

# FORCED SILENCE

CENSORSHIP  
MILESTONES AND MAP

Canada 



JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA

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# TRANSPARENCIA VENEZUELA

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## **FORCED SILENCE**

### **JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA: CENSORSHIP MILESTONES AND MAP**

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## INTRODUCTION

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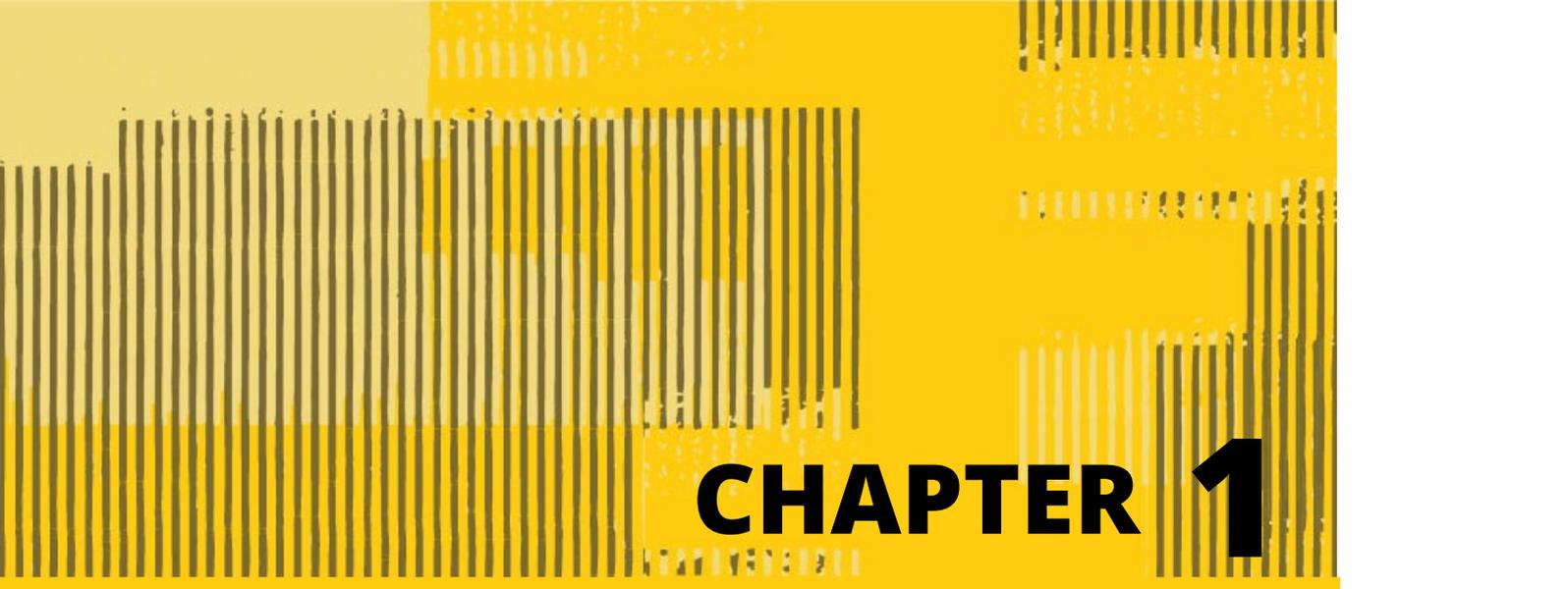
The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela—enacted in 1999—establish guarantees for the exercise of freedom of expression and information, which have been gradually dismantled through government action.

Article 57 of the Constitution states that “everyone has the right to freely express their thoughts, ideas or opinions orally, in writing or through any other form of expression, and to make use of any means of communication and dissemination, without censorship (...)”. In addition, Article 58 states: “Everyone has the right to timely, truthful and impartial information, without censorship (...)”

On October 4, 2001, then President Hugo Chavez said—for the first time—that the media were “enemies of the revolution”. The bitter relationship between media/journalists, regardless of their type, and the President, came to a breaking point in April 2002, when Chavez—after being deposed for a few hours—firmly embraced the socialist ideal, with Fidel Castro as his mentor.

What followed was the government’s hegemonic expansion of its own voices and narratives, while trying to stifle critical thinking and its media expressions. This trend continued after Chávez’s death and with Nicolás Maduro at the helm, and with some variations: From now on, the government itself is promoting and financing disinformation.

This paper summarizes to a large extent the main milestones of the development of this model in terms of communication and a current diagnosis of the situation.



# CHAPTER 1

# MAIN CENSORSHIP MILESTONES IN VENEZUELA



### 1.1 THE USE OF STATE AND PARASTATAL VIOLENCE

Hugo Chávez came to power in 1998 and right from the start of his administration, he had a complicated relationship with the media and journalists.

On June 27, 2001, during the National Journalism Awards ceremony, Chávez delivered a speech at the Miraflores Presidential Palace in which he explained his disagreement, and was to be the harbinger of complicated decades for freedom of information and expression in Venezuela.

Chavez said he had had a complex system of relations with the media, as a result of an inevitable battle. "It has nothing to do with anyone personally, nor with a specific individual or profession, in any way. It is part of a historical clash of forces, one that pushes to come into being, and has in fact come into being and is rising up, and wants to become

stronger, and another that has struggled to remain and to maintain itself until the end, and could not, and collapsed, but that is still there, and tries, of course, to get up again."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, then President Chavez labeled the media and journalists as members of the forces that opposed him. In the meantime, the enraged masses that followed Chávez took note and acted accordingly.

Violence against press workers became a daily occurrence, especially at times of heightened political tension. But the events of April 2002 were an important milestone. The enactment of a set of controversial laws issued by the Executive Branch was the trigger for a political crisis that ended with violence in the center of Caracas, where followers of the opposition and of the Government and caused Hugo Chávez to leave power for 24 hours.

<sup>1</sup> <http://todochavez.gob.ve/todochavez/1699-alocucion-del-comandante-presidente-hugo-chavez-con-motivo-de-la-entrega-de-premios-a-los-comunicadores-sociales-en-el-dia-del-periodista>

During those days, the media played a major role. First, they openly called for demonstrations against the President, while the Government constantly interrupted transmissions to broadcast national radio and television messages in support of Chavez.

On April 11, a large demonstration reached the vicinity of the Presidential Palace to demand the President's resignation. While Chavez was giving a nationwide address, private TV networks split the screen to broadcast also the violent events taking place in downtown Caracas. This event was key to the success of the coup against him, while self-censorship was applied on April 12 and 13.

These events led to a surge in the use of violence against journalists and the media. In 2002, the NGO Espacio Público published the first report<sup>2</sup> on the situation of freedom of expression and information in the country, where it reported 142 events or cases of aggression or restriction on the practice of journalism, where 154 media outlets were affected. In the 142 cases, 167 violations were recorded, the most frequent being aggression, which occurred in 25.7% of the cases, followed by censorship in 21.6%, intimidation in 15.6%, and attacks in 14.4%. The remaining percentage was verbal harassment (4.8%), judicial harassment (3%) and legal restrictions (1.2%).

The recurrence of violence against the practice of journalism took place in the context of news coverage, with the highest number of people affected being reporters (30%), photojournalists (22%), cameramen and TV technicians (16%).

In its 2003 report<sup>3</sup> the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights points out the

actions of the "Bolivarian Circles,"—groups organized and financed by Chavismo. "The main purpose of some of the "circles" is reportedly to act as shock groups to verbally and physically attack those identified as enemies of the political process, particularly leaders of the political opposition, including members of the National Assembly and municipal authorities, journalists and social communication workers, and social leaders, especially in the trade union and university movements. It is also alleged that some of these circles are in possession of weapons," the IACHR states.

The report adds: "...as regards the acts of violence with which the Bolivarian Circles are accused, the Commission holds that the impunity that has characterized all the cases in which they have allegedly been involved, and as a result of which the relevant responsibilities have not to date been identified, is a factor that must awaken suspicion or sow latent doubts with respect to their actions."

Violence against journalists and the media has since become common, especially during periods of political tensions, such as protests and election days. But an important fact is that violence is no longer caused exclusively by civil paramilitary organizations, such as the so-called Colectivos. The Armed Forces and police agencies themselves have participated directly in violent acts against the press.

This was the case on March 31, 2017, when journalist Elyangélica González was attacked by the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) near the Supreme Court of Justice, where she was

2 Espacio Público. Situation of freedom of expression in Venezuela/2002: <https://espaciopublico.org/informe-2002-situacion-del-derecho-a-la-libertad-de-expresion-y-a-la-informacion-en-venezuela/>

3 CIDH. Venezuela Report. 2003 <http://www.cidh.org/countryrep/venezuela2003sp/cap.2.htm>

reporting on the crisis following the Court's decision to take over the powers of the National Assembly (AN), reported Spain's *El País*.<sup>4</sup>

González was a correspondent in Caracas for the Colombian network Caracol Radio and the U.S.-based network Univision.

A video circulating on social media shows the moment in which members of the GNB knocked the journalist to the ground while she was covering a student demonstration, kicked her and dragged her by the hair. González said that she was reporting on Caracol Radio what was happening when the guards snatched two phones from her, reported the Spanish newspaper.

National and international organizations for the defense of freedom of expression issue their reports annually and constantly disseminate figures on attacks on press workers.

## 1.2 PROHIBITED ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT SOURCES

Since Hugo Chavez came to power, access to government sources by journalists and the media has been curtailed. Government officials have express orders not to respond to requests for information from the press.

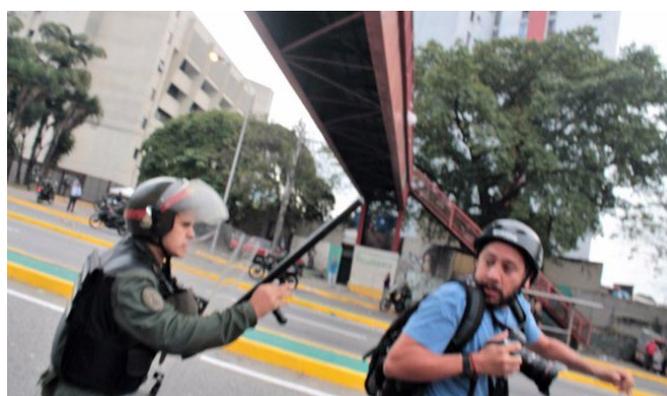
Official statistics are kept secret and there is no public disclosure of management accounts and reports.

The Chavista strategy aims at shoring up the state-owned media, while limiting the work of the independent media, in order to promote what has been termed the “communicational hegemony.” In other words, the government's voice is the dominant opinion, leaving people uninformed and with limited capacity for cross-checking.

According to Transparencia Venezuela,<sup>5</sup> Article 51 of the Constitution sets forth the right of citizens to petition public officials on matters within their purview, in order to obtain truthful and timely information. Venezuelan law indicates that those who violate this right shall be subject to severe sanctions, including removal from office.

However, no law has yet been enacted in Venezuela to guarantee this right.

Pursuant to the Venezuelan Constitution, citizens have the right to access administrative files and records; limitations are only established in the event that the information pertains to a criminal investigation, internal or external security or violates the principles of privacy of an official. However, “apart from these legal parameters, in Venezuela there is



4 Assault on journalist Elyangélica González. *El País* (Spain). 04/01/2017 [https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/04/01/videos/1491006786\\_230258.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/04/01/videos/1491006786_230258.html)

no special instance in charge of guaranteeing the right to information. Nor is there an administrative or judicial action to exercise this right, and claims are channeled through common procedures of administrative law.<sup>5</sup>

The intention to withhold information was also evident at the end of 2010 when a reform to the Internal Debate Regulations of the National Assembly was approved, which established that no private media could give direct coverage to the sessions of the Parliament<sup>6</sup> (Bautista, p95).

An emblematic case of limitation to the access to information was the illness of former President Chavez that ended up taking his life. According to Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS)<sup>7</sup> before the announcement of Chávez's illness, "clarity, precision and qualification of specialized information were the great absentees". (IPYS, 2013 p.60).

"The right of citizens to learn about the detailed conditions regarding the health of the President of the Republic has been limited because it is information of collective interest, and the principles of freedom of expression and public information have been violated, which are enshrined in Articles 57, 58 and 143 of the Constitution," it added.<sup>7</sup>

In a recent report, IPYS<sup>8</sup> noted: "The atmosphere of secrecy and opacity has become a constant obstacle to free press in Venezuela."

It commented on the restrictions reported by journalists such as El Pitazo's Armando Altuve, who obtain no replies to the requests for information made to the Prosecutor General,

Tarek William Saab, for an investigation on the alleged oil smuggling committed by two young Venezuelan businessmen accused by the government of Nicolás Maduro.

The media outlet also made reports on Covid-19, especially on medicines and vaccines, but neither the Ministry of Health nor its attached agency, the National Institute of Hygiene Rafael Rangel, replied to the requests.

A survey by IPYS Venezuela in September showed that during the last year at least 45 formal requests for information were left unreplied by the government after *El Pitazo*, *Crónica Uno*, the Venezuelan Health Observatory and *Transparencia Venezuela* tried to exercise their right to inquire on data of public interest.

According to the report, the lack of responses from the authorities, together with the absence of official information through active and passive transparency mechanisms has exacerbated the democracy shortfall in the country. "Not only have press conferences ceased to exist as a venue for providing journalists and media with important news for society, and official statements by public officials are non-existent," added the Institute.

In addition, the Institute's Freedom of Information team monitored the websites of the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV), the People's Ministry of Health (MPPS), the National Assembly and the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel), from September 1 to 15, 2022, to evaluate the effectiveness of these platforms as channels for active transparency.

5 Venezuela has no law on access to public information. *Transparencia Venezuela*: <https://transparenciave.org/project/venezuela-no-cuenta-con-una-ley-de-acceso-a-la-informacion-publica/>

6 Bautista de Alemán Paola. *A Callar que Llegó la Revolución*, 2014

7 Instituto Prensa y Sociedad y Bisbal, Marcelino (editor) *La Política y sus tramas*. 2013. <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/balance-ipysve-informacion-publica-en-venezuela-un-derecho-bajo-control-y-silencio/>

8 IPYS. Información pública en Venezuela: un derecho bajo control y silencio. <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/balance-ipysve-informacion-publica-en-venezuela-un-derecho-bajo-control-y-silencio/>

The issues evaluated in the four official websites were the availability, accessibility and quality of information on the budget allocated for 2022, the implementation of said budget and the accountability report corresponding to 2021 of each institution. It was found that this information is not published on the websites of these agencies or on any other official site.

Furthermore, the MPPS has not published the weekly epidemiological bulletin since 2016.



### 1.3 LAWS THAT FAVOR CENSORSHIP:

The use of legal instruments has allowed for censorship and self-censorship in the country. The use of so-called contempt laws has been openly questioned by international human rights organizations.

In its report for the year 2009, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights stated: “Contempt laws violate the human right to freedom of expression, as expressed in numerous international instruments, including the American Convention on Human Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

It adds that “international organizations and non-governmental organizations around the world have uniformly expressed the need to repeal these laws, which limit freedom of expression by punishing speech that might offend public officials. By silencing ideas and opinions, it restricts public debate, which is fundamental to the effective functioning of a democracy”.

In his January 2001 report, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression also spoke out against defamation laws, and in particular, against laws that afford special protection to public officials. The Rapporteur9 urged States to strip away the power of government agencies and public officials to bring defamation charges in their own name. He argued that there should only be civil remedies for defamation, and offenses such as “defamation against the State” should be abolished. In addition, any monetary damages awards should be reasonable and proportionate, to ensure that punishment does not have a “crippling effect” on freedom

of expression. Lastly, it stated that in such cases, the burden of proof should be on the allegedly libeled party.

In establishing which laws could be considered Contempt in Venezuela, the IACHR report cited Article 223 of the Penal Code, which stated: “Whoever offends—by word or deed, in any way—the honor, reputation or decorum of a member of Congress, or of any public official, shall be punished as follows, if the act has taken place in their presence and based on his role:

1. If the offense was directed against a law enforcement officer, with imprisonment from one to three months.
2. If the offense has been committed against a member of Congress or a public official, with imprisonment from one month to one year, depending on the category of such persons.”<sup>9</sup>

Article 226 also stated: “Whoever offends, by word or deed, in any way, the honor, reputation, decorum or dignity of any judicial, political or administrative body, if the offense has been proved to have been committed, or of any active Justice of the Court, shall be punished with imprisonment from three months to two years.”

In addition, Article 505 of the Code of Military Justice states: “Anyone who insults, offends or denigrates the National Armed Forces or any of their units in any way shall be sentenced to three to eight years of imprisonment.”

In 2005, the Penal Code was amended, but “to further distance itself from international standards on freedom of expression”<sup>10</sup> (Belalba, 2011, p.58). The penalties for crimes were increased, the scope of the rules of protection for the honor and reputation of public officials was enforced, and offenses such as dissemination of false information were created...” (Belalba, 2011, p.58).”

The enforcement of these laws was not only used to intimidate journalists and media owners, but also specifically to prosecute those who expressed their opposition to the government or criticized its officials.

On March 21, 2010, the president of TV news network Globovisión Guillermo Zuloaga issued a statement in response to a journalist from Ávila TV about the events of April 2002.

Zuloaga expressed his opinion on President Chavez’s responsibility in the violence that day, and questioned the Government’s management of freedom of expression. Those statements triggered a debate at the Chavismo-ruled National Assembly which resulted in an agreement.

Manuel Villalba, a ruling-party deputy, said that the goal of the agreement was to “reject the slander campaign against our country and the institutions of the Republic” allegedly launched by Zuloaga through the media and requested the Prosecutor’s Office to investigate the president of the TV station, which resulted in his arrest that same week, as reported by BBC.<sup>11</sup>

9 CIDH. Report on Contempt Laws, 2000: <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/docs/informes/desacato/Informe%20Anual%20Desacato%20y%20difamacion%202000.pdf>

10 Belalba Mariana, Contempt Laws. *Espacio Público* 2011 [https://es.slideshare.net/espaciopublico/leyes-de-desacato-m-belalba?qid=2a106bcc-724b-4c2b-b875-03ff449dee7c&v=&b=&from\\_search=3](https://es.slideshare.net/espaciopublico/leyes-de-desacato-m-belalba?qid=2a106bcc-724b-4c2b-b875-03ff449dee7c&v=&b=&from_search=3)

11 Guillermo Zuloaga Case. BBC. 10/03/2010 [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/america\\_latina/2010/03/100325\\_1728\\_globovision\\_venezuela\\_zuloaga\\_ao](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/america_latina/2010/03/100325_1728_globovision_venezuela_zuloaga_ao)

According to a press release from the Public Prosecutor's Office, the arrest request was made "pursuant to the provisions of Article 296 of the Venezuelan Penal Code, which establishes that: **"Any individual who, by means of false information disseminated by any print, radio, television, telephone, e-mail or propaganda pamphlets, causes panic in the community or fosters a state of fear, shall be punished with imprisonment of two to five years."**<sup>11</sup>

La detención se produjo también a pocos días del arresto del ex gobernador del estado Zulia, Oswaldo Álvarez Paz, igualmente por emitir declaraciones públicas donde acusaba al gobierno de tener lazos con el narcotráfico.

The arrest also came a few days after the arrest of the former Zulia governor, Oswaldo Alvarez Paz, also for issuing public statements accusing the government of having ties to drug trafficking.

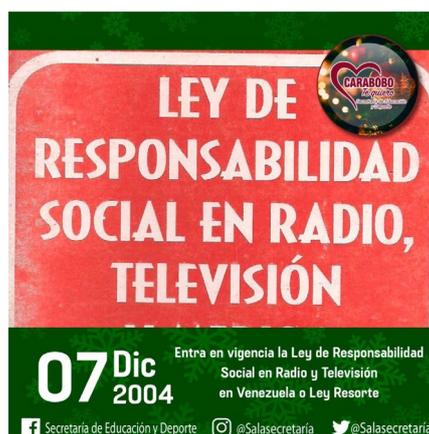
More recently, Maduro's regime used the Judiciary to confiscate the assets of *El Nacional*, one of the country's leading newspapers.<sup>12</sup>

In 2015, *El Nacional* replicated a report by the Spanish newspaper ABC in which, with testimony of Leamsy Salazar, a former bodyguard, Diosdado Cabello, an important leader in the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), was accused of being linked to drug trafficking businesses.

The Third Court of First Instance in Civil, Commercial, Traffic and Banking Matters of the Metropolitan Area of Caracas, issued on May 31, 2018, a final judgment declaring

the claim for moral damages as admissible, sentencing *El Nacional* to pay 1 billion bolivars as compensation, and ordered the judicial indexation of the sentence amount: which to date, according to the judgment, would be equivalent to 31,843,014,940,710 bolivars. Nevertheless, the amount imposed by the Supreme Court was 13.36 million US dollars in April and was later increased to 30.05 US million dollars, even after seizing the newspaper's building by force.

On December 7, 2004, the Law on Social Responsibility in Radio and Television (RESORTE) was enacted, which later also included electronic media.



The formal objective of the law was to establish the social responsibility of radio and television service providers, their related entities, independent national producers and users, in the process of broadcasting and receiving messages, in accordance with constitutional rules and principles, and legislation, for the full protection of children and adolescents, education, social security, free competition and the Law on Telecommunications.

<sup>12</sup> Supreme Court confirms sentence against *El Nacional* <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/tsj-confirma-sentencia-contra-el-nacional-por-dano-moral/>

However, ever since the start of the debate for enactment, it was described by journalists, media and organizations defending freedom of expression as a gag law. The law establishes a strong punitive framework with the supposed intention of protecting the rights of children and adolescents and to avoid public fear.

In 2010, the National Assembly passed the reform of this legal instrument. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF):

“The initial version of the “Resorte” law already was a real cause of self-censorship for the media, describing overly broad infractions ambiguously and subject to any interpretation” and holds that “The new version of the text exacerbates this defect to the point of caricature. Thus, the new law prohibits the broadcasting on television, radio and via the Internet of messages that “could incite to assassination” or that “could represent media manipulations aimed at creating anxiety among citizens or altering public order.”.

Reference is also made to messages that “could run counter the security of the Nation” or those aimed at “disregarding the legitimately established authorities.” Such a degree of vagueness lacks any serious legal basis, according to RSF.

## 1.4 MEDIA SHUTDOWN AND SANCTIONS

Media outlets in Venezuela have been sanctioned into shutdown, under various formal pretexts, but with the sole purpose of silencing critical voices, independent journalism and consolidating state communication hegemony on various fronts.

In October 2022, Espacio Público published an investigation documenting the shutdown between 2003 and September 2022 of at least 233 radio stations nationwide, which accounts for 64% of the total number of media agencies closed in the last 20 years. “Most of these measures took place in the midst of administrative procedures by the National Telecommunications Commission, supported by law enforcement officials,” the report states.<sup>13</sup>

According to the organization, “this restrictive logic towards radio in Venezuela is systematic, assumed by the Executive Branch as a State policy”. It indicates that the most emblematic case was in 2009, when during the Hugo Chávez presidency, at least 34 radio stations were closed at the same time.

Diosdado Cabello, who was then president of the National Telecommunications Commission and minister of Public Works and Housing, stated that these were the first 34 radio stations.



13 Espacio Público. La radio en Venezuela o la censura normalizada <https://espaciopublico.org/la-radio-en-venezuela-o-la-censura-normalizada-2/>

“When we made the decision in the national revolutionary government to democratize the radio-electric spectrum, to put an end to the media monopolies, we meant it, we were not playing games,” he declared.

Espacio Público assures that the main purpose of this practice is “to suppress venues for opinion, denunciation and contents linked to politics, replaced mainly by entertainment programming or pro-government editorials.” It reports that between January and September 2022, at least 29 radio stations were shut down in Zulia (13), Cojedes (6), Sucre (6), Barinas (1), Guárico (1), Anzoátegui (1) and Portuguesa (1).

As for television, Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV), on the air since 1953, and a leader in national audience ratings with a varied programming, was shut down in 2007. In terms of news and opinion, it was critical of the Hugo Chávez government.

On December 28, 2006, Hugo Chávez, recently reelected as President, appeared on screen dressed as a military man and announced:



“You can turn off all equipment, the measure has already been drafted, no media outlet working for the coup and against the people, against the nation, will be tolerated here.”

The legal argument for the measure was the termination of the radio spectrum concession in 2007, but the president himself put the matter in terms of political interests.

The measure mobilized citizens throughout the country for months after May 27, 2007, protesting and demanding the renewal of the channel’s concession.

Not only was the station ordered to go off the air, but its equipment was confiscated. The Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court ordered the equipment to be temporarily transferred to the State in order to ensure that the signal of the new state-owned station TVES would reach the entire country.

“This policy exacerbates restrictions, and violates Articles 51, 57, 58 and 337 of the Constitution, on the guarantees of freedom of expression and international human rights law. Any shutdown or restriction represents a violation of our rights”, noted Espacio Público.<sup>15</sup>

Although in September 2015 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a ruling in favor of RCTV and demanded the reestablishment of its signal, but the government did not comply.

14 Hugo Chávez announces shutdown of a critical TV station [https://elpais.com/diario/2006/12/29/internacional/1167346819\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/2006/12/29/internacional/1167346819_850215.html)

15 Fifteen years after the arbitrary shutdown of Radio Caracas Televisión <https://espaciopublico.org/a-15-anos-del-cierre-arbitrario-de-radio-caracas-television/>

According to the ruling, the Venezuelan State violated three articles in the American Convention:

**Article 1:**

Obligation to respect rights.

**Article 13:**

Right to freedom of thought and expression.

**Article 8:**

Right to judicial guarantees.

Regarding the shutdown of radio stations, Espacio Público director Carlos Correa, and Luisa Torrealba, professor and researcher at the Communication Research Institute (Ininco), told *El Diario* that Conatel's measures have sparked fear and self-censorship among radio station owners and workers.<sup>16</sup>

Torrealba noted that the radio stations have stopped broadcasting informative content in an attempt to protect themselves from any sanction. He argued that these stations are significant because they are the most direct contact with the residents of each town or region.

## 1.5 PURCHASE OF MEDIA OUTLETS

A novel mechanism to silence the media critical of the Government was the purchase of the main media companies. This is how important media outlets such as the news channel Globovisión and newspapers *El Universal* and *Últimas Noticias* passed into the hands of people close to the Chavista regime.

An investigation by Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS) Venezuela, entitled "Owners of Censorship in Venezuela," documented the process of change of media owners and its impact on public opinion.<sup>17</sup>

The research shows "how owners were forced to sell, due to their editorial line. This included the opening of legal proceedings and the closure of information sources."

According to IPYS, after the change of ownership, there was evidence of changes in the editorial line and efforts to silence critical journalists. "One constant was the downsizing of investigation units in print and television. Another example was the resignation and dismissal of many journalists after having been censored due to changes in the editorial line".

The year 2013 saw the sale of Cadena Capriles, a media holding company that included *Últimas Noticias*, the sports newspaper *Líder* and one journal specialized in economics, *El Mundo*, *Economía y Negocios*. The registered buyer was Latam Media Holding, created by TMF Group (Curaçao chapter), "a business consulting firm that, according to its website, operates in more than 75 countries and provides support to companies that wish to expand with international investments." However, the company is merely an intermediary—for the purpose of acquiring, selling, transferring and managing other companies—at the service of Britain's Hanson Group (also called Hanson Asset Management Ltd), with investments in different countries in Europe, Asia and America", states the IPYS paper.<sup>17</sup>

The real new owner of the Holding is Víctor Vargas, who at the time of the transaction was the majority shareholder of Banco Occidental de Descuento (BOD), according to the investigation, and Vargas himself acknowledged this to media staff.

<sup>16</sup> Conatel has shut down more than 15 radio stations in Zulia this year <https://eldiario.com/2022/10/13/conatel-cerrado-emisoras-zulia-en-lo-que-va-ano/>

<sup>17</sup> Owners of censorship in Venezuela <https://ipysvenezuela.org/proprietariosdelacensura/>



VÍCTOR VARGAS

With the changes in the shareholder composition came editorial pressures and censorship. David De Lima, a government-friendly politician, was appointed as the first president-editor of the media outlet.

An example of the new work model came in the form of a guideline for an investigative work. “A good topic to investigate is who finances the demonstrations,” proposed De Lima to journalists, and Últimas Noticias director Eleazar Díaz Rangel assigned the guideline to the investigation unit headed by Tamoá Calzadilla, who, days later, warned him about the difficulty of proving the allegations made by the national government in this regard, reported IPYS.

“The report consisted of a chronicle on the two sides—demonstrators and the national guard—of the *guarimbas* (the popular name given to barricades and roadblocks set up by opposition demonstrators). The director demanded a series of conditions:

“He wanted to skew the investigation to say that they were groups financed by foreign entities... To deplore them, but I never really understood in what terms he wanted that to happen. And he did not want to call them demonstrators but use pejorative adjectives

against them,” Calzadilla said. Faced with the journalist’s refusal, Díaz Rangel declined the publication and the censored piece was leaked and widely disseminated on the internet. The head of the investigation resigned the following Monday, as did the other members of the team gradually in the following months. Dismissals became increasingly common at Redacción Única,” reported IPYS.

In 2014, El Universal was sold, also in a non-transparent transaction. A Spanish-based company named Epalisticia appeared as formal owner. The change of editorial line took place almost immediately. Opinion writers critical of the government could no longer publish in the newspaper, while new management ordered to exclude coverage of opposition political leaders and to refrain from publishing information critical of certain pro-government leaders.

The newly appointed president of the newspaper, Jesús Abreu Anselmi, repeatedly refused to reveal the names of the owners of the newspaper, despite pressure from the workers.

As time went by, people linked to businessman Raúl Gorrín, who has been accused of shady dealings with Petróleos de Venezuela, and who acquired Globovisión in May 2013, were appointed to key positions in the media outlet.

The news station also changed its editorial line, which was previously opposed to the government.

## 1.6 GOVERNMENT INFORMATIONAL MONOPOLY

The bitter lessons learned from the management of the Venezuelan media after the events of April 2002, prompted Chavismo to reorganize and/or give a new direction to these media. Thus, in 2006, President Hugo Chavez launched the National System of State-owned Media.

In the 325th edition of his Sunday program, *Aló Presidente*, Chávez explained the objective. “The National System of State-owned Media must always bear in mind that they have to become truly informative and pedagogical media, to contribute to shape the conscience of social duty, the socialist conscience.” (Bisbal, 2009, p.28)<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the indoctrinating and ideological objective was evident, while critical voices were silenced.

Researcher Paola Bautista de Alemán noted that the National System of State-owned Media operated from 2008 to 2013. It was made up of six television stations:

- Venezolana de Televisión
- Vive
- Tves
- Telesur
- ANTV
- Ávila TV

Five radio stations:

- Radio Nacional de Venezuela (with a nationwide presence and three different signals in Caracas)
- YVKE Mundial
- La Radio del Sur
- Alba Ciudad 96.3 FM

- AN Radio
- además de la Agencia Venezolana de Noticias

Although they were not part of the National System of Public Media, 244 community radio stations and 32 TV stations helped disseminate and replicate the voices of the government and its narrative, contradicting the true essence of community media. In fact, the National Constituent Assembly of the National Alternative and Community Media Movement clearly states its political intentions:

“In this crucial hour of national life, in which the ideological/communication struggle constitutes the primary stage where we fight the great battle for the defense of the Bolivarian process and to lay the foundations of the socialist society of the 21st century, the Movement that integrates and articulates the Alternative and Community Media has to emerge as the communication frontline of the Venezuelan people. In each community, in each town, in each municipality and nationwide, to defeat the regressive hegemonic pretensions of the lackey media elites, of the traitorous media oligarchy and of US imperialism” (Bisbal.209, p 10).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Bisbal, M- (2009). *Hegemonía y Control Comunicacional*. Caracas. Editorial Alfa.

In 2013, the National System of Public Media gave way to the Bolivarian System of Communication in Information (SIBCI). Its objective is “to plan, coordinate, supervise, evaluate, advise and propose the informative, communicational and advertising campaigns of the bodies and agencies referred to in this decree”. (El Mundo, 2013). According to Bautista (2014), Sibci manages 14—print, radio and electronic—mass media outlets with national reach that serve the political goals of the Revolution.

The researcher argues that “the Bolivarian Revolution has managed to set up a communications monopoly that serves the political-ideological objectives of the regime. The totalitarian communicational model and the hijacking of the media’s message for propaganda purposes is a reality” in Venezuela. p109.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.7 CENSORSHIP ON THE WEB

With a large number of print, radio and television media outlets shut down or in the hands of the Government, journalism took refuge in the Internet to be able to inform Venezuelans of national events.

But the internet was not spared from government censorship. To this end, the Venezuelan regime has employed the use of the state-owned Compañía Nacional Teléfonos de Venezuela (CANTV), which is the main Internet provider in Venezuela, as well as the use of the regulator, the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel), and state security agencies to instruct private service providers to block access to certain websites.

In March 2022, on the World Day Against Internet Censorship, the NGO VE Sin Filtro, reported that according to its monitoring and documentation efforts carried out since 2012, “the escalation of internet censorship has been on the rise and has mainly affected media and web sites that share informative content.”<sup>20</sup>

According to the NGO, such forms of censorship date back to 2014, using mostly “DNS blocking,” which is a “technique whereby domain name system servers give wrong responses to queries related to the services they wish to block.”



<sup>19</sup> Bautista de Alemán Paola. *A Callar que Llegó la Revolución*, 2014

<sup>20</sup> Venezuelan NGO reports “extensive and sustained” internet censorship policy [https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/venezuela-censura\\_ong-venezolana-denuncia-pol%C3%ADtica--extensa-y-sostenida--de-censura-en-internet/47426908](https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/venezuela-censura_ong-venezolana-denuncia-pol%C3%ADtica--extensa-y-sostenida--de-censura-en-internet/47426908)

Azpúrua reported that generally “blocks are ordered by the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel), which supervises both technical aspects and content”.

The changes that were meant to be made in digital communications had been outlined in the II Socialist Plan for the Economic and Social Development of the Nation 2013-2019, known as Plan de la Patria (Homeland Plan).

This was expressed in the General Objectives of the Plan for the Homeland, according to the review of a research work of the Instituto Prensa y Sociedad,<sup>21</sup> on the subject:

**“Taking Venezuela’s connection with the communication and information networks dominated by the neocolonial powers to non-vital levels.”**

**“To eliminate the dependence of strategic sectors for national development on communication and information networks controlled by neocolonial powers (Presidency of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; 2012).”**

According to Ipys, there is evidence that internet control mechanisms began to be used in Venezuela since 2013, such as slowing down connections or completely cutting off internet access in times of high political unrest; just-on-time blocking of web sites or mobile applications.

It also cites a study by the expert Iria Puyosa (2015) which states that as a reaction to the protests in the country during 2014, there were also total internet access blocks in regions where demonstrations against the government were taking place.

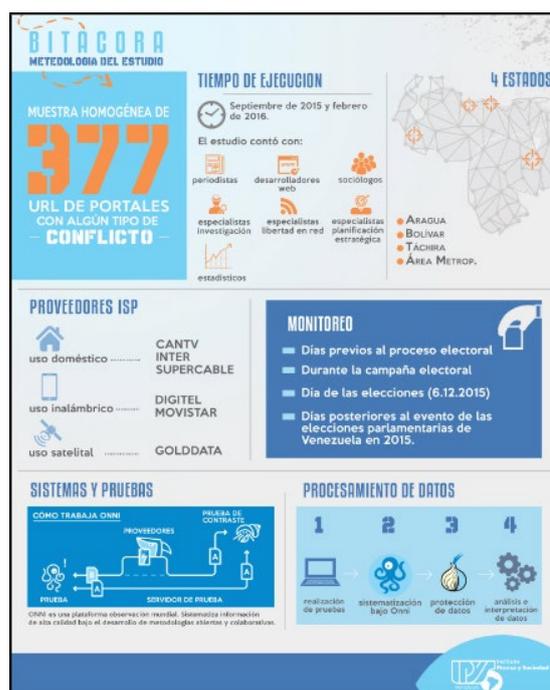
The report notes that Venezuelan government authorities reacted to the migration of audiences interested in news from traditional media to the web by establishing filtering and blocking measures <sup>21</sup>. Nearly 500 websites

were blocked for access from Venezuela during February 2014 (Espacio Público, 2015).

IPYS also cites technical reports that explain that between mid-February and late March 2014, CANTV and state-owned cell phone provider Movilnet set a limit of 1 Mbps during afternoons and evenings when demonstrations were taking place.

Between February and March 2014, CANTV reportedly manipulated the speed of data traffic to Twitter and YouTube servers (Freedom House, 2015). “The slowing of connections to these social media web services aimed at obstructing the dissemination of images of demonstrations and repressive actions by police, military and para-police groups,” the organization states.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, Ipys regards the events of April 14, 2013 (presidential election day) as an important milestone. On that occasion, CANTV shut down its services for approximately 35 minutes, leaving most Venezuelans offline precisely at the time when the polling stations were supposed to start closing (Freedom House, 2014).<sup>21</sup>



21 Navegar con Libertad. Ipys Venezuela 2016 <https://ipysvenezuela.org/navegarconlibertad/tag/bloqueo-de-portales-en-venezuela/>

This shows how the Venezuelan regime has used all its power as communications regulator and main service provider to implement internet censorship.

On the other hand, websites of major internet media have been subject to cyber-attacks, in some cases from hackers in Venezuela, but in other cases from other nations such as Russia.

Carlos Correa, director of the NGO Espacio Público and of the news site *Crónica Uno*, explained in 2019 that this website recurrently receives denial-of-service attacks.

"It is a permanent situation that our security systems are detecting. But there were at least two major attacks that affected us and caused some down time. Basically, they were denial of service attacks. And some of them came from Eastern European countries. That is what we detected at the time," he told *Crónica Uno*.<sup>22</sup>

Juan Eduardo Smith, director of *Noticiero Digital*, also explained in the same report how his site has been hit. "We are periodically attacked, via what they call DDoS attacks. The last one occurred between August 30 and September 3. An attack that increased the number of requests to the site to 50 million in a single day. That took our database to 100%. Of course, the site was inaccessible. The last one was the strongest in quite some time. It took us off the web for almost five full days."<sup>22</sup>

Smith pointed out that the attacks came from three countries: Russia, Iran and Ukraine, although he understands that the origin could be in other regions. "We think they were proxies (pretending to come from those countries). We don't know the specific origin," he said.

## 1.8 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A BATTLEFIELD

Social media as a tool for democratizing communication often have to face attempts to control them or to dominate conversations.

An investigation conducted by EsPaja in partnership with *Transparencia Venezuela*<sup>23</sup> recalls that the first attempt to control social media was the creation of alternative platforms, as is done in China; thus, in 2013, Nicolás Maduro called for the creation of a "Bolivarian Twitter". Two years later the "Red Patria" was created, with platforms similar to popular apps: "Nido" operated like Facebook, "Colibrí" was similar to WhatsApp, and "Cardenalito" mimicked Twitter, but those attempts failed, given the low interest shown by the public.

After the ruling party's defeat in the parliamentary elections, the Government became concerned with the control of conversations in social media, mainly in Twitter. According to the investigation, a Bolivarian revolution "army of trolls" cookbook was disclosed in 2017, which described how to articulate efforts in the public administration to issue content in favor of the Government and against the opposition.<sup>24</sup>

22 FANB activó protocolos ante hackers mientras ataca a portales de medios de comunicación <https://cronica.uno/fanb-activo-protocolos-ante-hackers-mientras-ataca-a-portales-de-medios-de-comunicacion/>

23 Caída del Escuadrón tuitero <https://transparenciave.org/caida-del-escuadron-tuitero-presentacion/>

24 Proyecto de Formación del ejército de trolls de la revolución bolivariana para enfrentar guerra mediática [https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2018-government-sponsored-cyber-militia-cookbook/data/Ejercito\\_De\\_Trolls\\_Venezuela.pdf](https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2018-government-sponsored-cyber-militia-cookbook/data/Ejercito_De_Trolls_Venezuela.pdf)

FORCED SILENCE

JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



This handbook outlines the organization of this army, with one person at its base, controlling a squad of 5 Instagram and Facebook accounts, 10 Twitter, 1 YouTube, Google and WhatsApp accounts. But the organization is growing: a platoon (consisting of 10 people), 1 company (50 people), 1 battalion (100 people) and 1 brigade (500 people). The latter has the capacity to handle 2,500 Instagram and Facebook accounts, 5,000 Twitter accounts, 500 YouTube accounts, 500 Google and WhatsApp accounts. In total, this instance could handle 11,500 accounts on the most important communication networks.



1 person=	<b>Squad</b>  5 Instagram accounts 5 Facebook accounts 10 Twitter accounts 1 Youtube account 1 Google account 1 Whatsapp	<b>23</b> <b>Accounts</b>  of the most important communication networks
10 persons=	<b>Platoon</b>  50 Instagram accounts 50 Facebook accounts 100 Twitter accounts 10 Youtube account 10 Google account 10 Whatsapp	<b>230</b> <b>Accounts</b>  of the most important communication networks
50 persons=	<b>Company</b>  250 Instagram accounts 250 Facebook accounts 500 Twitter accounts 50 Youtube account 50 Google account 50 Whatsapp	<b>1.150</b> <b>Accounts</b>  of the most important communication networks
100 persons=	<b>Battalion</b>  500 Instagram accounts 500 Facebook accounts 1.000 Twitter accounts 100 Youtube account 100 Google account 100 Whatsapp	<b>2.300</b> <b>Accounts</b>  of the most important communication networks
500 persons=	<b>Brigade</b>  2.500 Instagram accounts 2.500 Facebook accounts 5.000 Twitter accounts 500 Youtube account 500 Google account 500 Whatsapp	<b>11.500</b> <b>Accounts</b>  of the most important communication networks

EsPaja's research<sup>23</sup> also cites a report by the University of Oxford prepared in 2019 with entitled: Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation, "which details that Venezuela is one of the countries in which organized action from the governmental power to disinform has been detected."



According to journalist Víctor Amaya, director of EsPaja, in the case of Venezuela, the report "confirms that the strategies include the creation of disinformation or manipulated content, just like in China or Vietnam, using large groups of people hired by the government who shape public opinion and monitor public discourse through different online channels".

All this work on the web had measurable consequences. ProBox, an observatory made up of an interdisciplinary team devoted to analyzing trending content nationwide, as well as determining its origin and behavior on Twitter.

This organization determined that the Twitter trends positioned by the ruling party—linked to Nicolás Maduro's regime and government agencies—reached visibility in this social media platform during the first year of the pandemic thanks to a boost of 208,442,621 tweets. "That number represents 89.21% of all tweets on political and social issues posted in Venezuela between January 2020 and March 2021", explains EsPaja's research.<sup>23</sup>

Most of its trends were promoted by People's Ministry of Communication and Information (MIPPCI), supported by 201,090,709 tweets.

ProBox also detected that the tweets in favor of MIPPCI messages and topics showed a high percentage of inorganicity, i.e., they were generated by accounts with bot traits and behavior. Among the accounts that supported MIPPCI trends, 83.47% have bot traits, i.e. they are automated or with inauthentic behavior.

This whole scenario is a clear example of how social media have also been subject to planned and organized intervention by the Venezuelan regime with the purpose of making this also a space to amplify the impact of its narrative, but also for purposes of disinformation, publication of fakes news and stigmatizing messages towards targeted sectors in the opposition, in a platform widely used by the public due to the lack of access to information sites caused by the same blockade imposed by the Venezuelan government.

## 1.9 COMMUNICATION HEGEMONY AS PUBLIC POLICY

The hegemonic communicational model was an open policy disclosed by governmental authorities. The then Minister of Communications, Andres Izarra, stated this in an interview for the newspaper El Nacional.

On Monday, January 8, 2007, Izarra told the newspaper: "Socialism needs a communicational hegemony. Hegemony in the media is a necessary instrument for the revolution. And he added: "Yes, we are going to have a communicational hegemony. So what? And he added: "We have to prepare a new plan and ours is communicational and informational hegemony of the State; to build hegemony."<sup>25</sup>

Later the minister clarified: "I said it in the Gramscian sense. Gramsci does not speak of hegemony as these right-wing intellectuals, who want to make it look like an imposition, like a dictatorship", quoted Laura Helena Castillo in an opinion piece for The Washington Post.<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, Castillo argues: "The numbers, however, ended up contradicting the Gramscian tone of former Minister Izarra: according to Instituto Prensa y Sociedad Venezuela, between 2005 and 2017, around 99 media outlets were shut down, and during the government of President Nicolás Maduro (2013-2018), 65 newspapers ceased to circulate. El Nacional, 75 years after its foundation, has become number 66: The last print of the only independent newspaper with nationwide circulation in the country was sold on the street last Friday."

During the year 2022, a hundred radio stations in 16 states were closed by the Maduro regime. The National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel) argued the expiration of the concessions, and requests unfeasible conditions and requirements to renew the licenses.

The logic was clear. It was all part of a strategy with a primary objective, which was to promote a monopolistic and ideologized vision from the media that would underpin the 21st Century socialism in the public imaginary, through the dissemination of its narrative.

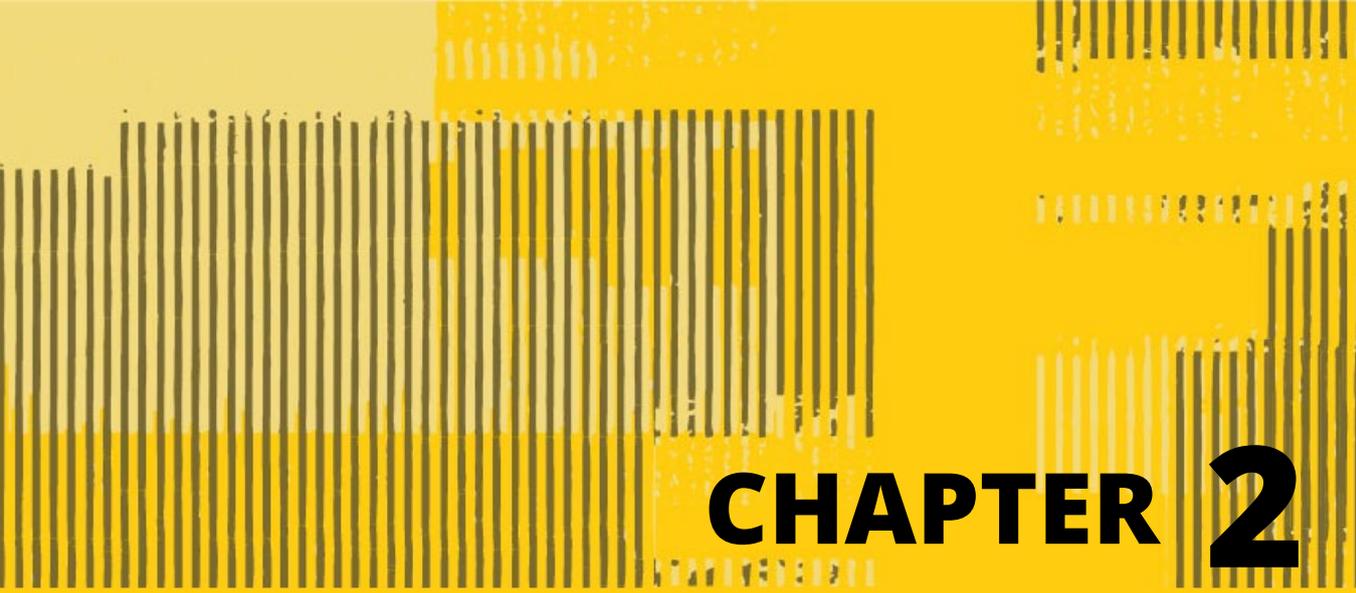
To this end, as has been pointed out, a two-fold tactic unfolded: first, the silence of the independent media, while the volume of the voice of government-sponsored media keeps getting louder.

In the first case, in order to silence independent media and citizens themselves, the apparatus described above was set in motion, including laws, sanctions, media shutdowns and buyouts, judicial persecution and online censorship, among other measures.

Second, the number of media outlets in the hands of the State was growing at a breakneck speed, artificial trends were created in social media, and lies, stigmatization and disinformation were used in the digital world.

25 Castro Villegas, Mario. Guayana sustentable. Vol. 13 Núm. 13 (2013) De la Hegemonía Comunicacional al Periodismo Libre <https://revistasenlinea.saber.ucab.edu.ve/index.php/guayanasustentable/article/view/2480>

26 Castillo Laura Elena. El Nacional y la hegemonía comunicacional en Venezuela. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2018/12/15/el-nacional-y-la-hegemonia-comunicacional-en-venezuela/>



# CHAPTER 2

# TODAY'S MEDIA MAP

FORCED SILENCE

JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA

The national media inventory kept by the NGO Espacio Público (<https://medios.espaciopublico.org/>) shows 973 media outlets. These have been subject to public policies and procedures that have increased censorship and disinformation in Venezuela.

**NATIONAL MAP OF THE NUMBER OF REGISTERED MEDIA OUTLET AS REPORTED BY ESPACIO PUBLICO**

Type	Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Radio.....44	Private	95	Private 34
Digital Native.....30 (Broadcast exclusively on the web).	State-owned	24	State-owned 9
TV (Analogue signal).....21	No data	3	No data 1
Digital Version (Newspaper,..10 TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>TOTAL 44</b>
Newspaper (print).....6			
Content curators.....4			
Cable TV.....2			
Traditional/Digital.....2			
Other.....1			
TV (Analogue signa).....1			
Digital TV (Broadcasting on the web).....1			
<b>TOTAL 122</b>			

Type	Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Radio..... 82	Private	97	Private 75
Traditional/Digital..... 5	State-owned	8	State-owned 7
Digital Version (Newspaper,..5 TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	No data	3	No data 1
Digital Native (Broadcast.....4 exclusively on the web).	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>TOTAL 82</b>
TV Cable..... 3			
Other..... 2			
TV (Analogue signal)..... 2			
Digital TV (Broadcasting..... 2 on the web)			
<b>TOTAL 105</b>			

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JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



Type	
Radio.....	68
Newspaper (print).....	1
Cable TV.....	1
Digital Version (Newspaper,.... TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	1
<b>TOTAL 71</b>	

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	68	Private 65
State-owned	3	State-owned 3
<b>TOTAL 71</b>		<b>TOTAL 68</b>



Radio.....	58
TV Cable.....	4
Newspaper (print).....	3
Digital Native (Broadcast..... exclusively on the web).	2
Traditional/Digital.....	2
<b>TOTAL 69</b>	

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	60	Private 50
State-owned	9	State-owned 8
<b>TOTAL 69</b>		<b>TOTAL 58</b>



Radio.....	56
TV (Analogue signal).....	6
Digital Native (Broadcast ..... exclusively on the web).	5
TV Cable.....	2
Newspaper (print).....	1
Digital Version (Newspaper, 1 TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	1
<b>TOTAL 71</b>	

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	68	Private 54
State-owned	3	State-owned 2
<b>TOTAL 71</b>		<b>TOTAL 56</b>

FORCED SILENCE

JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



Type	
Radio.....	43
Digital Native (Broadcast..... exclusively on the web).	9
Traditional/Digital.....	8
TV Cable.....	1
Digital Version (Newspaper..... TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	63
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>63</b>

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	40	Private 25
State-owned	16	State-owned 12
No data	63	No data 6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>TOTAL 43</b>



Radio.....	39
Digital Native (Broadcast..... exclusively on the web).	6
TV Cable.....	6
Digital Version (Newspaper..... TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	3
Newspaper (print).....	1
TV (Analogue signal).....	1
Traditional/Digital.....	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	49	Private 32
State-owned	8	State-owned 7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>TOTAL 39</b>



Radio.....	24
Digital Native (Broadcast..... exclusively on the web).	5
TV Cable.....	4
Digital Version (Newspaper..... TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	3
Newspaper (print).....	1
TV (Analogue signal).....	1
Traditional/Digital.....	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	33	Private 19
State-owned	3	State-owned 3
No data	39	No data 2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>TOTAL 24</b>

FORCED SILENCE

JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



Type	
Radio.....	20
Digital Version (Newspaper, TV ..... o radio, broadcasting information on the web)	7
Digital Native (Broadcast..... exclusively on the web).	5
TV (Analogue signal).....	4
Other.....	1
Newspaper (print).....	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	36	Private 19
No data	2	No data 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>TOTAL 20</b>



Radio.....	29
Digital Native (Broadcast ..... exclusively on the web).	3
Newspaper (print).....	1
TV (Analogue signal).....	1
TV Cable.....	1
Traditional/Digital.....	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	30	Private 23
State-owned	6	State-owned 6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>TOTAL 29</b>

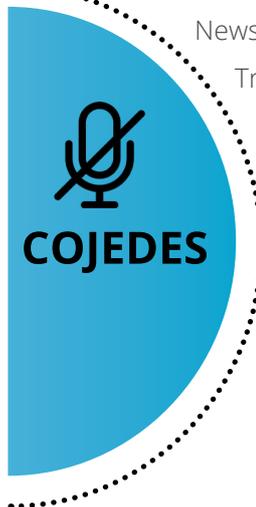


Radio.....	29
Traditional/Digital.....	5
Newspaper (print).....	1
Digital Version (Newspaper,..... TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	30	Private 23
State-owned	6	State-owned 6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>TOTAL 29</b>

FORCED SILENCE

JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



Type	
Radio.....	28
Newspaper (print).....	1
Traditional/Digital.....	1
<b>TOTAL 30</b>	

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	30	Private 22
State-owned	6	State-owned 6
<b>TOTAL 36</b>		<b>TOTAL 28</b>



Radio.....	23
Digital Native (Broadcast exclusively on the web).....	4
TV (Analogue signal).....	2
Digital Version (Newspaper, TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web).....	1
<b>TOTAL 30</b>	

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	27	Private 20
State-owned	3	State-owned 3
<b>TOTAL 30</b>		<b>TOTAL 23</b>



Radio.....	23
Digital Version (Newspaper, TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web).....	4
TV Cable.....	2
<b>TOTAL 29</b>	

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	28	Private 22
State-owned	1	State-owned 1
<b>TOTAL 29</b>		<b>TOTAL 23</b>

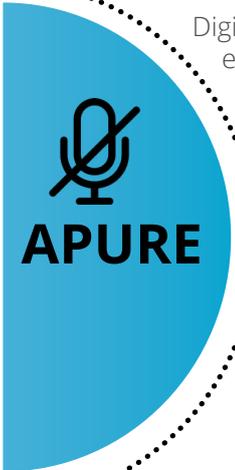
FORCED SILENCE

JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



Type	
Radio.....	23
Digital Native (Broadcast exclusively on the web).....	4
Newspaper (print).....	1
Digital Version (Newspaper,.. TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	1
<b>TOTAL 29</b>	

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	22	Private 16
State-owned	7	State-owned 7
<b>TOTAL 29</b>		<b>TOTAL 23</b>



Radio.....	17
Digital Native (Broadcast exclusively on the web).....	6
TV (Analogue signal).....	2
TV Cable.....	1
<b>TOTAL 26</b>	

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	21	Private 13
State-owned	5	State-owned 4
<b>TOTAL 26</b>		<b>TOTAL 17</b>

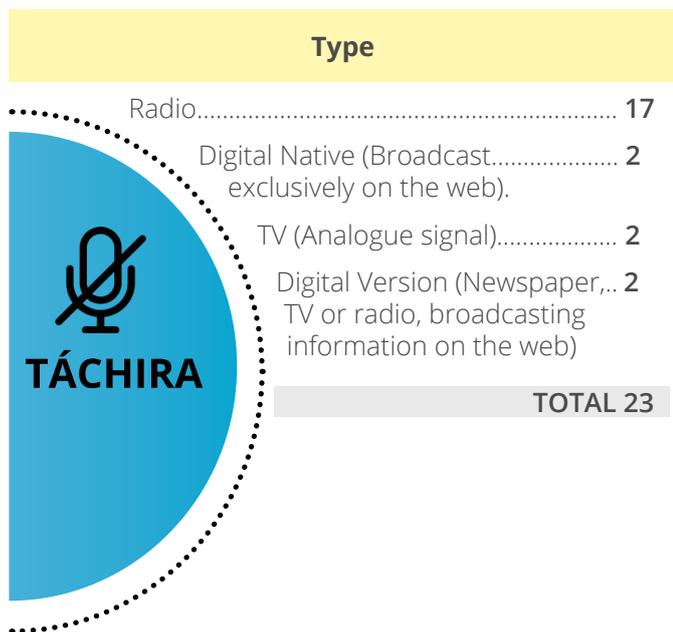


Radio.....	14
Digital Native (Broadcast exclusively on the web).....	8
TV (Analogue signal).....	1
TV Cable.....	1
Digital Version (Newspaper, TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	1
<b>TOTAL 25</b>	

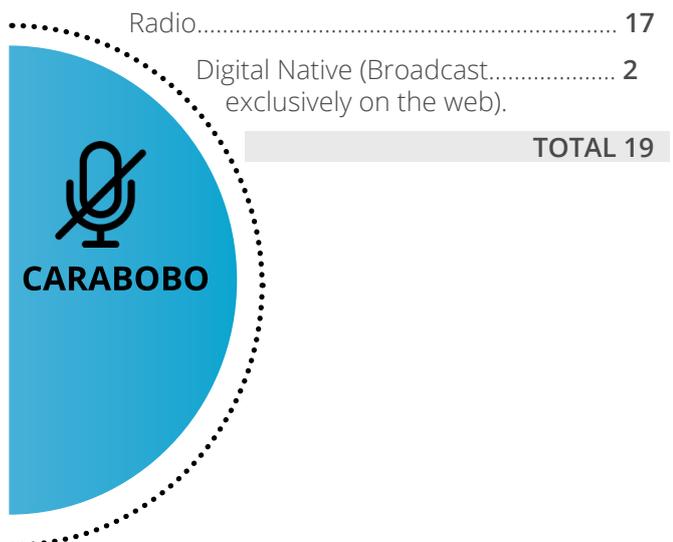
Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	25	Private 14
<b>TOTAL 25</b>		<b>TOTAL 14</b>

FORCED SILENCE

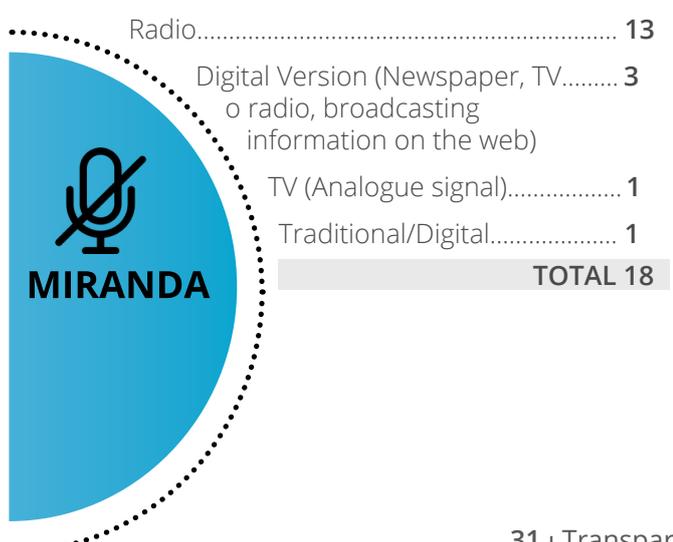
JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	18	Private 12
State-owned	4	State-owned 1
No data	1	No data 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>TOTAL 17</b>



Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	17	Private 15
State-owned	1	State-owned 1
No data	1	No data 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>TOTAL 17</b>



Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	14	Private 10
State-owned	1	
No data	3	No data 3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>TOTAL 13</b>

FORCED SILENCE

JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



Type	
Radio.....	11
TV Cable.....	3
Digital Version (Newspaper, TV or radio, broadcasting information on the web)	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	16	Private 11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>TOTAL 11</b>



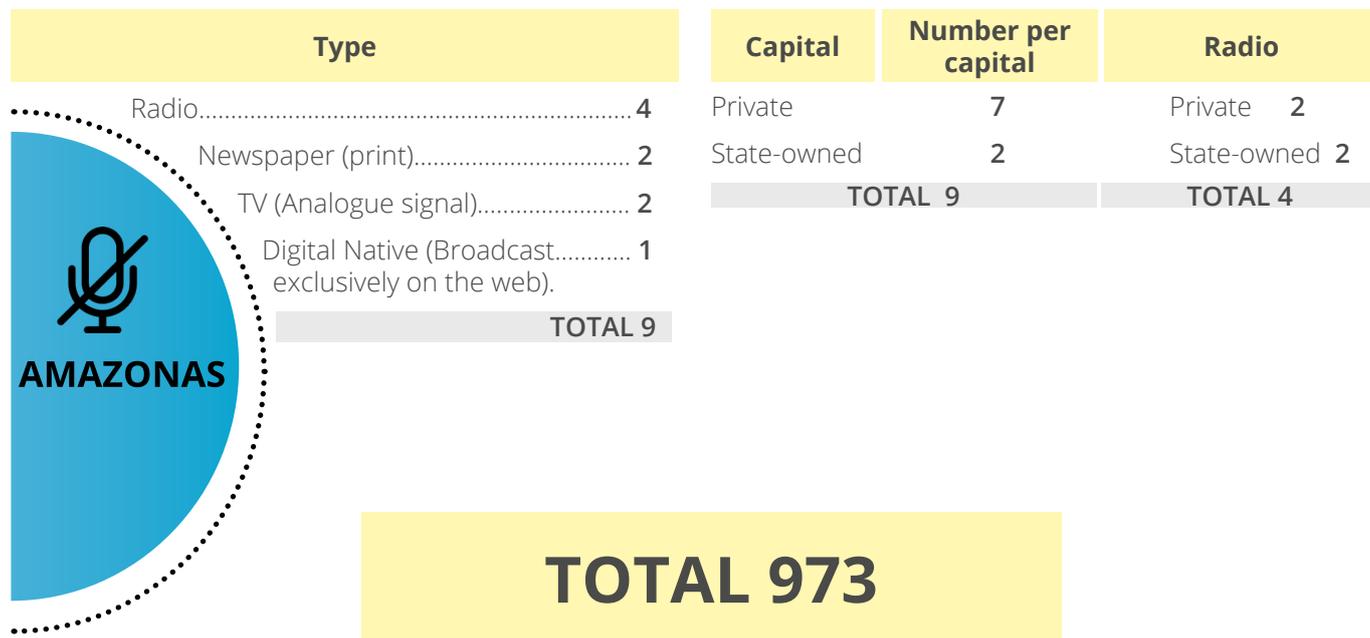
Radio.....	10
TV Cable.....	3
Digital Version (Newspaper, tv... o radio, broadcasting information on the web)	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	15	Private 10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>TOTAL 10</b>



Radio.....	11
Newspaper (print).....	1
TV Cable.....	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>

Capital	Number per capital	Radio
Private	11	Private 9
State-owned	2	State-owned 2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>TOTAL 11</b>



The Venezuelan State has been applying its communicational hegemony over media outlets that are still operating today and others that have ceased to exist.

The following is a description of a series of situations involving journalists and the media that highlight the spread of censorship and actions against freedom that are currently taking place in Venezuela.

### 2.1 SILENCE AND OPACITY AS CURRENT DYNAMICS

More than two decades of actions planned and executed by the State to secure communicational hegemony have led to what Instituto Prensa y Sociedad describes as an “information wasteland.” This prevents access to real time information on what is happening in the country, thus severely curtailing the debate to shape public opinion.

Limitations to the flow of information through sanctions, criminal and civil prosecution

aggressions against the media and journalists, media shutdowns and buyouts, added to the creation of a powerful network of state and parastatal media, and the use of the internet to misinform, have all brought about this reality.

But access is prevented in case of information on government management, thus hindering citizen oversight, a fundamental element for the exercise of democracy.

A paper by EsPaja, promoted by Transparencia Venezuela, entitled Opacity promotes a fictional Venezuela, explains that “The Venezuelan State is in debt when it comes to the disclosure of public data.”<sup>27</sup>

For the study, the organization evaluated 47 official documents that should have been released between 2010 and 2022, of which 64.22% have not yet been disclosed. In addition, 4.9% were untimely.

27 Espaja. La Opacidad promueve una Venezuela de ficción. <https://espaja.com/explain/la-opacidad-promueve-una-venezuela-de-ficcion>

In addition to the lack of data, disclosure is untimely, which causes distortions in the perception of reality. “We are seeing an old snapshot of the country. In cases such as the epidemiological bulletin, issued with a two-year delay, and in the statistics of the National Institute of Statistics (INE), with a three-year delay. This, undoubtedly, has an impact on the response to address social and economic problems, and it is even more serious in the case of public health issues,” explains EsPaja’s research.

We can see during the study period that, as the crisis keeps spiraling down, the government shuts down sources of information. While in 2016 the GDP saw its largest drop in 13 years—at 18.6%—, the State’s policy focused on censoring the media in order to achieve communicational hegemony.

The report shows that the lack of data on public debt, spending, the health situation, mortality rates, violent deaths, forced migrations and other key indicators of the crisis are the foundation of the current fictional Venezuela.

The report indicates that one of the most effective communication strategies of the Maduro administration is lack of transparency, which “has been successful in masking the true dimension of the humanitarian crisis, which civil society organizations have to report.

## 2.2 SOPHISTICATED CENSORSHIP

Professor Luisa Torrealba, a researcher at the Communication Research Institute (Ininco) of the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), explains that censorship and self-censorship mechanisms have grown in complexity and sophistication.

“This year 2022 has been very intense in terms of the revocation and suspension of radio licenses, with precautionary measures that include orders to go off the air to media outlets that have reported to be in the process of applying for their license, but have had no response from the regulator, the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel)”, she noted.

She comments that this government agency has acted with great opacity in relation to the management of the radio electric spectrum. “In the past, the records of authorized private, state and community radio and television stations were published on Conatel’s web page. Today there is no such record,” she explains.

**According to Torrealba’s numbers, some 300 radio stations went off the air in 2022, which account for 30% of the radio stations currently authorized to operate.**

As part of the sophistication of censorship, she argues that the regime intimidated radio stations by sending written notices, in which they were warned that if they addressed certain topics they could be in breach of the law, for example, when protests were taking place, a memo was issued where they were warned that broadcasting such events could affect the stability of the nation, which in turn led to self-censorship, as the media refrained from broadcasting the events.

But, according to Torrealba, written warnings gave way to telephone calls, so there is no record. “For example, banned topics include the long lines at the gas stations, food shortages, the black market dollar, and this has resulted in self-censorship, since the owner of the media outlet—whoever receives the call—is the person issuing the warning.”

### **2.3 REALITY OUTSIDE CARACAS**

Although geographically the entire population is affected by the lack of information, this reality is much more exacerbated outside the capital.

Luisa Torrealba explains that in more rural areas, radio has been the news medium par excellence. She notes that traditionally small radio stations do not produce their own news programs, as they usually replicate those of larger networks, but the threats has led to a transition towards more entertainment-based programming.

Furthermore, outside the capital, power outages that can last 6 or 7 hours are not uncommon, not without its consequences.

First, there is no information during that period, whether on radio, television or the internet. Second, due to the same situation, some radio stations have been forced off the air, as the blackouts have damaged their transmission equipment.



## RADIO STATIONS SHUT DOWN DURING 2022

### 1

**LARA**  
 CIELO 97.3 FM  
**MIRANDA**  
 SUPER 101.5 FM

### 2

**ANZOÁTEGUI**  
 ACTIVA 89.3 FM  
 ÉXITOS 100.1 FM  
**BARINAS**  
 TOPACIO 101.9 FM  
 EMOCIÓN 98.1 FM  
**BOLÍVAR**  
 PENTAGRAMA 107.3 FM  
 105.3 FM  
**GUÁRICO**  
 EXITOS 90.5 FM  
 CALLE 98.5 FM  
**NUEVA ESPARTA**  
 BUCANERA 107.7 FM  
 VILLA 103.5 FM

### 3

**MONAGAS**  
 MIX 92.1 FM  
 SABROSA 94.5 FM  
 AZUKAR 100.5 FM  
**PORTUGUESA**  
 TRIUNFO 99.3 FM  
 RADIO PAZ 103.1 FM  
 SONORA 107.7 FM

### 4

**YARACUY**  
 LUZ 102.9 FM  
 OASIS 90.3 FM  
 TROCADERO 106.3 FM  
 NAZARETH  
**CARABOBO**  
 PLAY TOP 91.5 FM  
 LIDER 106.7 FM  
 FM 105.3  
 EXITOS 99.1 FM

### 6

**COJEDES**  
 CANDELA 92.9 FM  
 MODA 105.1 FM  
 NEX 100.1 FM  
 HITS 92.5 FM  
 LUNA 95.5 FM  
 IMPACTO 91.7 FM

### 11

**SUCRE**  
 CENTENO 107.9 FM  
 CUMANACOA STEREO 98.5  
 BOOM 89.7 FM  
 COOL 101.3 FM  
 SHALOM  
 CAFÉ 100.4 FM  
 NVH RADIO 102.1 FM  
 MAGICA 95.1 FM  
 BELÉN  
 BAHÍA 102.5 FM  
 SOLO EXITOS 99.1 FM

### 13

**TÁCHIRA**  
 ACTIVACION STEREO 93.1 FM  
 LA NUESTRA 89.9 FM  
 PONTÁLIDA 92.5 FM  
 SOMOS 88.3 FM  
 ESPERANZA VIVA 98.1 FM  
 INNOVACIÓN STEREO 98.3FM  
 ALEGRIA 104.9 FM  
 PLATINUM 88.1 FM  
 ANGEL 102.3 FM  
 CAFÉ 90.3 FM  
 EXPLOSION STEREO 95.7 FM  
 SINERGIA 89.7 FM  
 RADIO FE Y ALEGRIA 95.7 FM

### 16

**FALCÓN**  
 EXTREMA 92.5 FM  
 TRICOLOR 105.5 FM  
 FREDMEDICAL 93.9 FM  
 CENTINELA 99.1 FM  
 PRECURSORA 95.9 FM  
 FIESTA 106.5 FM  
 CORIANÍSIMA 90.1 FM  
 METROPOLI 88.1 FM  
 GUADALUPANA 105.1 FM  
 TOP 97.1 FM  
 FALCONIANA 102.7 FM  
 97.5 FM EMISORA CULTURAL  
 OCCIDENTE 92.7 FM  
 CARUBARIGUA 96.9 FM  
 BERAKA 91.3 FM  
 MISIONERA 97.6 FM

### 31

**ZULIA**  
 SENSACIONAL STEREO 88.5 FM  
 ZULIA MIA 91.3 GM  
 KP 92.9 FM  
 REFUGIO 94.3 FM  
 PALABRA 97.3 FM  
 HIGH CLASS 98.1 FM  
 DESTINO 98.3 FM  
 RADIOLANDIA 103.3 FM  
 RIO STEREO 107.7 FM  
 SUAVE 102.7 FM  
 CANDELA 88.3 FM  
 SUPREMA 93.5 FM  
 JERUSALEN STEREO 98.5 FM  
 EXITOSA  
 RENUEVO 89.5 FM  
 CELESTIAL 96.9  
 GILGAL STEREO  
 SUR DEL LAGO STEREO 91.9 FM  
 SOMOS 95.5 FM  
 GUSTOSA 98.7 FM  
 ZULIANISIMA 102.9 FM  
 FANTASTICA 88.3  
 MAGICA 93.3 FM  
 CITOJENSE STEREO 94.3 FM  
 KE BUENA 101.1 FM  
 ACTIVA 88.3 FM  
 FIESTA 101.FM  
 BUENISIMA 106.3 FM  
 SABROSA 102.3 FM  
 PIRAGUA 99.9 FM  
 MELODICA 92.3 FM

## TOTAL 103

Source: National Journalists Association

Furthermore, a quota has been established by region for community radio stations which, according to the researcher, has been requested by religious groups or has been assigned to businessmen for commercial purposes. Thus, the nature radio is undermined, as people expect from this type of radio stations information related to their communities.

Another issue that significantly impinges on the right to information in the countryside is the shutdown of regional or local print media. Although there were several nationwide newspapers, they generally prioritized events occurring in the capital city Caracas, where they were based, and countryside residents did not see their daily reality reflected in these major newspapers.

The deep economic recession has threatened the financial stability of the regional and local media, with increasingly fewer companies with the budget to pay for advertising—the main source of income of these media. On the other hand, during the most restrictive stage of the foreign exchange control, the State centralized in a single agency the import and acquisition of paper, and newspapers had to go through a number of bureaucratic procedures that made it difficult to purchase this input.

This led, to a great extent, to the end of the national print media, but also the end of regional and local newspapers, leaving people uninformed. Some of these media made a transition as websites, but without the impact they had when they were printed, in addition to the issues of lack of connectivity and the power outages described above.

In the midst of such opacity, Torrealba explains that people in rural areas of the country have turned to alternative sources

information, such as news brief updates via WhatsApp, people reading the news on public transport or in a crowded place with a loudspeaker, or posters with the news of the day in the street.

Another alternative source of information emerged through migration. The researcher claims that people often ask their relatives abroad to inform them about the situation in Venezuela, since other countries broadcast more and better information than they have access to.

## 2.4 VIOLATIONS TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AS OF 2021 (TOTAL AND BY STATE)

The latest IPYS report for 2021 provides a clear snapshot of the current situation of the right to information in Venezuela and a state-by-state assessment.<sup>28</sup>

According to the monitoring and alert system of the Instituto Prensa y Sociedad, 249 cases were reported, totaling 380 violations of free expression and information through traditional and digital media.

The Institute points out that, although the total number of incidents is lower than that recorded in 2020—when 374 incidents were confirmed, including 636 violations—“the limitations experienced today by reporters and the media in the country show that excessive controls continue to be applied, jeopardizing the independence, diversity and plurality of journalism.”

The facts confirmed by this organization included 140 violations in the category of aggressions and attacks, 75 for restrictions on access to public information, 68 for stigmatizing speech, 25 for internal

28 Annual Report 2021 | *El asedio del Poder* <https://ipysvenezuela.org/2022/03/15/reporte-anual-2021-el-asedio-del-poder/>

ensorship actions, 24 for prior censorship, 17 for abuse of state power, 16 administrative legal actions, 12 arbitrary arrests and 3 forced disappearances.

It notes that, although the highest number of alerts was recorded in the first half of the year, with 129 cases of violations confirmed between January and June, the second half of 2021 was not free of recurrent violations, which occurred mainly in times of great political and social relevance, such as during the regional and municipal elections on November 21, being this the month where the highest number of restrictions were applied.

Historically, the greatest number of events affecting freedom of information and expression occur in Venezuela at times of great political tension, such as mass protests and elections.

In addition, IPYS reported<sup>29</sup> that officers of security forces in Venezuela, made up of the different branches of the National Armed Forces, police departments—including the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) and the regional and municipal police—, in addition to investigation and intelligence units such as the Scientific, Criminal and Forensic Investigations Corps (CICPC), the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) and the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM), were responsible for 69 of the cases of the cases of violations to freedom of expression during 2021, thus becoming the main perpetrators.

Notable cases are the arbitrary arrests of journalists:

- Luis López, in the state of Vargas.
- Edwin Prieto and Lenín Danieri, in Zulia.

- Martí Hurtado Pimentel and his wife Nelly Pulgar, in Falcón.
- Francisco Rafael Rattia, in Monagas.
- Orlando Montlouis of the state of Miranda.
- Milagros Mata Gil and Juan Manuel Muñoz, in Anzoátegui, in eastern Venezuela.
- Joan Camargo in Caracas.
- Rafael Hernández and Luis Gonzalo Pérez in Apure, when both were reporting for the international media NTN24 on the armed conflict on the border with Colombia in March 2021.

It reports that three months after that episode, Luis Gonzalo Pérez said on a video he posted on Instagram that his account there had been hacked after the military took away his device and detained him for 25 hours, 19 of which were spent as an enforced disappearance.

In addition, on October 15, CICPC officers raided the family home of journalist Roberto Deniz in Caracas, after securing an arrest warrant against the reporter from the 32nd Court of First Instance, headed by Judge Yoly Mariana Torres Sandoval, despite the fact that Deniz has not lived in the country since 2018.

The journalist's relatives were intimidated and interrogated by the agents who arrived in an unmarked vehicle and dressed in black.

Deniz has been subject to judicial persecution after filing a series of reports on the business dealings of Alex Saab, a businessman who, according to former Venezuelan Prosecutor General Luisa Ortega Díaz<sup>30</sup>, is a representative of the personal economic interests of the head of the regime, Nicolás Maduro.

29 Los 10 principales victimarios de la libertad de expresión en Venezuela <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/balance-ipysve-los-10-principales-victimarios-de-la-libertad-de-expresion-en-venezuela/>

30 Former Venezuelan Prosecutor Luisa Ortega talks about Alex Saab and his ties to Maduro <https://www.semana.com/semana-tv/semana-noticias/multimedia/efiscal-de-venezuela-luisa-ortega-habla-de-alex-saab-y-sus-vinculos-con-maduro/679698/>

According to data collected by the monitoring system No. 2 , in 2021 there were 72 cases with nationwide impact, while the states with the highest incidences during this period were the Metropolitan Area of Caracas, with 36 events, the state of Falcón, with 12, and the states of Lara and Carabobo with 11 cases. In the rest of the states, the number of reported and verified events was as follows:

Monagas (10), Portuguesa (10), Anzoátegui (9), Apure (9), Mérida (9), Amazonas (8), Bolívar (8), Zulia (8), Barinas (6), Vargas (5), Sucre (5), Miranda (4), Táchira (4), Aragua (3), Trujillo (3), Cojedes (2), Yaracuy (2), Guárico (1), y Nueva Esparta (1).

A new Ipys report on this subject will be available in 2023 that will give an account of the events in 2022.

“Between January and December 2021, IPYS Venezuela confirmed new temporary and continuous blockages that expanded the list of censored information sites in the country, totaling 40 affected media outlets and organizations. These restrictions, which were also reported by the organization Venezuela Sin Filtro, were verified based on a series of measurements implemented under the methodology of the Open Observatory of Interferences on the Web (OONI Run), and thanks to the joint work of the team of this organization and its National Network of Correspondents, who also reported and followed up on the massive outages that prevented the access of citizens to the information published on these websites, especially during elections last year”, said the report.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.5 DIGITAL BALANCE IN THE PAST YEAR

IPYS also inquired about freedoms in the digital space in Venezuela during 2021, and reported that the main violations of information rights in the web during the study period were 38 media outlets and two NGOs blocked, and 51 attacks under the category of stigmatizing discourse.

To a lesser extent, there were also incidents of identity theft (7), personal security breaches (7), arbitrary suspensions of social media accounts (7) and security breaches of web sites (5). The report also reports 115 claims of internet access restrictions due to power and telecommunications outages.

31 IPYS/ Information Guarantees went offline <https://ipysvenezuela.org/2022/05/16/garantias-informativas-quedaron-fuera-de-linea-en-venezuela-durante-2021/>



# 404 :(

The data verified by this organization showed episodes of selective censorship that restricted the dissemination of the contents of 38 national and foreign—mostly private and independent—media outlets. The following were impacted, among others:

- VIVOplay
- VPItv
- NTN24
- Noticia al Día
- El Pitazo
- Caraota Digital
- Albertonews
- Monitoreamos
- Armando.Info
- La Patilla
- Efecto Cocuyo
- Aporrea, 2001
- Correo del Orinoco
- Punto de Corte
- Runrunes
- Crónica Uno
- El Cooperante
- El Universal
- Globovisión
- El Nacional
- Correo del Caroní
- La Mañana
- Sumarium
- Infobae
- El Tiempo
- EVTU

and the websites of organizations such as

- Insight Crime
- Acceso a la Justicia
- Mi Convive

These limitations were implemented by private and state-owned internet service providers, both fixed and mobile networks, and CANTV, Movistar and Digitel were among the main implementers. It was determined that these abusive practices occurred mainly through DNS blocking (DNS server does not respond with the IP address associated to the requested domain).

In its annual report Freedom on the Web 2021, NGO Freedom House noted that of the nine countries in Latin America evaluated, Venezuela ranked among the worst nations in terms of free internet in the region, with a rating of 28 points, on a “internet freedom” scale in which a score of 70 to 100 means free.

IPYS also reported that in January 2021 digital media Efecto Cocuyo, El Pitazo, Caraota Digital, Radio Fe y Alegría and NGOs Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Prensa (SNTP) and Transparencia Venezuela were victims of a campaign of aggressions by the websites of Globovisión, Contexto Diario, El Universal and Misión Verdad, following the publication of Britain’s media organization Declassified UK on the international cooperation provided by the United Kingdom. In several articles and through its social media, Declassified UK’s investigation was criminalized for receiving foreign funding “to overthrow Maduro’s government.” Typical discourse also argued that the United Kingdom “influences the agenda of Venezuelan journalism.”<sup>31</sup>

## 2.6 POSITIONING FALSE NARRATIVES

With the use of disinformation staff financed with State money, various opinion matrixes have been promoted in Venezuela in conventional media and in the digital space. One of the most prominent during 2022 was the notion that “Venezuela is fixed now.”

According to the regime’s narrative, the Maduro administration has managed to circumvent the economic sanctions imposed by the United States and other governments and has stabilized the economy and improved the quality of life of Venezuelans.

In order to be credible, such a narrative must be based on some sort of foundation, and it sort of is, since during the past year—although inflation is still among the highest in the world—it has moved away from the hyperinflationary trend of previous years, and the economy has shown a very discreet recovery.

After a three-year hiatus without disclosing the nation’s macroeconomic figures, the Central Bank of Venezuela published that

by 2019, the previous year’s

inflation had stood at

**130,060%,**

although opposition-controlled Parliament

claimed it was

**1,698,844%**

There are still no official 2022 inflation figures, but according to the Venezuelan Finance Observatory (OVF), a body made up of economists who oppose Nicolás Maduro’s government, the interannual rate in November stood at 213%, and the accumulated year to date was 195.7%.

In May 2022, economic consulting firm Anova presented a study entitled *Is Venezuela fixed? - Recent Trends in Income Distribution*.<sup>32</sup>

Based on the National Survey of Living Conditions (Encovi), this report concludes that during the period 2020–2021 the overall inequality indicators in Venezuela, which were already high, deteriorated abruptly:

<sup>32</sup> Anova: ¿Venezuela se arregló?: Tendencias recientes en la distribución del ingreso <https://thinkanova.org/2022/05/06/venezuela-se-arreglo-tendencias-recientes-en-la-distribucion-del-ingreso/#:~:text=Asimismo%2C%20en%202021%20el%20pa%C3%ADs%20m%C3%A1s%20desiguales%20de%20Latinoam%C3%A9rica>

"In 2020, the average income of the richest 20 percent of the population was 23 times higher than the average income of the poorest 20 percent, while, in 2021, the income of the richest 20 percent was 46 times higher than that of the poorest 20 percent. Similarly, in 2021, the top 20 percent concentrated 61 percent of the nation's total income, while in 2020 it concentrated 54 percent," the report notes.

Ramón Cardozo, head of the consulting firm, notes: "These figures placed Venezuela as one of the most unequal countries in Latin America. The Gini index, a coefficient used to measure income inequality, rose 74 percentage points reaching 65.2 percent in 2021 (18.8 percentage points higher than the region's average)."<sup>33</sup>

With such a high inflation, Venezuela is far from being "fixed". However, the country is seeing a great number of businesses opening, which offer imported luxury goods that very few people can afford.



A WOMAN LIVING ON THE STREET IN THE CATIA NEIGHBORHOOD IN VENEZUELAN CAPITAL CARACAS.

But state-owned and private media with capital closely related to government officials open spaces to show a different reality. This is the case, for instance, of Lara state governor Adolfo Pereira, as he attended a casino opening: "I want to congratulate the people who trusted in Venezuela, in the powerful state of Lara, and stayed here. Tourism as a driver, an entrepreneurial driver," said in his remarks.<sup>34</sup>



33 Cardozo, Ramón: ¿Se arregló Venezuela? ¿O se sigue hundiendo? <https://www.dw.com/es/se-arregl%C3%B3-venezuela-o-se-sigue-hundiendo/a-62145222>

34 Inauguran en Barquisimeto el Casino Tiuna, "un emprendimiento con sabor e inversión privada" <https://alnavio.es/en-video-inauguran-en-barquisimeto-el-casino-tiuna-un-empredimiento-con-sabor-e-inversion-privada/#:~:text=%2D%20El%20Casino%20Tiuna%20abrir%C3%B3%20sus,estado%20de%20Lara%2C%20Adolfo%20Pereira>

## FORCED SILENCE

### JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA

country has also hosted an unprecedented number of concerts by international artists and although in many cases attendance is poor, the official narrative presents them as part of its argument that “Venezuela has been fixed.”

“Venezuela can say today that we deserve the Nobel Prize in Economics because we have made progress by ourselves, humbly, only with the Bolivarian economic agenda,” Maduro said in late March.<sup>35</sup>



GETTY IMAGES  
MADURO AFFIRMED THAT VENEZUELA DESERVES THE NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS



GETTY IMAGES  
HYPERINFLATION CAUSED THE VENEZUELAN BOLIVAR TO LOSE SO MUCH VALUE THAT ITS BANKNOTES ENDED UP BEING USED FOR DECORATIVE PURPOSES.



GETTY IMAGES  
VENEZUELA'S FREQUENT POWER OUTAGES ARE AN OBSTACLE TO ECONOMIC RECOVERY



GETTY IMAGES



REUTERS

VENEZUELA'S OIL PRODUCTION FELL TO MID-20TH CENTURY LEVELS IN 2020

35 Signs of Venezuela's economic recovery (and its limits (y sus límites) <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-61728010>

Although a month later he clarified: “Some people have come out to say that ‘Venezuela is fixed now.’ No, it is not fixed. It is improving, Venezuela is going to improve, it will grow, but there is still a long way to go.”<sup>35</sup>

## 2.7 EXPECTATIONS IN THE DIGITAL WORLD FOR 2023

During the year 2022, the regime tightened its grip over the web. Not only news sites were on the radar of Conatel and law enforcement and judicial agencies, but regular citizens have been prosecuted for expressing their opinions on social media or even for making a joke about public officials.

This year two people were arrested and prosecuted for criticizing the president of the National Racetrack Institute, Antonio Álvarez, on Twitter, and a 72-year-old lady was issued an arrest warrant for a humorous Tiktok video in which she made reference to Nicolás Maduro. The lady and her son were arrested on charges of “promoting hatred,” and after posting a video apologizing, they were issued subpoenas.

Regarding expectations for 2023, the Runrunes information site<sup>10</sup> consulted experts in the field. They all agree that this year, before an election year (presidential elections are expected to be held in 2024), there will be an increase in measures affecting the right to information and expression in the digital space.

Mariví Marín, political scientist and executive director of the ProBox Digital Observatory, said: “It is quite likely to happen, the reports of (national and international) organizations in defense of freedom of expression have

documented how access to information in Venezuela has been increasingly censored overall, and this is ever more common in the online sphere, which, as a result of censorship in traditional media, has become the main source of information.”<sup>36</sup>

Marín added that “taking into account that all these actions against freedom of expression, especially online, have been escalating, the internet—a fundamental space for social organization, activism and citizen articulation—will very likely suffer more attacks next year, and consequently, greater restrictions and violations against the digital rights of citizens.”

Regarding the criminalization of opinions, Professor Raisa Uribarrí, a researcher at Universidad de Los Andes (ULA), warns that this is done by enforcing the Law against Hate, an instrument enacted in 2017 by the so-called National Constituent Assembly, an entity imposed by the regime to encroach on the legal powers of the opposition-majority Parliament.

“They invented this branch of power. That is not to say that the National Constitution does not allow for this type of laws, but the purpose or even all their articles are very vague. In other words, what is hatred? The law does not clearly establish what hate speeches are, and it also sets out excessive penalties and sanctions. Prison sentences, civil pecuniary penalties with high amounts and, well, we will surely continue to see this kind of actions,” Uribarrí predicts.<sup>36</sup>

36 Panorama de la Libertad de Expresión en Internet <https://runrun.es/rr-es-plus/489160/3x3-panorama-de-la-libertad-de-internet-en-venezuela-pinta-oscuro-para-2023/>

37 IPYS/Bitácora de riesgos <https://ipysvenezuela.org/bitacora-de-riesgos/testimonios-sonoros/>

## 2.8 RISK MAP BY STATE

This year, Ipys Venezuela published on its website what it called a risk log<sup>37</sup>. It consists of determining the situations that most affect the work of journalists in the different states of the country during 2022. For this purpose, this organization interviewed a journalist from each state, who presented his or her points of view.

The testimonies are striking, but also, when comparing one with the other, we can witness a state policy aimed at

intimidation and aggression against news coverage. In addition, we have witnessed the alternative actions that journalists have had to take in order to practice, such as providing coverage accompanied by other colleagues, which, in order to leave a record, warn others or help colleagues in the event of an aggression or other arbitrary act.

Below is a summary of the Risk Log by state, according to the opinion of the journalists surveyed:



### AMAZONAS

The main risk is to cover sensitive issues such as guerrilla and drug trafficking, or the involvement of the Armed Forces in illegal activities, or reports about corruption in state-owned companies, which can prompt intimidation by officials. In fact, these issues are not covered in the media.



### ANZOÁTEGUI

The main risk is intimidation by government agencies simply for being journalists and covering events. Journalists have been arrested for taking photographs or statements, for example at a gas station, where there are usually protests. This can also happen in a hospital or elsewhere.



### APURE

Journalists are subjected to harassment or arbitrary arrests by the armed forces, who want to prevent publication of information that might displease the governor or military officials. Going to a healthcare center to gather information represents a risk.

## FORCED SILENCE

### JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



#### ARAGUA

The main risks include the intimidation to which journalists are subjected when they seek information in any public institution. This involves preventing access or being evicted from the coverage site. Often the threats come from social media accounts that expose journalists to discredit. Some government officials lead these discrediting campaigns.



#### BARINAS

Coverage of the protests related to gas and fuel distribution poses a risk, as police and national guards try to prevent journalists from conducting interviews or taking photos..



#### BOLÍVAR

Law enforcement officers forbid recording of audiovisual material and any wrongdoings, and force journalists to show the recorded content and then delete it. Journalists can only take pictures discreetly. In addition, due to the presence of organized crime in the mines in the south of the state, media sometimes refrain from publishing information on this subject in order to protect sources.



#### CARABOBO

There is a significant risk of being arrested, of law enforcement officers taking away reporters' phones—their main work tool. One form of intimidation is that Carabobo Police officers make videos of journalists as if they were their enemies.

## FORCED SILENCE

### JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA



#### COJEDES

Aggressions in the context of demonstrations or other events called by the opposition, and threats and verbal harassment, are part of everyday life of journalists in Cojedes. There are reportedly no printed media in this state and those who provide services in other platforms are threatened and restricted.



#### DELTA AMACURO

The main risk being prosecuted for what the government considers a mishandling of information. There is no official access to matters of public interest. There are many limitations and risks for the coverage of sensitive issues, such as gas and fuel distribution and power outages.



#### DISTRITO CAPITAL

Although there is better access to information than in the countryside, when journalists try to get a statement from a public official, they are surrounded by police officers or colectivos (paramilitary groups of the regime). Thus, there is a risk when asking an inconvenient question, as they threaten the reporter, who becomes a target. In low-income areas it is difficult to get testimonies, because people are threatened.



#### FALCÓN

Poor connectivity is a major limitation for journalism, as journalists must use several phone service providers in order to find the best signal to send their material. Constant power outages are another limiting factor.



#### GUÁRICO

The main risk is aggression by police and military officers and pro-government communities. Another important factor is crime, which poses the risk of theft of equipment, e.g. phones. Journalists usually cover news accompanied by other colleagues.

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#### LA GUAIRA

Journalists here are the target of attacks by pro-government groups when interviewing opposition leaders. They are threatened with the use of the justice system when their work is inconvenient for the ruling party. They are also exposed to public scorn in social media.



#### LARA

In opposition demonstrations, there are armed groups and pro-government colectivos that try to intimidate people, including journalists covering the demonstrations. These groups gone as far as firing weapons to prevent coverage.



#### MÉRIDA

The main limitations to the practice of journalism include threats or attacks by police or military officers, or even civilians, when reporters cover information that may damage the image of state authorities.



#### MIRANDA

There are obstructions to press coverage, interviews and photographs or videos in certain places, mainly outside public offices. There are also aggressions during street protests. Intimidation is the greatest risk, with police officers always watching what reporters do and impeding their work.



#### MONAGAS

The main risk is crime, as journalists are exposed to having their equipment stolen. In addition, journalists who visit the communities run the risk of being assaulted by government supporters, who see journalists as opposition actors. Journalists are also discredited by authorities, including the state governor.

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#### NUEVA ESPARTA

Insecurity also poses an important risk for journalists here, given the possibility of losing their phones, cameras, lighting equipment or vehicle. Coverage of protests also poses a risk.



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#### PORTUGUESA

Harassment, aggressions or the possibility of being arrested are among the main risks for the practice of journalism in the state. There are reports of areas where journalists are banned, such as gas stations; it may be risky to carry cameras or make videos in public institutions. Reporters have to hide to cover news.



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#### SUCRE

A major limitation is the shutdown of media outlets due to economic situations. Journalists and digital media face daily aggressions, threats of imprisonment and even death threats.



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#### TÁCHIRA

In this state, there is frequent intimidation by law enforcement and military forces during news coverage; consequently, journalists try to be accompanied by other colleagues while working in the street, in order to leave a record of abuses. There is reported a great deal of self-censorship due to legal actions brought against journalists, who have been imprisoned without legal foundations. On the border with Colombia, there is much intimidation, and reporters are exposed to aggressions. Crime also poses risks.

## FORCED SILENCE

### JOURNALISM IN VENEZUELA

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#### TRUJILLO

There is a high risk of arrest for journalists when covering news in certain places, such as gas stations. When covering on the street, officers demand to see the recordings. There have also been complaints filed at the Prosecutor General's Office against journalists and threats to radio programs for the information or opinions they broadcast.



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#### YARACUY

The main fear of journalists is being arrested. They are reportedly threatened daily by government officials, including the governor. These officials believe that critical journalists are always paid by the opposition. Media professionals are exposed to persecution and discrediting, which makes their work increasingly difficult.



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#### ZULIA

Aggression by police and military officers and the theft of the media equipment are the main risks for journalists in the state of Zulia.

## CONCLUSIONS

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Public opinion in Venezuela is severely compromised. The free expression of ideas is restricted, censored, prosecuted or contaminated, while government resources are used to amplify the voices and narratives of the regime, minimize critical opinions, misinform and try to conceal any information that could people make decisions or take stock of government action.

While people throughout the country are affected by clear violations of their right to expression and information, the issue is particularly acute in rural areas.

Outside the capital Caracas, the constant power outages, the end of the print media, the shutdown of radio stations and major connectivity problems, in addition to censorship and self-censorship, make it extremely difficult to obtain accurate, verified and timely information.

The situation can be summarized in the consolidation of a communicational hegemony, a confessed objective of the regime, and the undervaluation of—uninformed and weak—citizens, with little capacity to articulate efforts, in the face of an overpowering State.



# MILESTONES

**1999**



## PUBLIC POLICIES APPROVED BY THE GOVERNMENT

- Start of the communicational hegemony policy
- Strengthening of state-owned media
- Restrictions on journalists and media access to government sources
- Official statistics are kept secret. No public presentation of management reports
- People are uninformed and limited to compare sources

**2000**



## CONTEMPT LAWS

- Violation of freedom of expression through: Penal Code (Art. 223, 226, 296) and Code of Military Justice (Art. 505).
- Criminalization of expressions contrary to or critical of the government and its officials.

**2001**



## PRESIDENT HUGO CHÁVEZ'S SPEECH ON JOURNALISTS' DAY

- Violence in the streets by Bolivarian Circles and supporters of the government against the press

**2002**



## LAWS ISSUED BY THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

- Protests in April
- Violence against press workers
- Media openly called for demonstrations against the President
- Mandatory nationwide radio and TV messages supporting Chavez



## APRIL 11 COUP

- Self-censorship
- 142 events, aggressions or hindrances to journalistic activity
- 154 media outlets affected
- Bolivarian Circles act against journalists and the media

**2003-  
2022**



## AT LEAST 233 RADIO STATIONS SHUT DOWN

- 64% of all media outlets shut down in the last 20 years
- Increased silencing of critics and independent journalism
- Consolidation of state communication hegemony.
- Fear and self-censorship among radio station owners and workers



2004



#### ENACTMENT OF THE LAW ON SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN RADIO AND TELEVISION (*RESORTE LAW*)

- Establishment of the social responsibility of radio, television and electronic media service providers.
- Imposes punitive framework under the pretext of protecting the rights of children and adolescents and avoiding distress among the population.

2005



#### AMENDMENT OF THE PENAL CODE

- Increased penalties for offenses related to the protection of honor and reputation of public officials
- Creation of offenses such as dissemination of false information
- Criminalization of criticism of the government and officials
- Arrest of former Zulia governor Oswaldo Álvarez Paz

2006



#### CREATION OF THE NATIONAL PUBLIC MEDIA SYSTEM

- Government communication hegemony

2007



#### INTERVIEW WITH COMMUNICATION MINISTER ANDRÉS IZARRA

- Monopolistic and ideologized vision underpinning 21st Century Socialism

#### SHUTDOWN OF RADIO CARACAS TELEVISIÓN (RCTV)

- Confiscation of equipment
- Protests in favor of RCTV's concession renewal
- Consolidation of state communication hegemony.
- Violation of American Convention Articles: 1: Obligation to respect rights, 8: Right to judicial guarantees and 13: Right to freedom of thought and expression.

2009



#### SIMULTANEOUS SHUTDOWN OF 34 RADIO STATIONS

- Increased silencing of critics independent journalists



2010



**AMENDMENT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY RULES OF PROCEDURE AND DEBATES**

- Private media banned from covering parliamentary sessions

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AGREEMENT**

- Guillermo Zuloaga's (Globovisión president) statement at the Inter-American Press Association were condemned.

**AMENDMENT OF MEDIA RESPONSIBILITY LAW**

- Banning dissemination of messages that could incite assassination, cause distress or disturb public order, or otherwise jeopardize the security of the Nation.

2011-  
2013



**HUGO CHÁVEZ'S ILLNESS**

- Lack of specific information on the health of the President

2013



**SALE OF CADENA CAPRILES**

- Sold under pressure
- Changes in the editorial line to favor the government Resignation of independent journalists

**SALE OF *EL UNIVERSAL***

- Non-transparent sale
- Changes in editorial line to favor the government
- Exclusion of opposition columnists

**SALE OF GLOBOVISIÓN**

- Changes in editorial line, formerly strongly oppositional Resignation of independent journalists

**NATIONAL PUBLIC MEDIA SYSTEM GIVES WAY TO BOLIVARIAN INFORMATION COMMUNICATION SYSTEM (SIBCI)**

- Communication monopoly that serves the political-ideological objectives of the government.

**CANTV SERVICE STOPPAGE**

- Access to information limited for around 35 minutes during closing of polling stations in presidential elections



**2013-  
2014**



**INTERNET CONTROL AGAINST DIGITAL MEDIA**

- Just-on-time blocking of websites or mobile applications
- Access to 500 websites blocked during February 2014
- Manipulation of data traffic speed by CANTV and MOVILNET
- Internet outages in several regions
- Cyber-attacks in Venezuela and Russia

**2013-  
2015**



**CREATION OF ALTERNATIVE PLATFORMS: "BOLIVARIAN TWITTER"; "RED PATRIA"; "COLIBRÍ" AND "CARDENALITO".**

- Government's attempt to position trends in social media

**2014**



**MANIPULATION OF DATA TRAFFIC SPEED ON TWITTER AND YOUTUBE**

- Images of protests and government repression blocked from dissemination

**2016**



**PUBLICATION OF THE WEEKLY EPIDEMIOLOGICAL BULLETIN**

- Failure of Health Ministry to publish the document

**2017**



**ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS**

- Aggressions against journalists by the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB)

**APPROVAL AND EXECUTION OF PUBLIC BUDGET**

- Executive Branch decides not to publish the budget

**IMPLEMENTATION OF BOLIVARIAN REVOLUTION'S "TROLL ARMY"**

- Broadcasting of pro-government and anti-opposition content
- Creation of manipulated content and disinformation

**2018**



**FINAL JUDGMENT OF THIRD COURT OF FIRST INSTANCE IN CIVIL, COMMERCIAL, TRAFFIC AND BANKING MATTERS OF THE JUDICIAL DISTRICT OF METROPOLITAN AREA OF CARACAS**

- Claim for moral damages filed against El Nacional for 1 billion bolivars.

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**2021**



### SUPREME COURT CONSTITUTIONAL CHAMBER RULING 0302

- Confiscation of *El Nacional* assets for publishing a report in 2015 by Spanish newspaper ABC that made accusations against Diosdado Cabello.
- Additional fine for USD 30.05 million.

**2022**



### SHUTDOWN OF 86 RADIO STATIONS IN 16 STATES

- Government communication hegemony



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