

Pressemitteilung

3. Mai 2022

SPERRFRIST bis 3. Mai 2022 // 6 Uhr MESZ

An increasingly toxic environment in Latin America

Across the continent, journalists continue working in an increasingly deleterious and toxic environment. As it did in 2020, in 2021, the coronavirus crisis accelerated the rise in censorship, caused economic hardship for the press, and led to major difficulties in accessing information on the management of the epidemic by Latin American governments.

Distrust of the press, fueled by anti-media rhetoric and the trivialisation of politicians' stigmatising discourse – especially in Brazil (ranked 110th in the Index), Cuba (173rd), Venezuela (159th), Nicaragua (160th), and El Salvador (112th) – has gained ground. Increasingly visible and virulent, these public attacks weaken the profession and encourage abusive legal action, smear and intimidation campaigns – especially against women – and online harassment of critical journalists.

Nicaragua (160th) recorded the biggest drop in rankings (- 39 places) and entered the Index's red zone. A farcical election in November 2021 that carried Daniel Ortega into a fourth consecutive term as president was accompanied by a ferocious crackdown on dissenting voices. The last bastions of the independent press came under fire, and the vast majority of independent journalists, threatened with abusive prosecution, were forced to leave the country.

The situation in El Salvador, which, for the second consecutive year, recorded one of the steepest declines in the region (- 30), is also extremely worrisome. Since coming to power in 2019, President Nayib Bukele has played a dangerous game and has stepped up attacks and threats against journalists who criticise his administration, thus creating an image of the press as an enemy of the people. This authoritarian tendency, coupled with forced changes to the law (including one on "foreign agents" and amendments to the penal code), complicate journalists' work.

Mexico (127th), where at least seven journalists were murdered in 2021, remains the world's deadliest country for the media and ranks 179th of 180 in the Security indicator.

Costa Rica – the region's star student – remains the exception (8th in the ranking).

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Chronic precariousness and attacks in North America

The United States saw a modest increase in the 2022 Index (42nd, + 2 places), thanks to improvements made by the Biden administration, such as reinstating regular White House and federal agency press briefings. Nevertheless, chronic issues impacting journalists remain unaddressed. These include the disappearance of local newspapers, the systematic polarisation of the media, and the erosion of journalism by digital platforms amid a climate of animosity and aggression towards journalists, among others.

Although Canada (19th) repeatedly demonstrates a strong commitment to international press freedom protections and practices, in 2022, Canadian reporters suffered hostile treatment, denial of access, death threats, and harassment while covering the “Freedom Convoy”, a demonstration against the government’s health measures. In another disturbing trend, Canadian officials also arrested journalists covering an indigenous protest against an oil pipeline in British Columbia. Canada slipped five places to the 19th position in 2022, reflecting the poor treatment of journalists during the Freedom Convoy and indigenous protests.

In the Caribbean region, Trinidad and Tobago (25th) progressed rather significantly. This is mainly attributed to a Supreme Court ruling in favor of protecting journalists’ sources, which could hold far-reaching implications for media across the region. Guyana (34th) also saw substantial improvement in the 2022 Index, thanks to its robust media landscape, as well as the fact that journalists generally operate in a safe environment without fear of violence or physical attacks.