

An introductory look at the Paraguayan news media

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Abstract: Paraguay, a small, land-locked country bounded by bigger neighbors, has received little attention from media scholars. The purpose of this article is to help fill this absence by describing the history and contemporary situation of journalism in Paraguay for an international audience. Paraguayan media have reflected traits and trends in the country's political system since its founding. During the First Paraguayan Republic (1811-1870), when defense of independence from Spain and larger neighbors was paramount, the state held a monopoly over the mechanisms to communicate with the population and neither opposition press nor voices disputed the rule of independence leader José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1811-1840) (ACOSTA, 2008; ORUÉ POZZO, 2012). Paraguay's media system and journalism have several traits noticeable in its neighbors, including political parallelism, censorship, ownership concentration, violence against journalists and the abrupt termination of state-sponsored reforms targeting media pluralism. However, these similarities are grounded in a unique history and geographical position that make Paraguay an interesting case for understanding the localization of region media trends. In particular, the country's defense of its independence and strongman or single party rule have shaped how media and journalists operate today.

Keywords: Paraguay; Freedom of Expression; Attacks on the Press; Self-censorship; Media Ownership

Resumo: Um pequeno país cercado por vizinhos maiores, o Paraguai recebeu até agora pouca atenção de estudiosos da mídia. O objetivo deste artigo é ajudar a preencher essa ausência, descrevendo a história e a situação contemporânea do jornalismo no Paraguai para um público internacional. A mídia paraguaia reflete traços e tendências do sistema político desde a criação do país. Durante a Primeira República do Paraguai (1811-1870), quando a defesa da independência da Espanha e dos países vizinhos maiores era primordial, o Estado detinha o monopólio dos mecanismos de comunicação com a população e nem a imprensa de oposição nem vozes isoladas contestavam o regime do líder da independência José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1811-1840) (ACOSTA, 2008; ORUÉ POZZO, 2012). O sistema de mídia e o jornalismo do Paraguai têm características que são percebidas também nos países vizinhos, incluindo paralelismo político, censura, concentração de propriedade, violência contra jornalistas e a interrupção inesperada de propostas de reformas pelo Estado voltadas para o pluralismo da mídia. Essas semelhanças, porém, se baseiam em uma história e posição geográfica únicas, que fazem do Paraguai um caso interessante para entender e localizar tendências da mídia na região. A luta do país pela sua independência e o regime de partido único moldaram a forma como a mídia e os jornalistas exercem hoje a sua profissão.

Palavras-chave: Paraguai; Liberdade de expressão; Ataques à Imprensa; Autocensura; Propriedade de Mídia.

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Introduction

As a small, land-locked country bounded by bigger neighbors, Paraguay has received little attention from media scholars despite what its system illuminates about the localization of wider regional trends (FUNDACIÓN TELEFÓNICA, 2007; GARCÍA BÉJAR, 2009; ORUÉ POZZO, 1997; 2002). The purpose of this article is to help fill that absence by describing the history and contemporary situation of journalism in Paraguay for an international audience.

The country's media reflect trends in neighboring South American systems, but in ways shaped by its long history of strongman and single-party rule, geographic isolation and horrific losses of population during wars with neighboring Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. Most notably, Paraguayan journalism features high degrees of political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Historically this was because of centralization of power in authoritarian leaders who fought to keep the country independent despite enormous costs. Today, political parallelism reflects links between private media owners and politicians, as well as the termination of a brief period of media reform. Another important characteristic is the presence of censorship or self-censorship, due to the lack of autonomy from politicians as well as private media ownership concentration. Finally, also like elsewhere, anti-press violence has increased in areas where criminal and political elements overlap.

The beginnings of Paraguayan journalism

Paraguayan media have reflected traits and trends in the country's political system since the country's founding. During the First Paraguayan Republic (1811-1870), when defense of independence from Spain and larger neighbors was paramount, the state held a monopoly over the mechanisms to communicate with the population and neither opposition press nor voices disputed the rule of independence leader José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia (1811-1840) (ACOSTA, 2008; ORUÉ POZZO, 2012). During that time, border security was increased to prevent visitors from bringing mail or newspapers that would reach the population (CHAVES, 1958). After Francia, the state-civil society relationship changed under a development-oriented president, but the government continued to dominate communication processes (ORUÉ POZZO, 2012). The need of the new republic to be internationally recognized as independent launched the country's first newspaper, on April 26, 1845. The weekly *El Paraguayo Independiente* was printed by the state and Paraguayan President Carlos Antonio López (1844-1862) was editor (GONZÁLEZ DE BOSIO, 2008). Indeed, Paraguay's Journalist Day is celebrated every April 26, intertwining contemporary Paraguayan

journalism with the founding of the government newspaper.

Propaganda during the Paraguayan War

The Paraguayan War against Argentina, Bolivia and Brazil, also known as the War of the Triple Alliance, cost the lives of 70 percent of Paraguay's population. When the war started, several new government newspapers and magazines appeared to promote patriotism and morale (FARINA, 2013). The newspapers not only channeled government information to the population and troops, but also stereotyped the enemy. The newspapers utilized the indigenous Guaraní language, one of two official languages in Paraguay, not exclusively but, for the first time, systematically (CABALLERO Y FERREIRA, 2008).

Postwar journalism and the beginning of the XX century

The postwar begins as an era of liberal ideas, also known as the Second Paraguayan Republic (1869–1906), where new political parties and newspapers were founded by the same men (ABENTE, 1989; CABALLERO AQUINO, 1986). José Segundo Decoud, founder and principal editor of *La Reforma*, is one of the main referents in the development of the Partido Colorado (Colorado Party) in 1887. Ignacio Ibarra was the owner and director of *La Democracia*, as well as one of the founders of the Partido Liberal (Liberal Party), also in 1887. Both parties have dominated a significant part of the country's political history. The Colorado Party, in power until 1904, and later again in 1948, is the party of the 35-year dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner. The Liberal Party gained power in the 1904 revolution, ruling until the beginnings of the 1940s (ORUÉ POZZO, 2007).

By the end of the Nineteenth and beginning of the Twentieth century the growing working class and unions are reflected in the press, including the newspapers *El Artesano* (October 25, 1885), *El Despertar* (May 1, 1906) and *Bandera Roja* (November 1924) (GAONA, 1987). Furthering the trend of representation of new actors and voices in the press system, a newspaper with a feminist political agenda was formed in 1902, *Voz del Siglo*, directed by Ramona Ferreira (BAREIRO; SOTO & MONTE, 1993).

The Chaco War and the dictatorships of Morínigo and Stroessner

The Chaco war with Bolivia (1932–1935) continued the trend of patriotism in the Paraguayan press initiated during The Paraguayan War, but this time in privately owned newspapers. The Chaco war conditioned journalists to produce biased reports supporting the troops, promoting nationalism and the defense of national traditions,

and discrediting and degrading the Bolivian troops and their political leaders, and locally, attacking all who opposed the war (ORUÉ POZZO, 2007).

The political engagement mission of the Paraguayan press was in place when a civil war in 1947 divided society. With the defeat of the democratic sector that included liberals, febreristas (democratic socialists), communists, and sectors of the military, a significant number of journalists went into exile due to the systemic persecution exercised by the victorious faction: The Colorado Party. The Colorados won on all fronts, political and military, imposing strong censorship that ended the use of journalism as a tool for political commitment (ORUÉ POZZO, 2007).

Higinio Morínigo's regime (1940-1948) placed loyal journalists in key positions in different media companies, thus homogenizing the vision of public life offered to newspaper readers in the 1940s. The creation, in 1941, of the National Propaganda Office advanced these efforts. Programming such as The Official Hour, broadcast through the national system, to all channels, supported public policy during the Twentieth Century. Also, during Morínigo's regime the Press Law (also known as the Gag Law) was established to criminalize the dissemination of extra-official information (GÓMEZ FLORENTÍN; 2011).

The military presence within the government increased following the Chaco War, creating conditions for the long and tragic Stroessner dictatorship, beginning in 1954 (GÓMEZ FLORENTÍN; 2014). From the last years of the 1950s to the 1970s, Stroessner shuttered media outlets connected to opposition parties and opposition journalists were persecuted, incarcerated, assassinated, or forced into exile (ORUÉ POZZO, 2007).

DiarioABC Color, eventually considered a model of commercial and independent media, appeared during Stroessner's dictatorship. Publisher Aldo Zuccolillo introduced technological innovations such color print and tabloid formatting, and increased the technical professionalization of the newspaper's journalists. Staff gradually became more critical and demanded more autonomy, creating a conflict that led to the government closing the newspaper in 1984 (BAREIRO, 1987).

Live radio also became more challenging during this period, demanding local authorities explain their actions to the population. Radio Ñanduti, operated by owner, journalist, and broadcaster Humberto Rubín, founded his family-operated radio station in 1962. This challenge was not appreciated by the National Telecommunications Administration, which interfered with the station's transmission from 1978 until the station's closure in 1987. Meanwhile, the two television channels, TV 9, owned by Stroessner relatives, and channel 13, owned by a private firm regulated by the

government, were easy to control (BAREIRO, 1987).

Democratic transition

A military coup ousting Stroessner in 1989 had a positive impact on press freedom, but media pluralism remained limited (Segovia, 2009). ABC Color, radio Ñanduti and other outlets reopened and the government was not able to control them as it did during the Stroessner years (LÓPEZ & SOTO VERA, 2015). Channel 9 changed its name to National Television System and changed ownership from Stroessner's relatives to the daughter and son-in-law of General Andrés Rodríguez, who led the coup and became the new president (COLMÁN GUTIÉRREZ, 2015a). The process of presidents acquiring media companies repeated each time a new president was elected. Thus, Juan Carlos Wasmosy, elected president in 1993, left his position in 1998 as the owner of a media conglomerate (GUEREÑA & ROJAS VILLAGRA, 2016).

After a decade of corruption scandals and even an unsuccessful military rebellion, the 61-year reign of the Colorado Party came to a halt with the election of former Catholic Bishop Fernando Lugo Méndez in April 2008. Lugo was immediately accused of being a dangerous leftist by the agricultural conglomerates and a segment of the commercial media due to his socially oriented work at the Dioceses of San Pedro, located in northcentral Paraguay, one of the most vulnerable and conflictive regions in the country (EL LITORAL, 2008). Within this complex relationship between businesses and governmental institutions, Lugo tried to apply his communication policies that opened the door to a more pluralistic media system, but one that reflected the political polarization that had engulfed the country with the first election of a leftist president.

Among the most important reforms was the creation of the Secretariate of Information and Communication for Development, which replaced the Secretariate of Social Communication created in 1993. This Secretariate held cabinet status and consisted of four subdivisions: Education and Communication for Development, Strategic Communication, Presidential Information, and State Media.

The Subdivision Education and Communication for Development tried to develop new systems of community communication not only to serve these communities, but also to promote a debate regarding development. Additionally, the secretariate created a major and a master's degree in Communication for Development at the National Universities of Pilar, Concepción, Villarrica, Ciudad del Este, and Itapúa (SEGOVIA, 2009).

The development of a network of alternative community-based media outlets

included allocation of advertising resources, which had formerly been allocated to the dominant commercial media producers. Social organizations found easier access to media distribution of their messages through the community stations, increasing pluralism in the overall media system. Additionally, the Subdivision of State Media strengthened existing state-owned media and created new outlets to improve government communication, which had formerly relied on commercial media as intermediaries (SEGOVIA, 2009). TV Pública also opened in 2011 and presented a more socially inclusive style of journalism (RSF, 2012d).

Parliamentary coup: regressing

The return of a media system excluding the voices of marginalized communities and progressive voices began with Lugo's destitution on June 22, 2012. Lugo was ousted by a highly criticized parliamentary impeachment process that, although it was eventually approved by the Paraguayan courts, was criticized as not following due process. Lugo's defense had only two hours to review the accusatory documentation. A process that is supposed to take weeks, only took a few hours.

Media reflected political polarization during the impeachment process. The majority of private media and journalists working there defended Lugo's impeachment (either openly supporting it or by omitting key aspects of the story), while community radio stations called the impeachment a parliamentary coup. Additionally, citizens demonstrating against Lugo's ousting gathered in the main buildings of the public media outlets: TV Pública, Radio Nacional and news agency IPParaguay. There was an attempt to censor TV Pública after the Senate impeached Lugo and several opinion shows were suspended, increasing concerns about attacks on freedom of speech (RSF, 2012b). Many journalists, employees and technicians at the public television station lost their jobs soon after a new president took office (RSF, 2012a).

After a brief and corruption-filled presidency, polarization continued to reverberate in the media system. Horacio Cartes, elected president in 2013, was harshly criticized for discriminating against community media during his tenure as president. The Paraguayan Association of Community Radio Stations and Alternative Media denounced that while the government closed or erected barriers to provide licenses to community media, it massively legalized those outlets who were owned of politicians friendly to the Cartes' administration (OBSERVACOM, 2017). Cartes threatened and persecuted journalists who covered demonstrations against his attempts to be reelected (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2018). Lethal attacks on the opposition press grew during this period. One press official from the opposition and five

journalists were killed (COLMÁN GUTIÉRREZ, 2015b; CPJ, 2019; RSF, 2019; SPP, 2014).

Creation of a super Ministry of Communication

Mario Abdo Benítez, of the Colorado Party, was elected president in April 2018 by a small margin. The Colorado Party also won a majority in the House but there were no parties that could win a majority at the Senate. Opposition parties claimed fraudulent elections, but international observers said the election was fair (FREEDOM HOUSE, 2019).

Probably one of the most controversial measures of Abdo Benítez' government, so far, is the creation of the Ministry of Technology and Communication. This ministry puts under the same umbrella the Secretary of Information and Communication, responsible for government communication and state media, and the National Secretariat of Information and Communication Technologies. The new ministry also has the capability of controlling The National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL), the State telecommunications Company (COPACO) and the Paraguayan Space Agency. This ministry also controls governmental communication, public advertising and public media (OBSERVACOM, 2018a).

The head of the new ministry, Alejandro Peralta Vierci, is the nephew of the owner of one of the largest media groups in the country, Grupo Vierci. Abdo Benítez' decision to designate Peralta Vierci generated criticism since the ministry controls the state media that compete with his uncle's properties. Press unions argued the concentration of several agencies related to communication was to facilitate control of media through clientelism rather than savings and resource efficiency (LA NACIÓN, 2018; OBSERVACOM, 2018b).

Legal framework: 1992 Constitution and other laws

Despite the intrusion of politics in the media sphere, the 1992 Paraguayan Constitution is one of the most advanced in the region when it comes to protecting press freedom and freedom of speech, and access to public information. The Paraguayan Constitution protects the interests of citizens and also those of journalists, photographers and media owners. Additionally, it clearly prohibits governments from closing media outlets for being against their policies (FERNÁNDEZ BOGADO, 2011).

The Constitution defends, in its article 26, freedom of speech and press freedom. It also defends the dissemination of ideas and opinions without censorship and it has several articles that deal specifically with these topics. For example, article 27 recognizes that the media have a public service function and guarantees pluralism

by stating that media outlets won't be closed or suspended. This article also regulates advertising by protecting "the rights of children, the youth, the illiterate, the consumer and women" (SCHIFER & PORTO, 2010; OBSERVACOM, 2014; LÓPEZ & SOTO VERA, 2015).

Article 28 recognizes citizen's rights to receive truthful information and guarantees the right to reply. That is "every person affected by the dissemination of false, distorted or ambiguous information has the right to claim for its rectification or clarification in the same media outlet and in the same condition the previous information was disseminated" (SCHIFER & PORTO, 2010; OBSERVACOM, 2014).

Article 29 establishes that journalism practices in any of its forms should be free and not tied to a previous authorization. Additionally, it establishes that journalists should not be forced to act, but at the same time states that journalists have the right to publish their opinions without censorship in the outlet where they work and that the publishers of the outlet can show their disagreement as well (LÓPEZ & SOTO VERA, 2015).

Article 30 refers to electromagnetic signals and clearly establishes that they "are a public domain of the State" and that the "law would guaranteed, with equal opportunity, the free access to the electromagnetic spectrum." Finally, article 31 refers to media outlets that are property of the State and guarantees "democratic and pluralistic access to all social and political sectors with equal opportunities" (SCHIFER & PORTO, 2010).

Besides the rights protected by the Paraguayan Constitution, the 1995 Telecommunications Law (N°642) that had modifications in 2004 (Law N°2.478) and in 2011 (Law N°4.179) is the basic law regarding audiovisual media in the country. Several articles of Law 642 relate to broadcasting media. Additionally, there are articles related to regulation of community media (OBSERVACOM, 2014).

The organization in charge of regulating telecommunications and broadcasting media is the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL). This is an autonomous entity whose board is nominated by the Executive Power, so it is not politically independent. CONATEL is "responsible for administering the radioelectric spectrum, control compliance with legislation from its operators, provide licenses and authorizations to offer services and apply sanctions in case of legislation violations" (OBSERVACOM, 2014).

This law also establishes broadcasting frequencies for State media: one TV frequency and all the needed local frequencies to cover the whole country and one AM and one FM radio frequency in each department. However, there were not

public TV stations in Paraguay until 2011 (Decree N°6.975), during Lugo's presidency (OBSERVACOM, 2014).

The constitutional framework addressing press freedom and freedom of speech should guarantee journalistic autonomy (LÓPEZ & SOTO VERA, 2015). However, these constitutional ideals are often violated. International press rights organizations such as Reporters Without Borders (2006) have claimed on several occasions that CONATEL is not impartial when giving licenses to community radio stations, favoring commercial radio stations and thereby limiting pluralism in the media sphere.

Media concentration

The media map in Paraguay is extremely concentrated mostly around these three groups: Zuccolillo Group, Vierci Group, and Cartes Group. Additionally, the holdings run by a number of Paraguayan and international investors are significant (5DÍAS, 2018b; OBSERVACOM, 2018c). These groups are also connected with political parties. The most obvious are the Vierci Group (where the owner's nephew is the new Minister of Technology and Communication) and the Cartes Group (the owner is former president Horacio Cartes). Media concentration is significant, and this situation is even worse because media holdings also have interests in other areas of the economy (OVIEDO, 2017).

The Zuccolillo Group has the smallest number of media companies but that does not mean they are the least important (ORTIZ, 2016). Zuccolillo owns: Diario ABC Color, Diario Vanguardia of Ciudad del Este, Radio ABC Cardinal 730 AM, radio ABC FM 98.5, and ABC TV (cable). The holding was funded in 1967 by Aldo Zuccolillo with the launch of Diario ABC Color. His daughter, Natalia Zuccolillo, took charge of the holding when her father died in 2018 (5DÍAS, 2018a). Diario ABC Color print and online is the most read and influencing among all media outlets in the country (ORTIZ, 2016). Its power does not end with media, the group also owns other companies such as Editorial Azteca, Banco Atlas, Inmobiliaria del Este SA, Abasto Norte, Imprenta Mercurio, Núcleo SA, Zusa SACI, Nueva Americana, Consultora Atlas, Hotelera Atlas, Shopping Mariano, Shopping Mariscal, and Shopping del Sol (GUEREÑA & ROJAS VILLAGRA, 2016).

The Vierci Group, led by businessman Antonio J. Vierci is another important player within the Paraguay's media map, especially for the quantity of their media outlets (5DÍAS, 2018b; OBSERVACOM, 2018c). The group owns TV stations such as Channel 4 Telefuturo, Channel 11 La Tele, Channel 2 Red Guaraní, and Channel Noticias PY (cable); radio stations such as Radio Estación 40 91.1 FM, Radio Monumental 1080

AM, Radio Urbana 106.9 FM, and Radio Virtual FM. Also, the news portal paraguay.com, Centro Informativo Multimedia, Noticias PY, Diario Extra, and Diario Última Hora belong to this group. Similarly to the Zuccolillo Group, the Vierci Group owns business outside of the media such as Compañía de Desarrollo Agropecuario, Embutidos Franz, Inmobiliaria Nacional, Láser Import, and Retail SA (GUEREÑA & ROJAS VILLAGRA, 2016).

The Cartes Group owns Grupo Nación (includes newspapers La Nación, Crónica, and ADN), Diario Popular, news portal Hoy, Radio 970 AM, Radio Montecarlo 100.9 FM, HEi Radio 91.9 FM, Radio Laser Stream Digital, GEN TV (cable), Channel HEi (cable), and Channel Tropicalia (cable). Many of these media outlets (such as Grupo Nación and some radio stations) were acquired in 2015 while Cartes was president and that was questioned by many sectors of civil society (OBSERVACOM, 2018c). As Zuccolillo and Vierci Group, Cartes owns companies outside the media world, such as Banco BASA, Tabacos del Paraguay, Ganadería Sofía, Club Libertad, among many other ventures (GUEREÑA & ROJAS VILLAGRA, 2016).

Meanwhile, Humberto Rubin owns Radio Ñandutí 1020 AM, Radio Rock & Pop 95.5 FM, Radio Mburucuyá AM 980 (Pedro Juan Caballero), and Radio FM Concert (online). Another player in the media map that owns several radio and TV stations is Javier Bernardes who owns Radio Disney 96.5 FM, Radio Farra 101.3 FM, Radio Pop 93.3 FM, Radio UNO 650 AM, Radio Siete 107.7 FM, Unicanal (cable), Channel 13 RPC, the last one previously under the Chena Group. Additionally, “El Fantasma” Ángel González (Albavisión Group) is another big player because owns several TV stations: Channel 9 SNT, Channel 5 Paravisión, Channel 2 C9N, Channel 12 Paraná TV, Channel 10 Sur TV, and radio RQP. Together with the Vierci Group, Albavisión concentrates most TV networks, between these two they own seven of the nine existing frequencies (PLUS Research, 2018).

To this list, needs to be added the holding led by Ángel Aguilera which owns Channel Venus TV (cable), Radio La Unión 800 AM, Radio Aspen 102.7 FM, and Radio Venus 105.1 FM. Another important holding is led by Christian Chena, owner of Radio 1000 AM, 40 principales, and news portals RDN and epa.com.py (PLUS RESEARCH, 2018). Finally, another businessman that owns more than one media outlet is Fernando Rodríguez, owner of Diario 5Días and 5Días TV (cable) (PLUS RESEARCH, 2018).

Attacks on the press and self-censorship

Media concentration is a threat to pluralism and democracy, but another big threat is the conditions many journalists in Paraguay have to confront daily, especially

in the border region where crime and corruption overlap. Since the beginning of the XXI century 11 journalists, one journalism student, one citizen journalist and one press official were murdered (See Table 1) (LÓPEZ & SOTO VERA, 2015; RSF, 2019; CPJ, 2019). Similar to other countries in the region, all these murders have not yet been solved (LÓPEZ & SOTO VERA, 2015).

Table 1: Journalists murdered since 2000

Name	Media outlet	Murder date
Benito Jara	Radio Iby Yaú	4/13/2000
Salvador Medina Velázquez	FM Ñemity	1/5/2001
Yamila Cantero*	Student	7/6/2002
Samuel Román	Radio show La voz del pueblo	4/20/2004
Ángela Acosta*	Citizen journalist	12/21/2006
Alberto Tito Palma	Radio Mayor Otaño and Radio Chaco Boreal	8/22/2007
Martin Ocampos	Radio Comunitaria Huguá Ñandu FM	1/12/2009
Merardo Alejandro Romero Chávez	La Voz de Itakyry	3/3/2011
Marcelino Vázquez	Radio Sin Fronteras 98.5 FM	2/6/2013
Carlos Artaza*	Press Official for the Governor of Amambay	4/24/2014
Fausto Gabriel Alcaraz Garay	Radio Amambay	5/16/2014
Edgar Pantaleón Fernández Fleitas	Belén Comunicaciones	6/19/2014
Pablo Medina Velázquez	ABC Color	10/16/2014
Gerardo Servían	Radio Ciudad Nueva from Zanja Pytá (murdered Ponta Porã, Brasil)	3/4/2015

Source: Colmán Gutiérrez, 2015b; CPJ, 2019; López & Soto Vera, 2015; RSF, 2019; SPP, 2014.

This list can extend quickly if we add the threats and extorsions that journalists suffer daily. The journalists who suffer the most are those in community radios being threatened by local politicians and narcos. Since the beginning of the century there have been several cases of community radio stations that have been closed, burned or destroyed. Besides the abused suffered from law enforcement, journalists are also victims of the Ejército del Pueblo Paraguayo which claims to be a guerrilla group, but in reality, is a crime organization (RSF, 2012c).

Organized crime is the main cause of physical threat to journalists since the

end of the Cold War (RSF, 2011). It is difficult for journalists to cover the activities of the criminal world, their networks, and their infiltration in society. Unfortunately, Paraguay is a good example of these problems because its land is a pathway for the cocaine traffic from Bolivia to the Southern Cone (RSF, 2011). Aggressions and threats to journalists are very frequent in Paraguay (CPJ, 2019). RSF (2011) explains that violence levels are not as high as Mexico, Colombia or some Central American countries, but corruption persists, together with judicial impunity and the mafia's influence in political and economic activity and that prevents journalists from performing their watchdog role.

The border area in the Concepción, San Pedro y Amambay departments (north of Paraguay) is extremely dangerous for journalists, particularly for those covering drug trafficking and politics (LÓPEZ & SOTO VERA, 2015; RSF, 2011). A Reporters Without Borders (2011) report discusses how some journalists are afraid that Paraguay is transitioning into a state of lawlessness in some regions due to the insecurity that they experience at the border region with Brazil and Argentina, with growing self-censorship. Journalists, especially those who work at the border region, are forced to work isolated and with very few resources. Getting information from authorities is complicated because many times they work with the drug dealers (RSF, 2011).

Press freedom

Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House have rankings they use to classify press freedom and freedom of speech in different countries around the world. These rankings measure pluralism and independence of media outlets, safety and respect for journalists' freedom.

Freedom House (2018) claimed that the Paraguayan democracy is dominated by the conservative Colorado Party and it is a country with high levels of corruption, organized crime, where rural and indigenous communities' rights are not very well respected. Freedom House (2019) states the constitutional rights of press freedom and freedom of speech are inconsistently applied across the board. Direct pressure from criminal groups and corrupt officials foster self-censorship, and occasionally journalists are victims of violent attacks. That's why from a 1-7 scale, where 1 is most free and 7 is least free Paraguay has maintained itself in a 3 ranking since 2004, which puts the country in the partly free category (see Table 2).

Reporters Without Borders (2019) has a different way of classifying press freedom. Since 2002 this organization publishes the World Press Freedom Index, which is an index that measures levels of press freedom in 180 countries, including

Paraguay. The index does not measure journalism quality in each country or region. The criteria used are pluralism, media independence, self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency and the quality of the infrastructure that supports the production of news and information.

Reporters Without Borders (2019) states that Paraguay ranks 99 out of 180 countries. In comparison with the other 12 South American countries ranked with their index, Paraguay ranks 8th, only better than Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela. This ranking shows a slight improvement regarding 2018 when it ranked 107. However, this improvement is still far from the 32 rank that Paraguay had at the beginning of the XXI century, which shows that in the last 17 years press freedom in this South American country has worsen significantly (See Table 2) (LÓPEZ & SOTO VERA, 2015).

Table 2: Rankings Reporters Without Borders and Freedom House

Year	Reporters without borders	Freedom House	
	Ranking	Status	Freedom rating
2019	99	Partly free	3
2018	107	Partly free	3
2017	110	Partly free	3
2016	111	Partly free	3
2015	109	Partly free	3
2014	105	Partly free	3
2013	91	Partly free	3
2012	91	Partly free	3
2011	-	Partly free	3
2010	54	Partly free	3
2009	54	Partly free	3
2008	90	Partly free	3
2007	90	Partly free	3
2006	82	Partly free	3
2005	69	Partly free	3
2004	46	Partly free	3
2003	40	Partly free	3.5
2002	32	Partly free	3.5
2001	-	Partly free	3.5

Sources: Freedom House, 2018; RSF, 2019.

Conclusion

Journalism is key for building an informed and participatory society that is able to develop a democracy (DAHL, 1971; GUNTHER & MUGHAN, 2000). Journalists through their stories should inform people about irregularities and abuse of power

using facts in a fairly and responsibly. Therefore, they need to enjoy press freedom and freedom of speech. However, in Paraguay these liberties have been under attack since the country's independence. In its origins, Francia created a conservative model that limited and restricted rights. This model continued with very small changes until Stroessner's dictatorship. Stroessner then censured and closed several media outlets. After the dictatorship, journalism practices became more important, but even today, still, journalists continue fighting against repercussions, threats, extorsions and murders.

Even if the legal framework that rules press freedom and freedom of speech in Paraguay can be used as a model for many countries that restrict these liberties, the difficulties for its implementation make the law less perfect. Media concentration and the number of journalists murdered since the beginning of the XXI century not only represent an attack to journalists and the press, but to democracy in Paraguay. Unfortunately, this South American country is still fighting to free itself from the silence code and complicity that reigned during the dictatorship years and beyond.

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