

Mexico

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 17

Political Environment: 31

Economic Environment: 14

Total Score: 62

Survey Edition	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total Score, Status	48,PF	51,PF	55,PF	60,PF	62,NF

The violence and impunity that pushed Mexico into the ranks of Not Free nations continued in 2011, with the targeting of journalists as well as communicators who used social media to bypass censorship in the traditional press. The challenging conditions that have emerged from the convergence of the country's central position in the international narcotics trade, the use of the military to combat feuding criminal groups in major cities, and an inability to enact reforms to enhance government accountability and the rule of law continued to pose a key threat to media freedom. Promises to improve ineffective government protection and prosecution agencies failed to materialize, and there was no headway on structural reforms to offset media concentration issues in broadcasting.

Freedom of expression in Mexico is established in Articles 6 and 7 of the constitution. The federal criminal defamation law was eliminated in 2007, but civil insult laws remain intact, as do criminal defamation statutes in 15 states. In 2003, a Freedom of Information act was passed, and a 2007 amendment to Article 6 of the constitution stated that all levels of government would be required to make their information public. However, that information can be temporarily withheld if it is in the public interest to do so. Despite the existence of these laws, accessing information is a time-consuming and difficult process.

Impunity remains a problem in Mexico, with little progress in the prosecution of cases of murder and allegations of torture of media workers. The special prosecutor's office is considered largely ineffective, and it failed to prosecute any major crimes against journalists in 2011. The protection unit has only eight journalists under its care, after estimating last year that hundreds would seek protection. The prosecutor's office is hampered by jurisdictional weaknesses, a small number of investigators, and the need to draw upon the resources of several rival agencies. Further, journalists distrust the government because in some cases, politicians and police officers are among those threatening them. In October, an initiative to make crimes against journalists a federal offense was reignited, but the bill had not passed at year's end.

Press freedom organizations also distrust government programs to protect them or investigate crimes against journalists, echoing journalists' frustration. President Felipe Calderón had promised a number of international press monitors in 2010 that the revamped special prosecutor's office and a new program protecting journalists would operate more effectively than in the past. However, a special report by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) found that both promises remain unfulfilled.

Over the past decade, journalists have attempted to be more critical than they were during the 71-year rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party that ended in 2000, and although media pluralism has improved during this period, concerns remain about fairness and balance, particularly in the concentrated broadcast sector. Also, journalists and news organizations

regularly censor news about criminal organizations and increasingly avoid covering local corruption. And in a growing number of cities, media are pressured to follow the orders of organized crime cartels in their reporting, as well as bow to pressure from the government. Journalists are frequently removed from their positions after reporting on these sensitive issues. In February 2011, journalist Carmen Aristegui was briefly fired from her position at MVS Radio after inviting the president's office to respond to opposition claims that the president had a drinking problem. She was reinstated after a firestorm of public criticism of the network. In April, a reporter and editor were fired from their positions in San Luis Potosí at the request of the state government. The government conditioned state advertising on their removal from the newspaper *El Portal*. In addition, a number of community radio stations were raided and closed by state police.

The extension of drug traffickers' influence over the media signaled a transition from imposed silence to active control of the news agenda in a number of states. Because of this, self-censorship is also prevalent regarding sensitive topics such as threats to free press monitors, which in turn causes an underreporting of threats in several states where drug gangs violently dispute territory. In 2010, the Center for Journalism and Public Ethics (CEPET) questioned whether false reports of press attacks were made to discredit state security forces and create aversion to the presence of the police and military in high-conflict areas of the country.

Mexico remains among the most unsafe environments for journalists in the world due to the expansion of Mexican drug cartels, the government's decision to fight the cartels with the armed forces, criminal organizations' turf battles, and the institutional weaknesses of Mexico's public security institutions. As in previous years, drug cartels are behind the majority of the violence, but local political authorities and police forces appear to be involved in some cases, creating an environment where journalists do not know where threats are coming from or how to avoid the violence. Additionally, the professional federal judicial authorities have difficulty policing local officials who answer to either criminal organizations or abuse their own increased power following the demise of the 71-year-old centralized state in the late 1990s.

According to the CPJ, seven journalists and one media worker were killed in 2011. Information regarding journalists' murders is difficult to assess, as police investigations are frequently incomplete or manipulated, witnesses can be reluctant to talk, and violence is pervasive. Further, part-time journalists sometimes have other jobs that can take them into the line of fire. Violence is widespread throughout the country, with rival groups staging attacks and murders on journalists and media workers to prove a point and encourage an environment of fear. In March, Luis Emmanuel Ruiz Carrillo, photographer for the Monclova, Coahuila-based daily *La Prensa*, was killed with local television entertainer José Luis Cerda Meléndez and his cousin, Juan Gómez Meléndez, as they left Televisa's studios in Monterrey. Ruiz Carrillo had been sent to Monterrey to report on a man who overcame a drug addiction. Graffiti on the wall near the three bodies said to "stop cooperating" with one of the criminal organizations fighting for control of the area. In February, Rodolfo Ochoa had been killed when armed forces entered the transmission facilities of Multimedios Laguna, a local television station in Torreón. The attackers also stormed the Radiorama Laguna station and damaged equipment. Multimedios employees have been subject to attacks in recent years, with a murder in 2009 and a kidnapping in 2010, despite the fact that they do not usually report news about crime for fear of reprisal. Ocuilan municipal press spokesman and columnist Ángel Castillo Corona was beaten to death on the highway from Ocuilan to nearby Tiaguistenco in July 2011. The unidentified assailants also killed his 16-year-old son.

The state of Veracruz experienced exceptional violence in 2011. Columnist Miguel Ángel López Velasco, his wife Agustina Solano Melo, and their son Misael were found shot to death in their home in June. Also in June, Noel López Olguín's body was found in a grave after an arrested drug lord confessed to his murder. A month later, Yolanda Ordaz de la Cruz was kidnapped and her body was found decapitated and tortured on the roadside. All of the local reporters who cover the police sector fled the state in the aftermath of these murders, leaving the city without investigative crime reporting.

Social media has become an alternative means for journalists and citizen communicators to denounce and discuss issues related to the drug violence; however, bloggers and social media journalists were targeted in effort to shut down alternative forms of public communication. Maria Elizabeth Macías Castro, a journalist and blogger for *Nuevo Laredo en Vivo*, a website about organized crime, was killed in October for her anonymous reporting on the drug war via social media. A note found with her body claimed that a criminal group had killed her because of a blog she wrote. Three other journalists were also murdered for publishing blog posts critical of the drug wars. All the bodies were tortured or mutilated and left in public places with notes to intimidate internet users. Media outlets were also the target of intimidation. Gunmen attacked and set fire to the offices of the Veracruz newspaper *El Buen Tono* one month after it opened because it published articles about local politics and organized crime. Additionally, in Coahuila, men threw a grenade at the printing plant of Saltillo's *Vanguardia* newspaper in May, damaging the facility. In November, gunman ran a car into the front door of *El Siglo de Torreón*, set it on fire, and showered the building with gunfire.

There are numerous privately owned newspapers, and diversity is fairly broad in the urban print media. Broadcast ownership is predominantly private but highly concentrated, and television news coverage is driven by particular corporate interests. A majority of television stations are affiliated with Televisa or TV Azteca, two family-owned corporations that own around 85 percent of the stations in Mexico. These stations are the only networks with national reach, while a dozen or so family-owned companies control radio. The telephone industry is dominated by Telmex, and this organization is also taking ownership of pay television services and internet service providers. These oligopolistic practices are criticized in Mexican civil society, but a lack of political will prevents politicians from taking on powerful media and telecommunications companies. There was no movement in the Mexican Congress or from executive-based regulatory bodies to legalize and support community broadcasters or act on demands to diversify ownership of the broadcast spectrum, and only a handful of community radio operators have been awarded licenses. Advertising is occasionally used to influence editorial content, as is bribery and the granting of favors, particularly by local officials and political actors. Cases continue to occur of advertising being withheld from critical publications by federal and local authorities. Such practices occur particularly in the periods prior to elections and during the campaign periods themselves.

As of the end of 2010, 31 percent of the Mexican population was using the generally restriction-free internet. While content is not limited, internet service is costly and the market is not well diversified due to poor infrastructure, which is where the lack of telecommunications competition has an impact. The government has acknowledged this issue, and in May 2010 the Department of Communications and Transportation invested 1.5 billion pesos (\$120 million) to extend the internet to different regions throughout Mexico. Proposals to open the industry to competition and strengthen noncommercial media remained stalled in part because politicians reportedly feared reprisals from large media corporations. While violence and intimidation

remained the preferred tactics, a relatively rare cyberattack was used against Culiacan's muckraking weekly *Ríodoce*, one of the few media outlets in Mexico to report on organized crime. The publication went offline temporarily after its internet provider decided to end service in wake of the attack, which affected other customers.