama

April 6, 2007,  
in Acapulco

Ramírez, 50, Acapulco-based correspondent for Televisa and host of the daily news program “Al Tanto” on Radiorama, was shot after leaving Radiorama studios about 7:30 p.m. Ramírez had just stepped into his car when an assailant shot him twice from outside the driver’s window, a colleague told CPJ. A wounded Ramírez ran into the lobby of a nearby hotel, but the attacker followed and shot the journalist in the back, according to press reports.

Within days, state officials detained two men, one of whom was soon

released. The other suspect, Genaro Vázquez Durán, was convicted and sentenced in March 2009 to 38 years in prison. Federal authorities said Vázquez matched a description provided by witnesses and possessed illegal weapons of the type used in the murder. Vázquez's lawyer told reporters that he would appeal.

Local human rights groups and journalists have expressed concern that no clear motive was established, that witnesses implicating Vázquez were not credible, and that some witnesses could not be placed at the crime scene. One witness, Salvador Cabrera, told an Acapulco court in November 2007 that he had been coerced into identifying Vázquez in a police lineup.

The Guerrero state attorney general's office and the federal special prosecutor for crimes against journalists did not respond to CPJ's requests for comment.

Ramírez's death occurred as rival drug cartels were battling for turf and engaging in waves of execution-style killings in and around Acapulco. In March 2007, he had aired a Televisa report linking the murders of local police officers to drug traffickers. Misael Habana de los Santos, Ramírez's co-host at Radiorama, said the journalist had received several death threats by cell phone.

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On the evening of September 23, 2008, four unidentified men in a van shot Fonseca as he hung anti-crime posters on a major street in the capital city of Villahermosa, in the southern Gulf coast state of Tabasco, according to witnesses and local police. One of the posters read: "No to Kidnappings," and another declared support for the Tabasco governor. Fonseca, 33, died from chest wounds at a local hospital the next morning.

Fonseca, known by the affectionate Mexican nickname "The Godfather," was the charismatic host of a popular morning call-in show "El Padrino Fonseca" (The Godfather Fonseca), geared toward young listeners. On his show, Fonseca had announced plans to hang the posters in line with his anti-crime campaign, according to CPJ interviews.

In October 2008, Tabasco state authorities arrested five men and one woman in connection with the slaying. The next month, military officials in neighboring Chiapas state announced the arrests of three more men. Alex Alvarez Gutiérrez, deputy prosecutor for the Tabasco attorney general's office, told CPJ that the murder was a direct result of the journalist's anti-crime campaign.

One suspect, described as a member of the Zetas criminal group, was cooperating with Mexico's anti-organized crime unit and was being held in a witness protection program. The remaining suspects were charged with Fonseca's murder and were being held in a high-security prison in Nayarit state, according to the federal attorney general's office, local news reports, and CPJ interviews with reporters in Tabasco. Those suspects also face other federal criminal charges, including kidnapping and drug trafficking counts. No trial had been scheduled as of June 2010.

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An unidentified assailant gunned down Rodríguez, 40, as the veteran crime reporter sat in a company sedan in the driveway of his home. Rodríguez's eight-year-old daughter, whom he was preparing to take to school, watched from the back seat.

Rodríguez had told CPJ that he had been receiving threats and that intimidation had become routine in the violent border city. "The risks here are

Alejandro Zenón  
Fonseca Estrada  
EXA FM

September 24, 2008,  
in Villahermosa

Armando Rodríguez  
Carreón

*El Diario de Ciudad Juárez*

November 13, 2008,  
in Ciudad Juárez

high and rising, and journalists are easy targets,” Rodríguez told CPJ. “But I can’t live in my house like a prisoner. I refuse to live in fear.” Days before he was murdered, Rodríguez had written an article accusing a local prosecutor’s nephew of having links to drug traffickers.

In July 2009, the lead federal investigator working on the Rodríguez murder was shot to death. His replacement was murdered less than a month later. In an April 2010 interview with *The Texas Tribune*, an online news outlet, Juárez Mayor José Reyes Ferriz said there were no leads or suspects in the case.

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**Eliseo Barrón  
Hernández**  
*La Opinión*

May 25, 2009,  
in Gómez Palacio

At least seven hooded gunmen invaded the home of Barrón, a 35-year-old reporter for *La Opinión*, a paper based in the city of Torreón, Coahuila, in northern Mexico. Barrón had worked for the paper for 10 years, commuting from nearby Gómez Palacio, in neighboring Durango state.

As his horrified wife and two young daughters watched, assailants beat the reporter and forced him from his house into a vehicle. His body was found in an irrigation ditch with a gunshot wound to the head, according to Durango law enforcement officials. Days before his abduction, Barrón had covered a police corruption scandal that resulted in the dismissal of numerous officers, according to the newspaper *Milenio*, which owns *La Opinión*.

On the day of Barrón’s funeral, five banners purportedly signed by Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, the notorious leader of the Sinaloa drug cartel, were hung in prominent spots in Torreón. One banner said: “We are here, journalists. Ask Eliseo Barrón. El Chapo and the cartel do not forgive. Be careful, soldiers and journalists.”

In June 2009, the Mexican army linked several suspects picked up on unrelated narcotics and weapons charges to the Barrón murder. One suspect, Israel Sánchez Jaimes, told investigators that a local cartel leader had ordered Barrón’s murder to “teach a lesson to other local journalists,” according to a statement issued by the federal attorney general’s office. In August 2009, a federal judge in Coahuila state ordered that five suspects be tried for the murder, the attorney general’s office said. A spokeswoman for the attorney general told CPJ in April 2010 that she could provide no updated information, including the suspects’ whereabouts and trial date. Barrón’s colleagues told CPJ they were concerned that Sánchez’s statements were made under duress.

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**Norberto Miranda  
Madrid**  
Radio Visión

September 23, 2009,  
in Nuevo Casas Grandes

Around 11 p.m., at least two masked gunmen burst into the offices of Radio Visión and shot Miranda multiple times in the back of the neck, a spokesman for the state prosecutor’s office told CPJ. News reports said he died at the scene. Miranda’s brother, José, a Radio Visión staffer, was present but unharmed.

Miranda, 44, known as “El Gallito” (The Tough Guy), wrote the Web column “Cotorreando con el Gallito” and was a host for the online station Radio Visión. In his last columns, he criticized the lack of safety in Nuevo Casas Grandes and its surrounding areas. His final column detailed what he said was a string of 25 execution-style murders in the area. The journalist attributed the violence to the Juárez cartel, which was battling the Sinaloa cartel for control of Chihuahua state.

Miranda had also covered the capture of members of La Linea, an armed group associated with the Juárez cartel. The coverage led to threats against Miranda from sources affiliated with the cartel, local reporters told CPJ.

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Two SUVs intercepted a Ford Explorer being driven by reporter Antuna on a main street in the capital city of Durango in northern Mexico. Witnesses told local reporters that five men with assault rifles pulled Antuna from his vehicle and drove him away. That evening, local authorities found Antuna's body near the kidnapping scene with a note that read: "This happened to me for giving information to the military and for writing too much." His body showed evidence of strangulation, according to the coroner's report.

Antuna, 39, was a seasoned crime reporter in Durango, where the Sinaloa and Zetas crime groups were battling for turf. Antuna told the Mexico City-based Center for Journalism and Public Ethics that he had received telephone death threats, some from callers identifying themselves as members of the Zetas. He also told coworkers and the Mexico City magazine *Buzos* that he had received threats.

On April 28, 2009, as Antuna was leaving home, an assailant opened fire on his house, the reporter recounted in an interview with *Buzos*. No injuries were reported, but Antuna received a call later that day from an anonymous person who said: "We've found your home. It's over for you now." That day, Antuna reported the attack and the earlier threats to the state attorney general's office, but he told colleagues that authorities never contacted him to follow up. Records on file at the attorney general's office show that authorities did not take his complaint seriously, calling Antuna "paranoid."

Antuna told the Center for Journalism and Public Ethics that he had been investigating police corruption and, in the process, had collaborated with Eliseo Barrón Hernández, a reporter who was slain in May 2009. Antuna was also investigating the May 2009 murder of fellow *El Tiempo de Durango* reporter Carlos Ortega Samper.

Juan López Ramírez, the state prosecutor for crimes against the press, acknowledged in a March 2010 interview with CPJ that detectives had conducted only cursory interviews with witnesses and the victim's wife.

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Valdés, 29, a general assignment reporter for the newspaper *Zócalo de Saltillo*, was abducted in downtown Saltillo after several men in two SUVs intercepted the vehicle in which he was riding with two colleagues. One reporter, who remains unidentified, was abducted along with Valdés, but was later freed. The third colleague was not forced into the vehicle.

The next morning, the Coahuila attorney general's office announced that Valdés' body had been found in front of a local motel, the Motel Marbella. He had been shot several times, his arms and legs had been bound, and his body showed evidence of torture. A handwritten message found alongside his body read: "This is going to happen to those who don't understand. The message is for everyone."

The state attorney general's office told local reporters that an organized criminal group was behind the murder. Local reporters told CPJ that Valdés was likely targeted for a December 29, 2009, story about military raids at the Motel Marbella. The story, which ran without bylines, identified a leader of the Zetas criminal group as being arrested in one of the raids. Information about the cartel leader's capture was reported by Valdés, CPJ sources said. It was considered a message from the cartel that the reporter's body was left at the motel.

The newspaper is not pressing authorities for a thorough investigation, its editor, Sergio Cisneros, acknowledged. "We are not going to get mixed up in it," he told CPJ. "I don't believe there will be results, so why push?" Cisneros said investigators did not search the newsroom or Valdés' computer.

Bladimir Antuna  
García

*El Tiempo de Durango*

November 2, 2009,  
in Durango

Valentín Valdés  
Espinosa

*Zócalo de Saltillo*

January 8, 2010,  
in Saltillo

## Motive Unconfirmed

CPJ research shows the following journalists have been murdered during the tenure of President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, who took office on December 1, 2006. CPJ is investigating to determine whether these killings were in direct reprisal for the victims' work.

### Saúl Noé Martínez Ortega

*Interdiario*

April 2007,  
in Nuevo Casas Grandes

Martínez, a 36-year-old crime reporter, was found dead in the northern state of Chihuahua a week after he was abducted by armed men in neighboring Sonora state.

Martínez was seized on the night of April 16, 2007, outside a municipal police station in Agua Prieta. Press reports said that after a high-speed chase, Martínez stopped his SUV at the entrance to the station and called for help. But heavily armed gunmen forced the reporter into their vehicle and drove off. On the morning of April 23, a passerby discovered the journalist's body wrapped in a blanket on a road outside the town of Nuevo Casas Grandes, near the border between Chihuahua and Sonora, according to press reports and CPJ interviews.

Martínez had been dead for approximately six days, said José Larrinaga Talamantes, a spokesman for the state attorney general's office in Hermosillo. He had been beaten and apparently died of a blow to the head, the journalist's brother, Erick Martínez Ortega, told CPJ.

Martínez covered crime during night shifts for *Interdiario*, an Agua Prieta newspaper that published three times a week. Although investigators initially cited the reporter's work as a possible motive, they have not disclosed further leads or arrests in the case.

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### Gerardo Israel García Pimentel

*La Opinión de Michoacán*

December 8, 2007,  
in Uruapan

After a high-speed pursuit through the streets of Uruapan, two unidentified gunmen shot García at least 20 times at close range in front of the Hotel Ruán, where the reporter lived, according to news reports. As many as 50 shell casings, most from an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle, were found at the scene, police told reporters.

García, 28, covered agriculture, education, and, at times, crime in Uruapan, the second-largest city in Michoacán. One of García's final stories centered on a local public school teacher accused of abusing a student in a neighboring town. García had not reported any threats to his colleagues or family, *La Opinión* Deputy Editor Jaime Márquez Rochin told CPJ. State and federal authorities told CPJ they had not identified any suspects or motives.

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### Mauricio Estrada Zamora

*La Opinión de Apatzingán*

February 12, 2008,  
in Apatzingán

Estrada, 38, a crime reporter for the daily *La Opinión de Apatzingán* in the central state of Michoacán, was last seen leaving his newsroom to return home to his wife and young son, his family told CPJ.

Local authorities found his car the next morning in the neighboring municipality of Buena Vista Tomatlán. The vehicle's engine was on, the doors were open, and several items were missing, including a stereo and Estrada's camera and laptop, *La Opinión* journalists said. The case was assigned to the state attorney general's kidnapping unit, and a helicopter search was conducted in outlying areas.

Estrada's relatives told CPJ that the reporter had a dispute in January 2008 with a Federal Investigations Agency (AFI) officer they knew only as "El Diablo" (The Devil). "The day he had that fight with the AFI agent, he came home shaking," Estrada's wife, María Dolores Barajas, told CPJ. A spokeswoman for the federal attorney general's office, which briefly took control of the case, said investigators could not identify any AFI agent known as "El Diablo" or make a connection between Estrada's disappearance and a federal agent.

Barajas said that she considers her husband dead and that she has requested a death certificate from local authorities. Víctor Arredondo, a spokesman for the state attorney general, said that a death certificate would not be issued because the case might someday be reopened.

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Bautista, 24, and Martínez, 20, producers for a community radio station in the southern state of Oaxaca, were shot by unidentified men armed with assault rifles in an ambush along a rural road. Three others in the vehicle, including a young child, were injured, local news reports said.

The journalists were returning from a workshop and promotional event for their station, Radio Copala, or "La Voz que Rompe el Silencio" (The Voice that Breaks the Silence). The station, launched in January 2008 and based in the rural town of San Juan Copala, catered to the local Triqui indigenous group and offered programming in both the Triqui language and Spanish. The two producers covered a range of topics, from political news and health to education and cultural events, Jorge Albino Ortiz, general coordinator of the station, told CPJ. After the murders, the station reduced its coverage of sensitive political topics.

No arrests or developments were reported as of June 2010, according to news reports. Oaxaca state officials did not respond to CPJ requests for comment.

The area surrounding San Juan Copala, part of Oaxaca's impoverished Mixteca region, has been known for long-running political and land disputes, often linked to power brokers from Oaxaca state's ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party. Pro-state government paramilitary groups have been present in the area. In January 2007, tensions escalated when a Triqui movement declared its intention to make San Juan Copala an autonomous municipality.

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Police found Villagómez's body, bruised and riddled with gunshot wounds, in a garbage dump near a coastal highway between the towns of Lázaro Cárdenas, where he edited the regional newspaper *La Noticia de Michoacán*, and Zihuatanejo, where he lived with his wife and three children.

Villagómez, 29, had last been seen the night before, when he left his newsroom in Lázaro Cárdenas, a port city on the southern Pacific coast of Michoacán, around 10:30 p.m. and dropped two colleagues off at their homes, law enforcement officials and journalists told CPJ.

Villagómez's wife, Irania Iveth Leyva Faustino, told CPJ that her husband had received recent phone threats from callers identifying themselves as members of the Zetas criminal group. Villagómez's paper regularly covered crime, including cartel activities. Authorities did not disclose any arrests or other information on the case.

Teresa Bautista  
Merino

Felicitas Martínez  
Sánchez

La Voz que Rompe el  
Silencio

April 7, 2008,  
in Putla de Guerrero

Miguel Angel  
Villagómez Valle

*La Noticia de Michoacán*

October 10, 2008,  
between Lázaro Cárdenas  
and Zihuatanejo



Jean Paul Ibarra  
Ramírez  
*El Correo*

February 13, 2009,  
in Iguala

Ibarra, a photographer for the Iguala newspaper *El Correo*, and Yenny Yuliana Marchán Arroyo, a contributor to the local daily *Diario 21*, were riding a motorcycle to an assignment around 10 p.m. A gunman aboard a second motorcycle pulled alongside and fired repeatedly, according to news reports and the special prosecutor for crimes against journalists.

The gunman then shot the photographer a final time in the head, police told CPJ. Ibarra, 33, died at the scene, press reports said. Marchán, 22, was hit three times and suffered leg wounds. Local journalists told CPJ that Ibarra had mentioned receiving at least one threat in relation to his work.

In March 2009, state investigators announced the arrest of a local merchant, Mario Cereso Barrera, and said the killing had been motivated by a dispute over a necklace transaction. Local reporters told CPJ they were skeptical about the investigation, particularly the alleged motive and investigators' apparent failure to interview witnesses. Guerrero state human rights officials have seconded their concerns. Hipólito Lugo Cortes, director of the Guerrero state human rights commission, issued a statement expressing concern that Cereso had made self-incriminating statements under duress.

The Guerrero state attorney general's office did not respond to CPJ requests for comment on the case or the accusations made by the local human rights office. Cereso remained in detention without formal charge as of June 2010.

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Carlos Ortega  
Samper  
*El Tiempo de Durango*

May 3, 2009,  
in Santa María El Oro

Two pickup trucks intercepted Ortega, a reporter for the daily *El Tiempo de Durango*, as he was driving home in the town of Santa María El Oro in the northern state of Durango, colleagues told CPJ.

Four unidentified individuals got off the trucks and pulled the reporter from his car, *El Tiempo de Durango* journalists said. As he resisted, the assailants shot him three times in the head with a .40-caliber pistol, according to news reports and CPJ interviews. Ortega, 52, died at the scene.

In an April 2 article, the journalist had alleged that Mayor Martín Silvestre Herrera and Juan Manuel Calderón Guzmán, the local representative for federal programs, had threatened him in connection with his recent reporting on the conditions of a local slaughterhouse. In the same story, Ortega wrote that he was investigating allegations of corruption involving a local police officer, Salvador Flores Triana. In a subsequent story, his last, journalist said that the three men should be held responsible if anything were to happen to him or his family.

Ortega had worked as the Santa María El Oro correspondent for *El Tiempo de Durango* for less than a year. His editor, Saúl García, told CPJ that he believed Ortega had been killed in retaliation for his reporting on local government corruption. Authorities did not disclose a possible motive.

Silvestre told CPJ that he had no involvement in the murder. While acknowledging having had disagreements with Ortega, the mayor said he had never threatened him. CPJ phone calls to the other two officials went unanswered in 2009. Phone messages left for Calderón in May 2010 were not returned. Flores could not be located for comment in May 2010.

No suspects had been detained as of June 2010.

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Martínez, 48, anchor of the radio news programs “W Acapulco” on national W Radio and “Guerrero en Vivo” on local Radiorama Acapulco, was found gagged and partially buried in a vacant lot in La Máquina, a town in the southern Pacific state of Guerrero. The journalist’s body showed evidence of torture, with his hands and feet tied and head wrapped in tape, authorities told local reporters. A forensic examination found that Martínez had been asphyxiated, the newsweekly *Proceso* reported.

Enrique Silva, Radiorama Acapulco’s news director, told CPJ that Martínez covered a range of issues, but always took precautions when covering drug trafficking or other sensitive topics. “He was disciplined that way,” said Silva. “He knew he could not go deep on certain stories.”

Silva said the authorities reviewed Martínez’s laptop and interview archives. Javier Martínez Gil, the reporter’s brother, told CPJ in May 2010 that authorities had not informed him of any suspects or leads. “The case has gone cold,” he said.

The Guerrero state attorney general’s office and the Mexico City-based special federal prosecutor for crimes against journalists did not respond to CPJ’s requests for interviews.

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Galindo, anchor and faculty director of a radio station affiliated with Universidad de Guadalajara, was found dead inside his home in Ciudad Guzmán in the western state of Jalisco.

Galindo, 43, was gagged and tied to a bed, although he died of a blow to the head, according to authorities quoted in local press reports. Galindo mainly covered environmental issues and political corruption for the Ciudad Guzmán-based station. He hosted a nightly radio and television program, and directed several other radio news broadcasts. The university said Galindo contributed to several local and national newspapers as well.

Local authorities declined to comment on the case when approached by CPJ. Jorge Lomelí, Radio Universidad de Guadalajara’s general producer in Ciudad Guzmán, told CPJ that state investigators had visited the station twice to conduct interviews but had not reviewed Galindo’s recent work.

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Two men on a motorcycle shot Velázquez twice shortly after the newspaper owner left a staff Christmas party, the paper’s deputy editor, Luis Gamboa, told CPJ. Velázquez was taken to a hospital in Cancún where he died that night, local press reports said. Local reporters told CPJ that Velázquez reported receiving anonymous death threats in the months before his death. The newspaper’s printing press was also firebombed in November 2009.

Velázquez wrote articles that were critical of local officials, including the mayor of Tulum. Two reporters who interviewed Velázquez at the hospital on the night he died told CPJ that the publisher had identified the assailants as allies of the mayor. The mayor, Marciano Dzul Caamal, did not respond to repeated efforts by CPJ to reach him for response. But the day after the murder, his office issued a statement repudiating the killing and committing the mayor to helping solve it. In interviews with CPJ, some local journalists accused Velázquez of unethical business practices, including extortion, that could have played a role in the killing.

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Juan Daniel  
Martínez Gil  
Radiorama and  
W Radio

July 28, 2009,  
in Acapulco

José Emilio Galindo  
Robles

Radio Universidad de  
Guadalajara

November 24, 2009,  
in Ciudad Guzmán

José Alberto  
Velázquez López  
*Expresiones de Tulum*

December 22, 2009,  
in Tulum

**José Luis Romero**  
Línea Directa

January 2010,  
in Los Mochis

Masked men kidnapped Romero as he entered a restaurant in Los Mochis about 6 p.m. on December 30, 2009, bundling the reporter into a waiting SUV, according to news reports and CPJ interviews. Elio Lorenzo Patiño, a former military officer who was accompanying Romero, was also abducted and remained missing as of June 2010.

The detective assigned to the abductions was himself murdered about six hours after the kidnappings were reported, Mexican press reports said. The state attorney general told reporters that the two cases might be connected, according to press reports.

On January 16, 2010, Romero's body was found along a rural road near Los Mochis, said Rolando Bon López, Sinaloa's assistant state prosecutor. The body had signs of torture; Romero had been shot and his hands had been broken, Bon López said.

Romero had covered the crime beat for the statewide radio broadcaster Línea Directa for 10 years, News Director Luis Alberto Díaz told CPJ. He said he believed Romero was the victim of one of two warring drug cartels. Díaz said murdering a well-known broadcaster fit into the cartels' intentions to intimidate the public. "They want to seed psychosis among the audience; they want to terrorize; they want to keep people's mouths shut," Díaz said. No developments had been reported in the case as of June 2010.

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**Jorge Ochoa**  
**Martínez**  
*El Sol de la Costa*

January 29, 2010,  
in Ayutla de los Libres

Ochoa, an editor and publisher in Guerrero state, was shot after leaving a birthday party for a local politician, local reporters told CPJ. Ochoa owned *El Sol de la Costa*, a small-circulation weekly based in Ayutla de los Libres. María del Carmen Castro, Ochoa's widow, told local reporters that her husband had received anonymous cell phone threats.

A suspect identified as Alberto Bravo Jerónimo was arrested in connection with the murder on March 16, according to Albertico Guinto Sierra, acting state attorney general of Guerrero. Bravo allegedly confessed to killing Ochoa after a traffic dispute, and said the two had argued in the past. Officials said Bravo's gun matched forensic analyses of the weapon used in the murder.

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**Evaristo Pacheco**  
**Solís**  
*Visión Informativa*

March 12, 2010,  
in Chilpancingo

Pacheco was found alongside a rural road in the Guerrero state capital of Chilpancingo with five gunshot wounds, one to the head, according to news reports citing law enforcement officials.

Pacheco, 33, a reporter for the weekly *Visión Informativa*, was the second journalist in two months to be murdered in the state of Guerrero, a southern Pacific coast state with strategic transit points and agricultural land used by drug cartels. Albertico Guinto Sierra, acting state attorney general of Guerrero, told CPJ that investigators had not identified a motive or suspects.

## Media Support Workers Murdered

CPJ research shows the following media support workers were murdered in the course of their duties during the tenure of President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, who took office on December 1, 2006.

Assailants in an SUV pursued and intercepted a newspaper delivery truck bearing the logo of the daily *El Imparcial del Istmo* along a rural stretch of highway connecting the cities of Salina Cruz and Tehuantepec in southern Mexico, according to local news accounts. The attackers shot Cortés, the driver, and delivery workers López and Vásquez at close range, *El Imparcial del Istmo* reported.

Luis David Quintana, *El Imparcial del Istmo*'s deputy director, told local reporters that the newspaper had received several threatening e-mail messages and letters in the previous month, warning the paper to tone down coverage of local drug trafficking. Numerous staff members resigned a day after the murders, Quintana told CPJ. ♦

Mateo Cortés  
Martínez

Agustín López  
Nolasco

Flor Vásquez López  
*El Imparcial del Istmo*

October 8, 2007,  
between Salina Cruz and  
Tehuantepec

## Appendix II: Journalists Missing

CPJ research shows the following journalists have gone missing in relation to their work during the tenure of President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, who took office on December 1, 2006.

**Gamaliel López  
Candanosa**

**Gerardo Paredes  
Pérez**

TV Azteca Noreste

May 10, 2007,  
in Monterrey

Reporter López and camera operator Paredes vanished after covering the birth of conjoined twins at a hospital in the northern city of Monterrey. They were last heard from about 4 p.m., when they checked in with their station, a regional affiliate of the national TV Azteca, according to Mexican press reports.

Their Chevrolet compact, bearing the TV Azteca logo, also disappeared, according to press reports and CPJ interviews. Neither journalist had reported any prior threats, according to the state prosecutor's office in Nuevo León.

Soon after the disappearance, then-state prosecutor Luis Carlos Treviño Berchelman told local reporters that López had ties to the Zetas criminal group, an assertion that TV Azteca denied. At the time of the disappearances, cartel-related violence was escalating in Monterrey, with groups such as the Zetas engaging in public violence.

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**María Esther  
Aguilar Cansimbe**  
*El Diario de  
Zamora and Cambio  
de Michoacán*

November 11, 2009,  
in Zamora

Aguilar, 32, a veteran reporter and mother of two, was last seen leaving her home in Zamora, in the central state of Michoacán, after receiving a cell phone call, according to news reports and CPJ interviews. State and federal authorities have not disclosed any leads or suspects in the case.

Aguilar reported for regional news outlets, including the Zamora-based daily *El Diario de Zamora* and the regional daily *Cambio de Michoacán*. While her coverage varied, she tended to focus on organized crime and local corruption. In the weeks before she vanished, Aguilar's reporting highlighted police abuse allegations, the military's anti-cartel efforts, and the arrest in Zamora of at least three individuals, including a politician's son, on suspicion of collusion with organized crime groups. On October 27, her story on local police abuse was followed by the resignation of a high-ranking official. Soon after that piece ran, she reported on the arrest of a reputed local leader of the cartel La Familia Michoacana.

Aware of possible reprisals, Aguilar did not include her byline on many risky stories, colleagues told CPJ. She did not mention receiving threats before her disappearance, they said.

Her husband, David Silva, told CPJ that the influence of the cartels in Zamora was so strong he did not have faith in police to determine what happened. "With most of the police here you don't know who you're talking to—a detective or a representative of organized crime," he said.

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Domínguez, Argüello, and Silva, three reporters with El Mañana newspaper group in the Mexican city of Reynosa, near the Texas border, went missing during a wave of drug violence in the border city that endangered the local media, according to press reports and CPJ interviews.

Only one of the reported disappearances was confirmed by authorities. On March 9, the Tamaulipas state prosecutor's office said Miguel Angel Domínguez Zamora, a reporter for the daily *El Mañana*, had been missing since March 1. A Domínguez family member had filed a formal complaint with the Tamaulipas prosecutor's office. Silva and Argüello, who worked for *El Mañana* and the evening newspaper *La Tarde*, also went missing in early March, according to two CPJ sources.

Coming amid a series of violent confrontations between the Zetas and the Gulf cartel, the abductions sowed even greater fear in the local press corps, which was already practicing widespread self-censorship. Colleagues said the missing journalists could have done something to anger either the Gulf cartel or the Zetas or somehow gotten caught in the warfare between the groups. Authorities provided very little information on the seizures.

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Ángeles, a part-time correspondent for the newspaper *Cambio de Michoacán*, was last seen leaving home to go to the National University of Pedagogy, where he worked as a professor, his son, Rommell David Ángeles Méndez, told CPJ.

Juan Ignacio Salazar, chief of correspondents for the Morelia-based *Cambio de Michoacán*, told CPJ that Ángeles was a general assignment reporter who did not routinely cover sensitive stories. In March 2010, however, Ángeles covered an armed attack on a local indigenous family, Salazar said. The journalist did not report receiving any threats, he said.

Ángeles' son told CPJ that the journalist received an anonymous phone call two days before he vanished, but he said that his father did not disclose details of the call. "We don't know what happened," Ángeles' son said. "My father never mentioned having any enemies or fear. He just vanished." Federal and state investigators said a missing-person investigation was ongoing. No leads have been disclosed. ♦

Miguel Angel  
Domínguez Zamora  
*El Mañana*

Pedro Argüello  
*El Mañana* and  
*La Tarde*

David Silva  
*El Mañana* and  
*La Tarde*

March 2010,  
in Reynosa

Ramón Ángeles  
Zalpa  
*Cambio de Michoacán*

April 6, 2010,  
in Paracho

# Appendix III: CPJ's 2010 Impunity Index

CPJ's Impunity Index calculates the number of unsolved journalist murders as a percentage of each country's population. CPJ examined every nation worldwide over the last decade. Only those nations with five or more unsolved cases are included on the index.

## 1. Iraq

Impunity Index Rating: 2.794  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 2. Somalia

Impunity Index Rating: 1.000  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 3. Philippines

Impunity Index Rating: 0.609  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 4. Sri Lanka

Impunity Index Rating: 0.496  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 5. Colombia

Impunity Index Rating: 0.292  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 6. Afghanistan

Impunity Index Rating: 0.240  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 7. Nepal

Impunity Index Rating: 0.210  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 8. Russia

Impunity Index Rating: 0.127  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 9. Mexico

Impunity Index Rating: 0.085  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 10. Pakistan

Impunity Index Rating: 0.072  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 11. Bangladesh

Impunity Index Rating: 0.044  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants.

## 12. India

Impunity Index Rating: 0.006  
unsolved journalist murders  
per 1 million inhabitants. ♦









