

FUNDAMEDIOS
REGIONAL REPORT 2022

2022
AN EXODUS YEAR
FOR JOURNALISTS



FUNDAMEDIOS

INDEX

1. Introduction	03
2. Bloodstained journalism	04
Mexico	
Haiti	
Honduras	
Colombia	
Ecuador	
Brazil	
Venezuela	
Chile	
Paraguay	
United States	
3. Arbitrary detentions	13
Number of journalists in detention in 2022	
Nicaragua	
Cuba	
Guatemala	
Venezuela	
Peru	
4. Exile	19

1. INTRODUCTION

Violence against the press in Latin America was the prevailing trend in 2022.

The region has had an unprecedented number of journalists murdered for doing their job. Chile and the United States, relatively safe countries, have joined the macabre count of the violent realities of Mexico or Haiti.

To silence the truth, nefarious actors increasingly recur to judicial harassment via spurious trials and false accusations of money laundering or asset laundering. Justice systems at the service of repressive governments have endorsed the detention and, in several cases, the imprisonment for up to 15 years of journalists in Nicaragua, Cuba, Venezuela, and Guatemala. Some journalists are detained in inhuman conditions and subjected to physical and psychological torture, deprived of contact with their families, no food, and no access to reading materials.

In El Salvador and Mexico, the use of digital spyware to surveil journalistic work and threaten sources has been repeated. Journalists' family members, including children, have been monitored too.

The deterrent effect of the extreme State violence exercised via arbitrary arrests, lack of procedural due process, and the fear of physical aggression or murder, has resulted in transforming 2022 into an exodus year for journalists.

The number of journalists who have had to leave their homes, move out or away temporarily until the intimidation stops, or seek asylum in other countries has increased dramatically. Many Venezuelan journalists who had emigrated in previous years were joined in 2022 by Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan journalists who cannot continue practicing journalism in their place of origin.

States are, in many cases, the very perpetrators of violence; in other cases, they act passively, not preventing the atrocities committed by organized crime. Prevailing impunity and lack of justice are gradually silencing courageous voices, forcing the closure of media outlets and leaving fewer and fewer spaces for independent journalism to report corruption and give voice to citizen demands.

The region is on a dangerous path toward an abyss of authoritarianism, and silencing the press is the most significant symptom of other freedom losses.

In this report, we will highlight the most significant cases of abuse and raise our voices for each of the murdered journalists and each detained journalist. We seek to strengthen the support systems for those who have had to leave their countries. We stand by each one of them in solidarity.

Dagmar Thiel

CEO

Fundamedios Regional

2. BLOODSTAINED JOURNALISM

The murders of journalists in 2022 reflect a harsh reality: Latin America has no open armed conflicts, yet it is one of the most dangerous regions to the practice of journalism in the world.

Violence has impacted independent journalism in all areas, with an increase in physical aggressions, whether by international organized crime mafias, states, or ordinary citizens who, in the context of protests, express their discomfort with the press with increasingly aggressive actions that pose a danger to street reporters.

The figures prove it. As of the closing of this report, the *Red Voces del Sur*¹ – a network of 16 organizations that monitors freedom of expression in the region– founded among other organizations by Fundamedios– has recorded 39 journalists murdered in the Americas. This is a highly worrying fact compared with the ten murders documented in 2021. Lethal violence has almost quadrupled.

Mexico has the highest rates of assassinations of journalists. 12 murders related to journalistic work have been documented. Discerning the cause of the threats presents an additional problem. Journalists work precariously, they must hold several jobs to make ends meet. Some also work in press offices in institutions or for politicians, and some work in bars or as cab drivers.

Haiti has the second highest rate of lethal violence, as 9 journalists have been killed this year in the context of the crisis and lawlessness that the Caribbean nation is experiencing.

Although the figures in the other countries are somewhat lower, they are alarming and speak of the danger to freedom of expression. In Honduras, 5 journalists have been murdered; 4 in Ecuador, 4 in Colombia, 2 in Brazil, and one in Venezuela, Chile, and Paraguay.

Even in the United States, a journalist was murdered by a person who considered himself affected by his investigations



Foto: Agencia Reforma

¹ <https://vocesdelsurunidas.org>

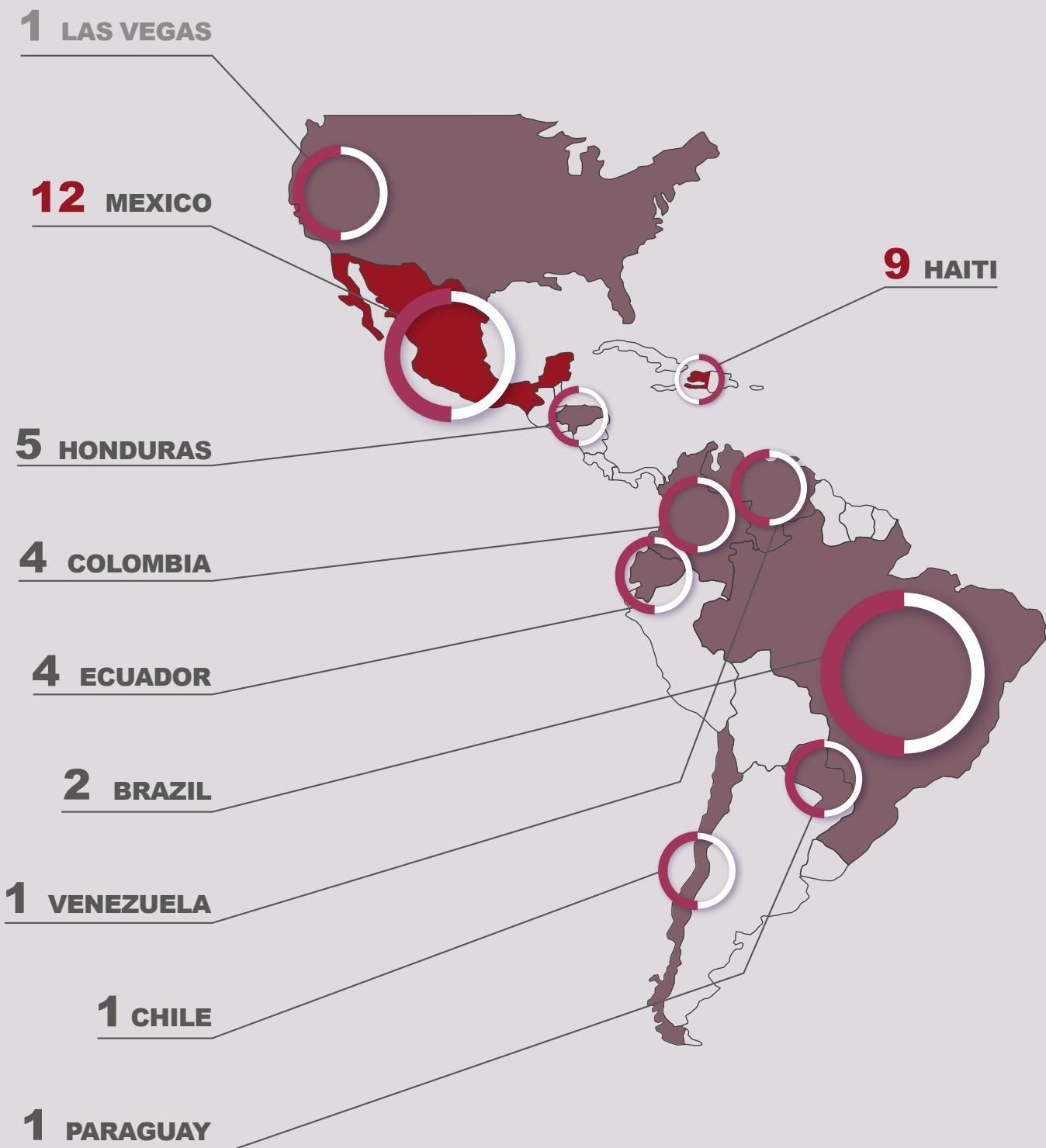
on corruption in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Impunity is the rule, and justice is not served, nor are these deaths adequately investigated, except for the case in the U.S. and one journalist's murder in Ecuador.

Advocacy, raising our voices and remembering their names in the different international spaces in which Fundamedios acts is part of our work to keep their memory alive and demand justice.



39 journalists murdered in the Americas



MEXICO

Mexico is the most dangerous country in the world to practice journalism. More journalists died in Mexico than in Ukraine, Syria, or Afghanistan in 2022. A total of 17 cases of murdered journalists have been registered. 12 of these deaths are directly linked to their journalistic work. These murders reflect the conditions of vulnerability and harassment in which the country's press finds itself. Several journalists had requested government protection or were already under the shield of Mexico's Mechanism for the Protection of Journalists. These protections proved ineffective.

These are the names of the journalists murdered in 2022.



José Luis Arenas Gamboa

January 10, 2022
Veracruz



Margarito Martínez

January 17, 2022
Tijuana



Lourdes Maldonado López

January 23, 2022
Tijuana



Roberto Toledo

January 31, 2022
Michoacán



Heber López

February 10, 2022
Oaxaca



Jorge Camero

February 24, 2022
Empalme



Juan Carlos Muñiz

March 4, 2022
Zacatecas



Armando Linares

March 15, 2022
Zitácuaro



Luis Enrique Ramírez

May 05, 2022
Sinaloa



Antonio de la Cruz

June 29, 2022
Tamaulipas



Alan González
August 11, 2022
Ciudad Juárez



Juan Arjón López
August 16, 2022
Sonora

HAITI

Journalists in Haiti have no guarantees to work. Communicators who have tried to report on clashes between criminal gangs and/or organizations responsible for hundreds of deaths or kidnappings have suffered lethal consequences, and 9 journalists have been brutally murdered. Some bodies were incinerated after the crime was committed.

They are:



Wilguens Louissaint
January 7, 2022
Port-au-Prince



Amady John Wesley
January 7, 2022
Port-au-Prince



Maxihen Lazzare
February 24, 2022
Port-au-Prince



Tayson Lartigue
September 11, 2022
Port-au-Prince Cité Soleil



Frantszen Charles
September 11, 2022
Port-au-Prince Cité Soleil



Romelson Vilsaint
October 30, 2022
Port-au-Prince



Tess Garry
October 25, 2022
Les Cayes



Fritz Dorilas
November 05, 2022
Port-au-Prince



Francklin Tamar
December 18, 2022
Port-au-Prince

HONDURAS

In Honduras, threats against media workers have increased. The main perpetrators are law enforcement, politicians, and public officials. But journalists have also faced violence from organized crime that seeks to silence any investigation.

These are the names of the journalists murdered in 2022.



Pablo Hernández
January 09, 2022
Lempira



Omar Hurtado Carranza
May 10, 2022
San Pedro Sula



Carlos Peralta
April 11
Colonia Murcia



Ricardo Ávila
May 29, 2022
Choluteca



Edwin Josué Andino
October 10, 2022
Tegucigalpa

COLOMBIA

Colombia has the best-funded protection system for journalists and human rights defenders in the region. Despite this, 4 journalists have been murdered this year. One of them had reported to the Attorney General's Office the threats he had been subjected to for two years, which did not prevent his tragic end in October.

Here are the names of the journalists who have been victims of extreme violence to silence them.



Leiner Montero
August 28, 2022
Fundación, Magdalena



Dilia Contreras
August 28, 2022
Fundación, Magdalena



Rafael Emiro Moreno
October 16, 2022
Montelíbano, Córdoba



Wilder Córdoba
November 28, 2022
La Unión, Valle del Cauca

ECUADOR

Freedom of expression in Ecuador has suffered a heavy blow. This year 4 journalists were murdered, two of them in a single month. Fundamedios had repeatedly requested that the Ecuadorian State to activate a protection mechanism, which is still not working, although the Government responded when severe threats were made to media organizations in October.

Also in Ecuador, journalist Fernando León has been missing since August 2022, when he left his home to cover road conditions in his area. Leon's car was found at the bottom of a ravine, but his body, so far, has not been located. Fundamedios also reported the femicide of Johanna Guayguacundo as the highest form of gender violence. Her ex-partner was sentenced to 26 years nine months in prison for the murder.

These are the cases of murdered journalists in Ecuador in 2022:



Johanna Guayguacundo
February 02, 2022
Quito



Mike Cabrera
July 24, 2022
Portoviejo



Gerardo Delgado Olmedo
August 10, 2022
Manta



César Henry Vivanco
November 14, 2022
Huaquillas

BRAZIL

Two journalists were murdered in Brazil this year. One of them was a British journalist collaborating with the Guardian Newspaper. He and an expert on indigenous issues were investigating illegal fishing in protected indigenous territories. Journalism has undoubtedly become a target of attack for the agribusiness power groups in Brazil. This case adds to the stigmatizing anti-press discourse of Jair Bolsonaro's Government, which increased in tone during his unsuccessful electoral campaign.

These are the names of the murdered journalists:



Givaldino Oliveira
February 07, 2022
Ceará



Dom Phillips
June 16, 2022
Atalala do Norte,
Itaqui River in the Amazon
Rainforest

VENEZUELA

Venezuela has not only seen a growing aggressive socio political context against the press but also a growth in restrictive legislation. The country lacks access to information processes , and systemic Internet blocks which have limited further the sparse spaces available for independent information. On January 10, 2022, community journalist **José Gregorio Urbina** was murdered in the town of Apure. He had recorded a video in which he held police authorities responsible for his integrity.



José Gregorio Urbina
January 10, 2022
Apure

CHILE

Journalist **Francisca Sandoval**, a reporter with Señal 3 La Victoria, died on May 13, 2022, days after being wounded with a firearm during her coverage of Workers' Day in the Meiggs neighborhood on the border of Santiago - the country's capital city- and Estación Central.



Francisca Sandoval
May 13, 2022
Meiggs

PARAGUAY

Journalist **Humberto Andrés Coronel** was shot dead in an attack in front of the radio station where he worked, Radio Amambay 570 AM, located in the Department of Amambay, on September 6, 2022. The police suspect that it was a hired assassination.



Humberto Andrés Coronel
September 6, 2022
Departamento de Amambay

UNITED STATES

Las Vegas Review-Journal reporter **Jeff German** was murdered in front of his home on Saturday, September 3. Public official Robert Telles, who lost an election because of German's journalistic investigations, has been charged with the crime. The trial is set to go forward in early 2023.



Jeff German
September 3, 2022
Las Vegas

3. ARBITRARY DETENTIONS

The region's prisons have been transformed into gagging mechanisms to imprison freedom of expression and attack journalism in Latin America. Nicaragua, Cuba, Guatemala, and Venezuela stand out for their cruel repression and disrespect for human rights. In the region, 24 press workers are held unjustly in dungeons.

Cuba and Nicaragua have the highest number of journalists arbitrarily detained and sentenced in recent years.

In Guatemala, the judicial system seeks to repress freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and access to information in a "legal" way with manipulated trials. The Observatory of Journalists reported 10 cases of judicial harassment against the media this year in Guatemala.²

Below is a list of the countries that keep professional journalists or media workers imprisoned for practicing journalism or working for freedom of expression organizations.

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS OR MEDIA WORKERS IMPRISONED AS OF DECEMBER 2022
Nicaragua	14
Cuba	3
Guatemala	2
Venezuela	3
TOTAL	22

NICARAGUA

At the end of December, more than 235 political prisoners in Nicaragua were incarcerated for opposing or criticizing the regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo. All of them have been imprisoned for crimes of opinion. However, the justice system at the service of the authoritarian regime has used laws created expressly to

accuse them of various crimes. We highlight here the cases of journalists or people who have worked in media or organizations defending the freedom of expression, arbitrarily imprisoned or confined to their homes.

² https://twitter.com/APG_1947/status/1602323042323111938?s=20&t=YybyaN825hWum9JgaQs8A



On February 8, sports journalist **Miguel Mendoza** was convicted for the alleged crime of "conspiracy to commit undermining national integrity," established in the Law for the Defense of the People's Rights to Independence, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination for Peace. The regime arbitrarily detained the sports reporter on June 21, 2021. Mendoza's "crime" was to expose on social networks his discontent with the totalitarianism that his country was experiencing. Mendoza has reportedly received threats of imprisonment since the April 2018 anti-government demonstrations.



The founder of 100% Noticias, **Miguel Mora**, who had expressed his desire to run for President in the November 2021 elections, was arrested on June 20, 2021. The Prosecutor's Office requested 15 years in prison and disqualification from holding public office for Mora. In February 2022, he was sentenced for the crime of 'undermining national integrity', established in the so-called 'Sovereignty Law'.

On March 22, the former director of the Violeta Barrios de Chamorro Foundation (FVBCH), **Cristiana Chamorro**, was sentenced to eight years in prison for alleged laundering money, goods and assets, misappropriation and impro-

per retention, abusive management, and ideological falsehood. This sentence is the result of the systematic harassment against the organization that, for 20 years, was dedicated to defending the freedom of expression and improving the quality of journalism. The Foundation closed its activities because it did not accept the alleged government imposition to register as a Foreign Agent. Cristiana Chamorro is detained in her home.



On the same day, March 22, three other former FVBCH employees were also sentenced. **Marcos Fletes**, general accountant, and **Walter Gómez**, financier of the organization, were sentenced to 13 years in prison and to pay the penalty equivalent to three times the amount allegedly laundered. Even the driver, **Pedro Vásquez**, has been sentenced to 7 years in prison for allegedly cooperating in the crime of money laundering.



In the prosecution for silencing the newspaper La Prensa, **Juan Lorenzo Holmann**, general manager of the newspaper, was sentenced on March 23 to nine years and four months in prison plus a monetary fine for the alleged crime of money laundering. Holmann was arrested on August 14 when police raided the only independent print media circulating in the country. From the same media outlet, photojournalist **Jader**

Flores and the newspaper team's drivers, **Mario Sánchez** and **Carlos Lam**, were arrested on July 7, 2022, during coverage and remain in custody. The Government has expropriated the facilities of La Prensa.

Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, a member of the Board of Directors of La Prensa, has also been sentenced to 9 years in prison for the alleged crime of misappropriation and improper retention, ideological falsification, and abusive management. He, as well as **Jaime Arellano**, is under house arrest. Arellano, a political commentator, has been sentenced to 13 years in prison for "conspiracy to undermine national integrity" and "dissemination of false news."



And most recently, the archdiocese journalists of Matagalpa were kidnapped and detained in December 2022. **Manuel Obando Cortedano**,

media director of the Diocese of Matagalpa, and journalist **Wilberto Artola**, with TV Merced, were imprisoned on Sunday, December 11. A video on social networks attests to the police deployment during the arrest of these journalists on the street in Matagalpa.

Human Rights organizations have reiterated their concern for the conditions of the detainees, who, in 18 months of imprisonment, have barely received 12 visits from family members or their lawyers. They have lost a lot of weight due to poor nutrition and suffer from various health conditions that are not properly treated. Although they have been sentenced, they continue to be subjected to interrogation and psychological torture. None of the detainees are allowed to have reading material or to receive letters or photographs from their loved ones, nor are they allowed to communicate by telephone with family members in exile. Those who have small children, as is the case of Miguel Mendoza, have been able to see their children only once in 18 months, on December 8. In the case of Miguel Mora, who has a son with disabilities, he has been visited twice.

Visiting days for political prisoners' relatives have been another torture episode with intimidating and humiliating searches. Many family members were forced to undress completely and do squats naked.

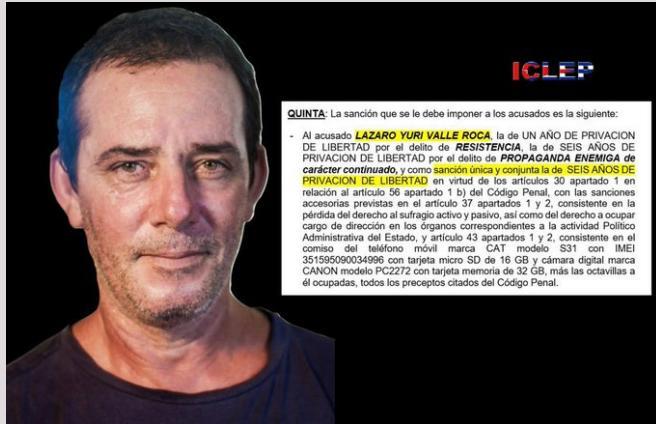
CUBA

The regime has increased its persecution of dissident voices demanding freedom on the island. The Cuban Institute for Freedom of Expression and Press (ICLEP)³ recorded 59 arbitrary detentions of journalists and activists this year. On most occasions, journalists have been detained on more than one occasion, bringing the number to 207. The organization Reporters Without Borders⁴ indicates that this country is the worst

for press freedom in Latin America. The Government controls all existing media, and the Constitution prohibits the independent press. The few independent media have emerged with the massification of the Internet and social networks. But the Government controls access to the Internet, which significantly limits access to quality information.

³ <https://iclep.org/>

⁴ <https://rsf.org/es/pais/cuba>



In several cases, journalists were detained and released within hours or days. But since 2011, three journalists have remained in prison. Among them is **Lázaro Yuri Valle Roca**, who reported on the resistance movement in 2020. The Cuban police arrested him on June 15, 2021. A day before his arrest, he sent messages about democracy from his Youtube channel "Delibera. On July 28, 2022, Valle Roca was sentenced to five years in prison for the alleged crimes of "enemy propaganda of a continued nature" and "resistance". The regime pointed out that he is part of the "illicit" NGO, Delibera, and that his message was "contrary to the social and political system in force in Cuba." His wife has reported that he suffers from kidney problems and other health conditions.⁵

Communicator **Yoandi Montiel**, better known as 'El Gato de Cuba,' is also in prison. Montiel made sarcastic humor of the regime on his social networks. He had 114 thousand followers on Facebook and 74 thousand on Youtube. He was arrested on contempt charges on April 12, 2021. The trial was scheduled for April 8, 2022; however, without prior notice, it was held on April 7, and he was sentenced to two years. Montiel's mother assured that the prison authorities were blackmailing him. "They are using it as a type of blackmail because they told him to speak through the networks, to incite young Cubans not to go out on the streets anymore," he refused.⁶

José Antonio López Piña was arrested on July 21, 2021, and was charged with the alleged

crime of instigation to commit a crime. He was doing his job covering the demonstrations that were taking place on the island when the police raided his house and took his belongings. He was accused of instigating people to take to the streets, provoking protests and vandalism, just after the July 11 demonstrations. He was released 72 hours later under threat but is currently under house arrest.



Additionally, arbitrary detentions have multiplied in Cuba, such as the one suffered by journalist Ramón Zamora Rodríguez. Journalists are often taken to police units as a form of intimidation. Rodríguez was taken for questioning at the Criminal Procedure Unit on March 12, 2022. Police threatened him at least twice in one month because of his work. During the interrogation, they told him they would put him in jail if he continued with his publications on social networks and his collaboration with media outlets such as Radio and Television Martí. They accused him of generating a "boycott" and "resistance" against the regime. His children were also part of the conversation and did not hesitate to tell him that they would also be imprisoned if he continued his work as a journalist.⁷

⁵ <https://iclep.org/post/hospitalizan-al-periodista-y-preso-politico-lazaro-yuri-valle-roca/>

⁶ <https://iclep.org/post/red-vds-cuba-sin-derecho-a-la-libertad-de-expresion/>

⁷ <http://vozessdelasurundidas.org/incidentes/policia-politica-arresta-e-interroga-al-periodista-ramon-zamora/>

GUATEMALA

According to figures from the Public Prosecutor's Office, cases of aggression against journalists are usually closed before they even reach the courts. In the last 18 years, only 28 cases out of 1,187 complaints obtained a conviction. In 2020, a Special Prosecutor's Office was set up to investigate crimes committed against the press, but there are no specialized people to deal with those cases. However, the justice system, which has proven to be responsive to the Government, has been extremely quick to prosecute one of the country's most critical journalists.



On July 29, the Public Prosecutor's Office raided the home of **José Rubén Zamora** and the headquarters of the newspaper he founded and presided, *elPeriódico*. The head of the Special Prosecutor's Office against Impunity accused the journalist of "blackmail, influence peddling, and money laundering". It justified that the arrest has nothing to do with his journalistic practice but that he stands trial as a businessman, not a journalist. Zamora, internationally recognized for his investigative work, denounced that the Attorney General and head of the Public Prosecutor's Office, Consuelo Porras, was "fabricating" an act to take him to jail. This official was sanctioned in September 2012 by the United States, accused of obstruction of justice. Despite this, she was re-elected to the position. On Thursday, December 8, Judge Fredy Orellana decided to bring Zamora to trial for an alleged money laundering case, blackmail, and influence peddling. The judge indicated that "there is sufficient evidence to accept the accusation with the modifications presented by the Prosecutor's Office."

The CFO, **Flor Silva Flores**, was also arrested on the same charges on August 19. At the intermediate stage hearing on December 8, 2022, she pleaded guilty to benefit from a sentence's commutation and payment of a fine. This game of Guatemalan justice severely complicates the situation of the founder of *elPeriodico*, which has ceased to circulate in print and remains only as a digital media.



To give other examples of judicial persecution in Guatemala, we highlight the case of journalist **Robinson Ortega** of Relax TV, who was arrested on June 16, 2022, while covering a demonstration in Siquinalá. Ortega was recording abuses of power by the police against demonstrators, and to prevent it, the police attacked the journalists. Ortega was pushed out, and his camera was taken away. At the police station, officers filed a report against him with accusations of "obstructing" their work and insulting them. Even the policewoman, Yessenia Marisol Castillo, said that the journalist hit her, bit her wrist, and hit her cheekbone. He was remanded in custody for five days and faced criminal proceedings for an "attempt." The hearing is scheduled for January 10, 2023.

In Peru, the politician and businessman César Acuña sued the journalists **Cristopher Acosta** and **Jerónimo Pimentel** for publishing an unauthorized biography. Acuña ran three times for the presidency of the country. The book was based on facts, investigations, and reported complaints. Acuña accused the journalists of aggravated defamation, embezzlement, falsification of documents, plagiarism, and corruption of judges and

prosecutors. The judge considered that they should have consulted with the accused first to ratify the facts. In January 2022, they were sentenced to two years in prison and to pay US\$100,000 in reparations in favor of Acuña. However, in June, the plaintiff politician decided to desist from the legal action.

VENEZUELA

Ronald Carreño is a well-known journalist imprisoned for more than two years without a sentence. According to the authorities, he was "caught red-handed on October 26, 2020, and has confessed his participation in crimes against the constitutional order to alter the peace of the republic". He was accused of financing terrorism, illicit arms trafficking, and association to commit crimes. His trial is plagued with irregularities. He has been in three prisons and his trial has been postponed due to the medical leave of the judge, which means a setback in the progress of the process. There is still no date for the next hearing.



On August 24, the National College of Journalists of Venezuela reported that journalist **Ramón Centeno** and young **Gabriel Guerra** had been

imprisoned for more than six months in the National Anti-Drug Office (ONA), in San Agustín, Caracas. This happened after interviewing some detainees for alleged links to drug trafficking. On January 22, 2022, they went to the National Anti-Drug Command to interview one of the 'narco-deputies' arrested in the operation called 'Mano de hierro' (Iron Hand). 11 days later, they were arrested without a warrant. Subsequently, the Attorney General accused them of "association to commit a crime, influence peddling and usurpation of functions."

Ramon Centeno was detained while convalescing from hip reconstruction surgery. Even in the first hearing, he suffered facial paralysis. Meanwhile, Gabriel Guerra suffers from heart disease but has not received medical attention.

4. EXILE

Exile is defined as "expatriation" or "separation," but it goes much further than that. It means an effort to leave everything you know and love without a concrete path. Exile is a forced and obligatory trip with uncertain return.

Growing authoritarianism has expelled dozens of journalists from their countries this year. Victims of persecution, communicators, have opted for exile as an alternative to censorship and self-censorship, confiscation, or permanent closure of their media.



Practically all the visible heads of the independent media have left Nicaragua due to the brutal persecution against them and their families. Nicaraguan immigration authorities have confiscated the passports of many journalists, so they leave, undocumented through unofficial border points to seek refuge in other countries. In 2022, **170 Nicaraguan independent journalists** exiled themselves. Most of them sought asylum in Costa Rica, crossing the nearest border.

However in November 2022, Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves issued two decrees amending the requirements for people requesting refuge in his country. Among the measures he established was a travel ban for those who are applying for international protection, as their files would be archived.

In addition, persons requesting refuge will only be able to access a legitimate job after some time, to work they would have to undergo a new process. If migrants already have a work permit, they will only be able to renew it if they have registered with Social Security.

All these conditions limit the possibilities of accessing sources of income or leaving the country to carry out advocacy actions.

The entire team of La Prensa has gone into exile. You can read the following on its website: "Your support is vital since 2021 the Ortega Murillo dictatorship confiscated the facilities of La Prensa, our general manager remains imprisoned, and today the editorial staff is in exile. During our persecution, your subscription allows us to continue doing our job: to inform".⁸



Nicaragua's telecommunications regulator (Telcor) ordered the suspension of 17 media outlets in just one month. Among them are several television channels and radio stations. In September 2022, the Government decided to

⁸ <https://www.laprensani.com/>

take off the air of the international television network CNN en Español. In total, 54 media outlets have been closed in the country.

The wave of repression has also expanded to other Central American nations. The arbitrary trials initiated in Guatemala against elPeriodico and the threats against investigative journalists have expelled at least 8 journalists, who have left the country until they have safer conditions for their return or have already initiated asylum requests.



The Association of Journalists of Guatemala reported 105 attacks against freedom of expression and the press in 2022. The persecution and criminalization of journalists have forced several into exile for fear of reprisals or jail. Two well-known journalists who have left the country are Michelle Mendoza, a correspondent for CNN, and Juan Luis Font, director of "ConCriterio," who have requested asylum while facing criminal charges against them.⁹

Mendoza, for example, has been in exile for seven months and continues to receive threatening calls to intimidate her and prevent her from continuing her investigations on corruption.

"They can say whatever they want about me, but I have never done my job badly, and if this is the price I have to pay for

working for my country, I accept it. But it's hard because they don't only affect me in my role as a journalist. They also do it in my role as a mom and woman. They sexualized me, and they threatened to rape me. Mentally, they tear you apart,"

she told the Ocote Media.¹⁰

Similarly, in El Salvador, repression and surveillance of the media have increased. The surveillance of journalists with spyware such as Pegasus has affected investigative work. The Association of Journalists of El Salvador, APES, reports that at least 10 journalists are in exile and have left their country due to threats received.

The Inter-American Press Association's report states, "under the government of Nayib Bukele, freedom of expression and freedom of the press languish amid censorship and fear in the country." Due to increasing violence, journalists have no other option but exile and forced displacement. Independent media are limited in their capabilities because they are censored or intimidated by the Executive and the legislative power. Salvadoran journalists have had to face a reform to the Penal Code, which allows sentencing with the jail to any person who graffiti on buildings or reproduces information that "panics or causes anxiety" from sources that are allegedly gangs.¹¹

APES denounced these modifications as "gag reforms" and an attempt at censorship, as they claim that the Assembly members of the ruling party infer that the press has been a spokesperson for the gangs.¹²

In Cuba, criminalization and political persecution against journalists have also led to many digital journalists or influencers being forced to leave the country. The Cuban regime intimidates journalists so they self-censor or leave the island

⁹ <https://www.prenslibre.com/guatemala/justicia/terrorismo-judicial-acecha-a-la-prensa-el-informe-de-la-apg-sobre-la-situacion-de-libertad-de-expresion-en-guatemala-breaking/>

¹⁰ <https://www.agenciaocote.com/blog/2022/11/08/michelle-mendoza-llaman-amenazarme-decir-no-puedo-regresar/>

¹¹ <https://www.sipiapa.org/notas/1215023-la-sip-rechaza-criminalizacion-del-periodismo-el-salvador>

¹² <https://apes.org.sv/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Informe-Balance-Libertad-de-Prensa-2022.pdf>

immediately. The new Penal Code approved in May 2022 provides for a 10-year sentence for "the receipt, use and possession of funds from abroad", which hinders the operation of the few independent or private media. Meanwhile, the state monopoly blocks dozens of independent media websites and human rights organizations. "Most of Cuba's independent journalism is in exile," acknowledged Yadiris Luis Fuentes, an exiled journalist with ADN Cuba.¹³

Stories of exile in 2022 also include journalists from Colombia, Honduras, and Mexico. While others choose to keep quiet about the reports they investigate. Murders, judicial processes, harassment, kidnappings, threats, and other types of violence threaten the freedom of the press. Many journalists are opting for self-censorship in the face of fear. Individual and self-induced coercion is a defense against being intimidated, assaulted, imprisoned, or killed in the Americas.

¹³ https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/cuba-prensa_yadiris-luis-fuentes-y-el-periodismo-que-intenta--seguir-vivo--fuera-de-cuba/48025174