

PRESS FREEDOM IN MEXICO

POLITICS AND ORGANISED CRIME THREATEN INDEPENDENT REPORTING

Laura Schneider

"What do you want from us?", screamed the editorial headline of the Ciudad Juárez daily newspaper *El Diario* in September 2010, after the paper's second reporter was killed in the space of two years. "We want you to tell us what you want from us, what we should publish and what we shouldn't, so that we know what rules we are playing by." This plea wasn't some kind of "surrender", but more a call for a "ceasefire with those who have imposed their own strict laws on the city so that they will respect the lives of those who are dedicated to reporting the news".¹ This appeal by the Mexican newspaper not only shows how dangerous it can be for journalists but also highlights the serious threat to press freedom in Mexico.

The Latin American country is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists according to international organisations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders. In this year alone 12 journalists have already been killed according to the International Press Institute, more than in any other country.² Mexico came top of the list in 2010 as well, with 12 reporters being killed.³ Since President Felipe Calderón



Laura Schneider is a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate School Media and Communication Hamburg (GMaC) and an alumni of the Rudolf-Augstein-Stiftung. Her book "Journalismus und Pressefreiheit in Mexico" (Journalism and press freedom in Mexico) has been published by LIT-Verlag.

1 | Cf. Redacción de El Diario, "Qué quieren de nosotros?", *El Diario*, September 19, 2010, <http://diario.com.mx/notas.php?f=2010%2F09%2F19&id=ce557112f34b187454d7b6d117a76cb5> (accessed August 30, 2011).

2 | Cf. International Press Institute, "Death Watch", http://freemedia.at/our-activities/death-watch/countryview.html?tx_incoredeathwatch_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=796&tx_incoredeathwatch_pi1%5BshowYear%5D=2011&cHash=d0555d76f3acf73c04b87405522 (accessed September 13, 2011).

3 | Cf. *ibid.*

declared a “war on drugs”, “la guerra contra las drogas”, shortly after his inauguration in 2006, it is not only attacks on journalists that have risen steeply.

More than 40,000 people have become victims of the war that is being waged against the drug cartels by around 50,000 soldiers and federal police officers.⁴ Last year

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was the bloodiest since the offensive began with more than 15,000 deaths in 2010 being connected to drug-related crime. A significant number of these deaths were in the northern border city of Ciudad Juárez,

which is now considered to be one of the most dangerous cities in the world.⁵ Since the drug trade stopped being an ‘underground’ business, attacks have become more frequent with many innocent people getting hurt, including children and adolescents. In January 2010 13 young people died when a private party was stormed by gunmen. Only two months later eight youngsters were killed at a party by strangers. In February 2011 six people died in an attack on a nightclub, while in July 2011 20 people were killed when a group of men shot up a popular bar with automatic weapons. And in August 2011 53 people died when a casino was attacked. The list goes on and on. In addition to those killed many people have been wounded.

Against this background of escalating violence it is no real surprise that the current situation is having an adverse effect on journalists and the media, especially those who tend to be critical. Reporters are being threatened, abducted and tortured. Decapitated heads are being packaged up and sent to editors, and media buildings are being attacked with grenades or stormed by armed gangs.

4 | Cf. *BBC News Latin America*, “Mexico’s drug-related violence”, <http://bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-10681249> (accessed August 30, 2011).

5 | Marc Stevenson, “Mexico: 34,612 Drug War Deaths; 15,273 in 2010”, *Huff Post*, January 12, 2011, http://huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/12/mexico-drug-war-deaths-2010_n_808277.html (accessed August 30, 2011).

THE PECULIARITIES OF MEXICAN POLITICS

It is only really possible to understand the structures of the Mexican mass media and the current situation relating to freedom of the press if we know something about the peculiarities of the politics in the country. In contrast to the many breakdowns in political systems that have been witnessed in Latin America in the last century, Mexico as a presidential federal republic actually has a remarkably stable system. From 1929, when the Mexican Revolution became institutionalised, until the year 2000 the country was ruled for 71 years under a one party system by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI). With the collapse of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union the PRI became the longest-ruling party in the world.⁶

Mexico as a presidential federal republic actually has a remarkably stable system. From 1929 until 2000 the country was ruled for 71 years under a one party system by the PRI.

During its time in power every Mexican president, most of the members of the chamber of deputies, most of the senators and nearly all governors and heads of the administrative areas known as 'municipios' were drawn from the party's ranks. Although the system was generally accepted as being constitutional and all sectors of society were officially integrated, the PRI government was basically manipulative and corrupt and a long way from being a true democracy. "Subordinate groups had little independent voice, and when softer means of control failed to keep political opposition within bounds, electoral fraud and coercion always stood in reserve."⁷

In the late 1980s the PRI's monopoly on political power started to crumble when the opposition parties comprising the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD) started to win their first governorships and important mayoral positions. However, it wasn't until 1997 that the PRI lost its majority in the

6 | Cf. Daniel C. Hallin, "Media, political power, and democratization in Mexico", in: James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (eds.), *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (London: Routledge, 2000), 97-110.

7 | Cf. *ibid.*

Because of the recent political changes in the last two decades and the establishment of independent political organisations it would be fair to describe Mexico's political system as pluralistic.

chamber of deputies and eventually, in 2000, the presidency. The centre-right PAN won the election and appointed Vicente Fox Quesada as president. Since 2006 Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, also PAN, has been the president of Mexico. Because of the recent political changes in the last two decades and the establishment of independent political organisations such as the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE), which acts as a watchdog for democratic processes, it would be fair to describe Mexico's political system as pluralistic. On the face of it, Mexican politics has made significant steps on its way to democracy.⁸

However, recent events have thrown this into doubt. The PRI were once again the big winners in the parliamentary elections held in July 2009, not only at national level but also in six of the federal states and in terms of the number of mayors appointed. The 'dinosaur' won the majority of seats in the chamber of deputies (38.7 per cent), doubled its number of seats in congress and now opposes President Calderón with an absolute majority.⁹ After the elections there was widespread scepticism amongst the Mexican people, just as there had been in the 1990s. The PRI were accused of buying votes and other irregularities.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEXICAN MASS MEDIA

Articles 6 and 7 of the Mexican constitution, which was established in 1917 after the revolution, guarantee freedom of the press. However, the traditional methods of controlling the press from colonial times did not really disappear, even after Mexico's declaration of independence, they just became a bit more subtle. This included state subsidies, the use of advertising to exert influence and regular and irregular payments to certain media.¹⁰

8 | Cf. Laura Schneider, *Journalismus und Pressefreiheit in Mexiko*, Münster, 2011, 29 et seq.

9 | Cf. Günther Maihold, "Die Rückkehr des Dinosauriers? Der Wahlerfolg der PRI vergrößert die Reformunfähigkeit Mexikos", *GIGA Fokus*, No. 8/2009, 1-7.

10 | Cf. Markus Schulz, *Internet und Politik in Lateinamerika: Mexiko*, Frankfurt/Main, 2009, 12.

Mexican broadcasting did not become totally commercial but developed into a mixture of private and public companies. The policies of President Miguel Alemán, who was in power from 1946 to 1952, ensured that radio, which began in the 1920s and 1930s, remained predominantly in private hands.¹¹ He gave considerable support to private business, thus fundamentally changing the relationship between the Mexican state and the commercial sector. The foundations for the current structure of the Mexican media were put in place during this period.

Throughout the whole growth period of commercial broadcasting, and indeed beyond, only one party held political power, namely the PRI, and this made it possible for a long-term relationship between the state and private broadcasting companies to develop. This close relationship between state and private broadcasting, which was friendly from the very beginning, ensured that any form of critical journalism was always strangled at birth. This meant that the Mexican mass media effectively became a key component of the political system. This dubious relationship was based on mutual dependency and common interests and remains a key characteristic of Mexican broadcasting today. The Mexican TV giant *Televisa* provides the perfect example of this. Its ongoing hegemony is testimony to the impact the earlier interdependence of state and media has on press freedom in Mexico even today.¹²

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TELEVISA AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF POLITICIANS AND THE MEDIA

Today *Televisa* is the largest and most important media company in the Spanish-speaking world and is keen to defend its dominant position in Mexico.¹³ The company dominates every aspect of the TV industry and is also heavily involved in many other business sectors. According

11 | Cf. Elizabeth Fox, *Latin American Broadcasting. From Tango to Telenovela*, Luton, 1997, 38 et seq.

12 | Cf. Schneider, n. 8, 32.

13 | "Televisa, the Mexican media monopoly, is the product of the long, successful relationship between the Mexican media and the country's political leaders", in: Fox, n. 11, 37.

to its own publicity, the company owns cable TV providers, several football clubs and stadiums, advertising agencies, telecommunications companies, the biggest publisher of Spanish newspapers, an important radio group, pay TV providers and even an airline. It is hard to imagine that in an emerging nation like Mexico a media company could exist that is so powerful both domestically and at an international level without state support, and the importance of the media giant is testimony to the huge political influence that politics has on the mass media in Mexico. The company's top executives are always members of the Azcárraga family, which continues to profit enormously from this relationship.

In 1950 Mexico was the sixth country in the world to build a commercial TV sector. The PRI government showed great interest in this new medium from the very beginning and actively supported its growth.¹⁴ The first three licenses awarded to TV broadcasters were given to influential media investors, one of whom was Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurer. The Mexican state subsidised the expansion of the private sector and the two private broadcasting groups TSM and TIM were founded. It was only after a political crisis in the 1960s that the government suddenly wanted broadcasting to be seen as a public service. The two private groups soon realised that the state-owned media were dangerous competitors, so they merged in 1973. *Televisa*, *Televisión Vía Satélite*, was born and from the beginning had a monopoly over Mexico's private broadcasting.

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The 1980s were the years when *Televisa* really grew and became effectively the "fifth estate"¹⁵ in Mexican society and the ultimate example of the interdependence between state and private broadcasters. Before the elections the soon-to-be President Lopez Portillo spelled out his expectations of *Televisa* thus: "I count on you for my campaign. I will be present in every house to which you carry my image. I count on you in the fields and in the countryside.

14 | Cf. Sallie Hughes, "The Media in Mexico: From authoritarian institution to hybrid system", in: Jairo Lugo-Ocando (ed.), *The Media in Latin America*, Berkshire, 2008, 131-149.

15 | John Sinclair, *Latin American Television. A global view*, Oxford, 1999, 39.

But more than anything, after the elections, if elected, I count on you for my presidency.¹⁶

Even the head of *Televisa* at that time, Emilio Azcárraga, made no secret of the fact that the TV company allocated the majority of its election coverage to the PRI (in the 1988 elections it was 80 per cent compared to the most important opposition party, PAN, who were only granted three per cent of air time¹⁷): “We are with the PRI, members of the PRI, we have always been a with the PRI. [...] And as members of our party we will do everything possible to ensure that our candidate wins.”¹⁸ As the popularity of the opposition party started to grow at the beginning of the 1990s, indignation over *Televisa*’s partisanship and lack of credibility also increased. So in 1993 the government sold the licences for two of its stations to Ricardo Salinas Pliego, the founder of *TV Azteca*. Because both companies employed similar strategies, the group became an important competitor in the Mexican media system and today it is still the only serious competitor to *Televisa*. Public pressure forced *Televisa* to adopt a more balanced approach to reporting. This, together with the growing financial power of the opposition, led to a gradual breaking of ties with the PRI. The opposition started to get more air time. Later they would emerge as victors in the presidential elections.¹⁹

After this shift in power *Televisa* made a conscious effort to shift its traditional close alliance with the PRI over to the newly elected PAN party. This only served to reinforce the impression that the broadcasting company was motivated more by profits than any ideology. It also proves that the former opposition party, PAN, as well as the Ecologist Green Party of Mexico, PVEM, have adopted a similar model today and not only give financial support to the media, especially television, but also use it as a political tool.²⁰

16 | Quoted from Fox, n. 11, 45.

17 | Cf. Hallin, n. 6.

18 | Quoted from Ingrid M. Schleicher, *Televisa S.A. in Mexico. Genese und jüngste Entwicklung eines kommerziellen Fernsehunternehmens im Spannungsfeld zwischen Rundfunkpolitik und Konzerninteressen*, Münster, 1994, 282.

19 | Cf. Schneider, n. 8, 37 et seq.

20 | Balbina Flores Martínez, “El estado de la libertad de expresión en México”, in: Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos (ed.), *El estado de la libertad de expresión en Centroamérica, México y República Dominicana*, San José, 2005, 293-318.

Television is now the least critical and least diverse of all the media in Mexico, in spite of the fact that in surveys between 50 and 75 per cent of Mexicans claim that TV is their primary source of political information.²¹ The internet and pay TV, which has more diversity in terms of content but which tends to be expensive, have not really developed into key sources of information so far.

Table 1
Media Distribution in Mexico²²

Medium / Technical Infrastructure	Households Equipped (%)*	Number of Publications / Stations
Electricity	98,9	-
Television	95,1	461** licensed stations
Pay TV	27,2	-
Radio	83	1.488
Computer	26,8	
Internet connection	18,4	
Newspapers / Magazines	-	855

Political influence on the media and the resulting concentration of the broadcasting sector are two of the key factors that have traditionally restricted freedom of the press in Mexico.

TRADITIONAL RESTRICTIONS ON PRESS FREEDOM

When looking at the current state of press freedom in Mexico we can divide the restrictions into two separate groups. The first group includes all those factors that have been threats to press freedom for a long time now, partly since the establishment of electronic media but in many respects since the country's declaration of independence.

21 | Cf. Hallin, n. 6.

22 | Figures with * denote the position in 2009, Figures with ** denote the position in 2004. Cf. Rodrigo Gómez García and Gabriel Sosa Plata, "Das Mediensystem Mexikos", in: Hans-Bredow-Institut (ed.), *Internationales Handbuch Medien 2009/10*, Baden-Baden, 2009, 1056-1067; Raúl Trejo Delabre, "Medien in Mexiko", in: Hans-Bredow-Institut (ed.), *Internationales Handbuch Medien 2004/05*, Baden-Baden, 2004, 974-982.

These 'traditional' restrictions include the concentrated nature of the media mentioned above and access to the market for mass media. The second group of restrictions on press freedom are those that have been brought about by the current escalation of violence in connection with the drug war. These kinds of threats to the freedom of reporting are relatively new and include physical and psychological attacks on journalists and the media, leading to security measures and self-censorship becoming a virtual necessity.

THE HIGHLY CONCENTRATED NATURE OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN MEXICO

In Mexico there are two different types of broadcasters (radio and TV broadcasters): those with cultural goals that need a permit, and commercial broadcasters that require a licence. The former are mostly run by government agencies and, in contrast to channels run by private companies, do not need to sell advertising time.²³

The interdependence between politics and the media which was alluded to in the above example of *Televisa* clearly demonstrates why the Mexican mass media is so highly concentrated. The structure of Mexico's electronic media is a classic example of media concentration. "Mexican broadcast television's ownership structure is among the most highly concentrated private-sector systems in the world."²⁴ The fact that the powerful national free-to-air TV sector is run by only two private companies, *Televisa* and *TV Azteca*, is making it a prime example of a commercial, centralised duopoly.

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Between them the two companies have an 80 per cent share of all TV advertising revenue and 94 per cent of the viewing figures for free-to-air TV. They also control 95 per cent of the frequencies available to private TV companies.²⁵ Although *TV Azteca* is a potential competitor to *Televisa* these days, the TV giant still maintains a dominant position within the duopoly.

23 | Cf. Schneider, n. 8, 33 et seq.

24 | Sallie Hughes and Chappell H. Lawson, "Propaganda and crony capitalism. Partisan bias in Mexican Television News", in: *Latin American Research Review*, No. 39/2005, 81-105.

25 | Cf. García and Plata, n. 22, 1056-1067.

Table 2

Comparison of Commercial TV Broadcasting Groups²⁶

Name	Turnover 2006 (U.S. dollar)	Net Advertising Revenue (U.S. dollar)	Number of Employees
Grupo Televisa	3.511 bn	1.900 bn	16.205
TV Azteca	797 mil	757 mil	6.416

Televisa's TV channels have a market share of 70 per cent while *TV Azteca* has only around 30 per cent. The ownership of commercial radio stations is also highly concentrated, with 70 per cent of all licensed radio stations belonging to 10 large private groups (e.g. *Radiorama*, *Radio Fórmula*), who have merged their radio stations into networks for technical, legal and commercial reasons.²⁷ These large concerns, some of whom are themselves owned by even larger broadcasting companies, can make the (financial) situation of smaller, private radio companies even more difficult and these smaller companies are often forced to sell their stations. In contrast, the print media do not demonstrate this kind of trend towards concentration and yet there is little competition between individual newspapers because readership is mainly concentrated on just a few large newspapers.

This concentration of Mexico's media represents one of its biggest restrictions on press freedom. The higher the degree of concentration, the more power a small number of media owners have over the diversity and quality of media content and the less likely it is that the media will exert a degree of critical self-control.²⁸ The journalist Klaus Ehringfeld sums up the structure of Mexico's media as follows: "Imagine that *RTL* and *SAT.1* dominated 90 per cent of the electronic media in Germany and had a very close relationship with the Chancellor's office. That is pretty much how things are in Mexico."²⁹

26 | Cf. *ibid.*

27 | Cf. *ibid.*

28 | Cf. Hughes, n. 14.

29 | Cf. Klaus Ehringfeld, "Mundtot", *Medium Magazin*, No. 03/2008, 54.

LIMITED MARKET ACCESS FOR MEXICAN MEDIA

Two key factors determine whether a media company can get access to the market, that is to say establish itself in the market and then survive there. Firstly, its financial strength and the power that its owners have as a result of that strength, and secondly, its basic ideology.³⁰ Opportunities for print media are generally different to those for electronic media. While the latter, as already mentioned, need a licence or a permit to access the market, there are no official special requirements for print media or the internet. The fact that in principle anybody can publish a newspaper or blog really helps the cause of press freedom.

And yet nearly all Mexican newspapers are dependent on advertising revenues from the government and a few major private customers. In the provinces especially there is often hardly any private advertising at all and most advertising is done by the state and the local governor. For the majority of private media this means that they can only really exist if they make sure they are not a thorn in the side of the government or important private advertisers, otherwise they might lose their advertising revenue.³¹

For the electronic media, access to the market is severely limited from the outset. The lack of transparency and apparent arbitrariness in awarding licences and permits for TV and radio stations is one of the biggest problems facing the Mexican media system and consequently one of the biggest restrictions on press freedom. While financial strength officially has no bearing on the awarding of permits for cultural stations, the process is so lacking in transparency that it appears to be totally arbitrary. The result is that community radio stations which are particularly critical are often refused a permit or have it rescinded.³²

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When it comes to commercial TV and radio stations, the political and economic power of those involved in the current duopoly is sufficient to ensure that any opportunities

30 | Cf. Schneider, n. 8, 82.

31 | Cf. Martínez, n. 20.

32 | Cf. *ibid.*

competitors may have in gaining a foothold in the market are strangled at birth. Instead changes to legislation aimed at reducing media concentration are being rejected, while reforms indirectly proposed by *Televisa* get passed. "As a quid pro quo for more support and air time for their own candidates on TV most deputies [...] are pressured by their party leadership to vote in favour of the reforms."³³ A good example would be the 2006 reforms of federal radio and TV legislation known as the "Televisa Law". The reforms actually only amounted to a few small changes, but these changes offered huge benefits to the dominant players in the broadcasting market. Although the country's highest court decided that some of the changes were unconstitutional, the changes to the legislation ordered by the court have still not been introduced. As a result the restrictions on access to the market for commercial electronic media still include the following:

- A license is issued for 20 years. Once it has expired the same licence holder is given preference over other interested parties.
- The government has the right to take a financial consideration in exchange for issuing a licence.
- Instead of a fixed financial consideration the issuing of a licence may be decided by a public auction
- There are grounds for rejecting an application if the "right prerequisites" are not in place and/or the financial consideration offered is not considered satisfactory.³⁴

A RAY OF HOPE FOR PRESS FREEDOM IN MEXICO AT THE START OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

As described earlier, the year 2000 saw a very important change of government in Mexico, the first in 71 years. It was not only the result of, but also the driving force behind, a process of political democratisation which has seen even the Mexican mass media become more professional, more independent of the government (at least to an extent) and more competitive.

33 | Cf. García and Plata, n. 22.

34 | *Ley Federal de Radio y Televisión*, <http://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/114.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2011).

Content and ideology had become much more diverse, especially in the print media. These days the media no longer simply reproduce the opinions of the powerful but try to get across a wider range of diverse or even controversial points of view. A good example of this new openness is the widespread criticism of the president – often in the form of humiliating caricatures – whereas in the past he appeared to be untouchable. Even discrimination against indigenous peoples and different aspects of poverty are being covered by the media, if only occasionally.³⁵

There have also been some positive changes to legislation relating to press freedom since 2000, including in 2003 the passing of the federal law on transparency and free access to public governmental information, which obliged all public administrative offices to give everyone free access to information in their possession. Another ground-breaking change was the renewal of Article 41 of the constitution in 2007 which abolished the right of political parties to buy air time on radio or TV.

REPORTING ON THE DRUGS WAR: CURRENT RESTRICTIONS ON PRESS FREEDOM IN MEXICO

There are three reasons why Mexico is destined to have drug-related problems. Firstly, the USA presents the world's biggest market for illegal narcotics; secondly Central and South America are amongst the world's leading drug producers, and thirdly the border between the USA and Mexico is almost 3,200 kilometres long.³⁶

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Today seven major drug gangs are fighting over the country's most lucrative smuggling routes. The cartels have now developed into various crime syndicates which smuggle narcotics like marijuana and opium. Some of these drugs are produced in Mexico and are becoming ever more popular among the increasingly affluent middle classes. But these syndicates are not only drug smugglers. Their trade also includes human trafficking, prostitution,

35 | Cf. Martínez, n. 20.

36 | Cf. Karl-Dieter Hoffmann "Drogenkrieg in Mexiko", http://www.bpb.de/themen/IBZGI4,0,0,Drogenhandel_in_Mexiko.html (accessed September 5, 2011).

gambling, illegal arms trading, organ trafficking and the latest growth industry, extortion.

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It is hardly surprising that journalists often fall victim to this kind of organised criminality. It is true that the gangs tolerate general reporting about gang incidents, perhaps even including killings and other activities, as they can use this as a form of PR, but any more in-depth investigation is likely to put the lives of journalists in danger.

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTACKS ON MEXICAN JOURNALISTS

In its annual report for 2008 the Committee to Protect Journalists wrote as follows: "Mexico has become one of the most dangerous countries in the world for the press, with journalists routinely targeted for their reporting."³⁷ Since then attacks on journalists have become ever more common.

Every year the Mexican Centre for Journalism and Public Ethics (CEPET) tallies the number of reported attacks on journalists. But it has to be assumed that many journalists don't bother reporting such attacks, either out of fear or because they think it is pointless. Therefore the number of recorded incidents should be taken with a pinch of salt.³⁸ In 2009 CEPET recorded 140 physical and psychological attacks which violated press freedom. 183 journalists were attacked in the following ways (with more than one type of aggression possibly occurring in parallel):

37 | Cf. Committee to Protect Journalists, "CPJ 2008 Annual Report", <http://cpj.org/about/CPJ.Annual.Report.3MB.pdf> (accessed September 3, 2011).

38 | Cf. Schneider, n. 8, 63 et seq.

Table 3

Types of Attacks Carried Out on Mexican Journalists in 2009³⁹

	Delict	Cases
Physical Attacks	Bodily harm	45
	Damage and dispossession of equipment / belongings	26
	Arbitrary detention	10
	Robbery	8
	Murder	7
	Attack/threatening with a firearm	6
	Kidnap	3
	Attack with explosives	3
	Disappearance	6
Psychological Attacks	Threats and intimidation	56
	Verbal abuse	10
	Indictments / legal proceedings	9
	Stopping / interrupting transmissions	4
	Bribery attempt	1

The fact that in the course of a year only ten incidents of verbal abuse were recorded goes to show that the figures are distinctly questionable. But one thing is clear – nothing else has a more obviously restrictive effect on press freedom than these different forms of violence against journalists.

HOW MEXICAN JOURNALISTS TRY TO PROTECT THEMSELVES

The situation as a whole is reflected in the ways that individual journalists try to protect themselves. Once journalists need to take precautions, as is the case in Mexico, it is clear that press freedom is already very limited. Certain basic security measures are now commonplace in Mexico. Newspaper articles dealing with delicate issues no longer bear the author's name, and 'narcomantas' –

39 | Cf. Centro de Periodismo y Ética Pública (CEPET), *Gobierno y narco; la lucha por imponer la agenda periodística*, 2010, <http://cepetsmexico.files.wordpress.com/2010/02/informe-cepets-2009.pdf> (accessed September 3, 2011), abridged examples given here.

banners bearing the messages of the drug gangs – are not published. If a publication publishes a drugs banner from a particular cartel then sooner or later one of the other gangs will feel neglected and will start making threats. Particularly in the dangerous north of the country, some journalists go to work in bulletproof vests.⁴⁰

Journalist Lucy Sosa of *El Diario* in Ciudad Juárez describes how she protects herself: “Personally, I always go on the street with a photographer. We always stay together so that we are never alone and we can keep an eye on each other and the equipment [...], and we have special insurance to cover high medical bills – and life insurance.”⁴¹

MEXICAN JOURNALISTS AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

There is no doubt that this general climate of threats and fear means that Mexican journalism is characterised by self-censorship. In Mexico a reporter’s

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safety is directly linked to the subject matter of his or her report. So journalists who report on crime and corruption face the biggest risks: “Reporting basic information

about criminal activities – including names of drug lords, smuggling routes, and prices – places journalists at direct risk.”⁴² According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, reporters are not only killed because of what they write, but often just because they have asked critical questions. As a result journalists are increasingly shying away from investigation and analysis and just reporting the bare facts as provided by official communications such as police reports.⁴³

Journalist Emigdio García, of Grupo Reforma in Guadalajara, admits this quite openly: “We have to censor ourselves,

40 | CEPET, “Informe: Periodismo bajo la violencia del narcotráfico”, http://libex.cepet.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=287:notas-informe-2009&catid=42:monitoreio-octubre-2008&Itemid=56 (accessed September 4, 2011).

41 | Cf. *ibid.*

42 | Committee to Protect Journalists, “Silence or Death in Mexico’s Press. Crime, Violence and Corruption Are Destroying the Country’s Journalism”, http://cpj.org/reports/cpj_mexico_english.pdf (accessed September 4, 2011).

43 | Cf. *ibid.*

otherwise we are facing a death sentence. "When you know that you are in mortal danger if you write about a particular topic, investigate something, or get involved, then you tend to prefer to leave it alone."⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

This issue of the way subject matter can be reported highlights how press freedom in Mexico is currently affected by a great many restrictions, some of them serious. The governmental changes in 2000 brought about some positive developments, including new laws and more variety in terms of content. But many of the old ways of doing things have persisted, such as the extreme media concentration and the strong influence exerted by the political and business sphere. These have continued to compromise press freedom in Mexico and since the start of the drug wars in 2006 they have been accompanied by new, serious restrictions such as those caused by the use of violence against journalists.

The escalation of drug-related crime and the danger which this presents to journalists have led to certain problems such as self-censorship, which in the past were less of an issue, now taking on a new dimension. When combined with all the old problems they are now creating new and severe restrictions on press freedom – making Mexico one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists.⁴⁵

44 | Cf. *ibid.*

45 | Cf. Schneider, n. 8, 135.