



Instituto
Prensa y Sociedad

Venezuela

Periodismo en arenas movedizas

Censura y Autocensura
en periodistas y medios
de comunicación en Venezuela



Estudio 2015

Based on the principles of autonomy, plurality and freedom of information the Instituto Prensa y Sociedad de Venezuela (IPYS Venezuela) devoted itself to constructing an X-ray of the exercise of journalism, encompassing 67% of the national territory. This exercise counted on the participation of groups of journalists and human rights activists, who made it possible to compile this perception-based study and prompted 227 employees of private, independent, community-based and state-owned media to participate.



Venezuelan journalism has the challenge of recuperating its essence and stripping itself of rough edges. It must reflect the voices of denunciations and complaints by the citizens. It must be the mirror of a society that practices the scrutiny of powers, as a healthy exercise of and for democracy.

Venezuelan journalism must act as a counterweight to power. It is indispensable that the voices of the communities debate and practice public deliberation. This would require the annulment of quashing or silencing orders. The challenge is to overcome the risks, the threats, pressures, censorship and self-censorship.

Venezuelan journalism reclaims its autonomy, independence, diversity and plurality. It needs stimulus, protection, strength and freedom.

These challenges are posed in light of the conditions surrounding the work of conducting journalism in Venezuela, derived from the results of the 2015 Study on Censorship and Self-censorship among Journalists and the Media, which has been called ***Journalism in Quicksand***.

Balance and challenges

From it, the [Instituto Prensa y Sociedad de Venezuela \(IPYS Venezuela\)](#) constructed an X-ray of the exercise of journalism in the past 12 months, through the perception of 227 journalists in private, independent, community-based and State-owned media, who participated in a survey that encompassed 16 states of the nation.

These demands and complaints should be urgently looked into, in the face of adversity. A society of fear and silence has become accentuated in Venezuela, a country submerged in conflict.

Although new independent spaces have sprung up and journalism has taken a new breath of air through new initiatives which have derived in a shift in the configuration of the ecosystem of media in this nation, fear has overtaken the spaces where full expression must prevail and we have advanced and arrived at cohibited, domesticated, complacent, indulgent journalism. Secretive journalism.

Unencumbered platforms for denunciation and public scrutiny have become debilitated and have caved to incessant pressures, sometimes excessive, other times mild. Coactions have been imposed thereon which have managed to distort the nature of journalism as a force to counterbalance power, indispensable in any democracy.

This is the way the circle of censorship turns, at the speed of a weakened society, lacking in independence, plurality, diversity and quality of information, fundamental conditions to guarantee healthy public deliberation.

This wheel has intensified its rotations, marked by the ebb and flow of physical and verbal assaults, lawsuits, police surveillance and pursuit actions, the criminalization of the media, the concealment of facts and figures, internal pressures and express silencing orders, issued by the powers that be.

These movements open the hatches of self-censorship, that inert state that paralyzes journalists, locking them in a somber frontier that goes far beyond. These currents derive in the persecution of citizens who are the sources of information for journalism.

Thus, seeking information –the essential work of journalism– and offering data and declarations –the natural function of the citizens– are now viewed as vetoed actions.

By repeating these statements so often they become habits and make a transgression of the trade of finding and disseminating information. The law of silence is thereby imposed. For the journalists, there appear to be sources, topics and circumstances that are untouchable and that cannot be mentioned: opaque stories which cannot be scrutinized and much less foster public deliberation on them.

Due to the commitment they take on with their sources, on some occasions and on other occasions due to their ethical principles, the journalists prefer to keep silent,

drop out or refrain from exercising their public service function. But this generates a social and collective consequence that runs deep.

Secretism is therefore imposed which fosters an imbalance of information, the traits of a society with dwindled rights of their population to know, to be more and better informed so as to take sensible and responsible decisions on day-to-day issues. Ultimately, to exercise citizenry.

The circle of censorship

These traits are part of the diagnosis and proposals outlined based on the ***2015 Study: Censorship and Self-censorship in Journalists and the Media in Venezuela***, an investigation based on the confidentiality of the identity of the persons consulted.

This analysis was based on the perception of 227 journalists and media employees in various fields of action, selected at random, encompassing private media (73.13%), independent media (10.57%), state-owned media (8.81%) and community-based media (7.49%).

It is an X-ray of the exercise of journalism in the nation, through field work conducted from September 18 and October 31st, 2015, deployed in 16 states of the nation: The capital district, Trujillo, Miranda, Lara, Táchira, Zulia, Anzoátegui, Monagas, Falcón, Bolívar, Portuguesa, Carabobo, Aragua, Mérida, Barinas and Apure.

It is a quantitative study which delved deeper into the analysis of the historic record files held by [IPYS Venezuela](#), for the purposes of attempting to explain the complexity of the circle of censorship in the nation.

The perception of the participants coincided in that in Venezuela there are predominant obstacles hindering the full exercise of journalism as a mechanism of social comptrollership. These restrictions are manifested through direct and indirect pressures by State forces, recognized private and civil institutions, but also by groups outside the law.

These conditions drive Venezuela into a secretive scenario in a spiral in which censorship is weaved by the constant refusal of diverse sectors to inform on affairs of public interest; made more acute through diverse subtle and indirect pressures deriving in the omission of information and ending up in the voluntary decision by the journalists to remain silent.

This pattern is proof of the authentic dynamics in which self-censorship is implemented, in unstable territory through a mechanism that seems to be natural to tackle fears and possible reprisals in the exercise of the right to information.



PERIODISMO EN ARENAS MOVEDIZAS

Estudio 2015: Censura y Autocensura en periodistas y medios de comunicación en Venezuela.



Self-censorship

The personal willingness to refrain and to keep silent is proof of the appearance of a frightened community, in which uncertainty and apprehension prevail. This phenomenon is the principal symptom of self-protection in a country in conflict, where there are untouchable topics, circumstances and sources. Taking the risk of challenging this panorama brings damaging consequences for journalism but even much more perverse for a society erected based on a contract of fear and silence.

The study conducted by [IPYS Venezuela](#) revealed that throughout 2015 –under different events, sources and circumstances– the 227 journalists admitted to having been indulgent. They carefully thought about the consequences which could be derived from their function of informing on affairs of public interest, to the point that they came very close to self-censorship.

The silencers

In these crossroads, legal investigations threatening free expression in Venezuela are having an inhibiting effect, same as police surveillance and intelligence actions and harassment patterns through various mechanisms which have become more accentuated.

Thus, 37% of the participants referred that one of the reasons why they have preferred to be cautious and keep silent has been the threats of lawsuits, which could lead them to face civil or criminal procedures at state-owned institutions.

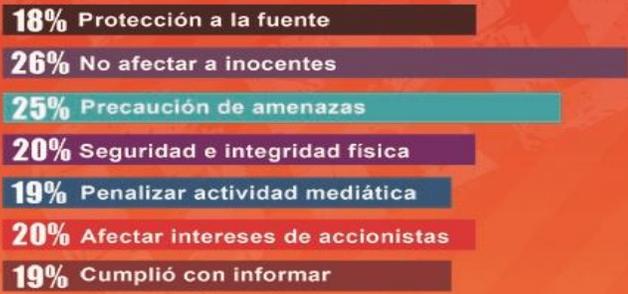
This decision was made by the journalists when they saw what was going on in their milieu. 30% of the participants said this reality was due to the lawsuits filed against media and journalists. 21% were concerned over the application of provisions on slander and injury set forth in the criminal laws of Venezuela, and the exacerbation of lawsuits against journalists and the media in the past 3 years.

Another reason why the journalists have come close to the line of self-censorship has been quashing measures applied against national and regional media, as described by 24% of the sample.

AUTOCENSURA

1. INHIBICIÓN DE LAS AMENAZAS LEGALES

Este fenómeno es el principal síntoma de autoprotección en un país en conflicto, en la que prevalecen temas, circunstancias y fuentes intocables.



2. SILENCIO QUE PROTEGE LA FUENTE

Periodistas prefirieron autocensurarse durante su labor informativa, e imponer así su voluntad personal de no publicar información de interés público.

3. TEMAS INTOCABLES

Periodistas reconocieron algún grado de autocensura en todos los temas planteados, que abarcan los fundamentos de la cobertura social, política y económica del país.



Other inhibition effects also mentioned among the persons consulted were police surveillance actions (23%); the constitution of instances legalizing opacity and authorizing police intelligence actions, such as the Strategic Homeland Security and Protection Center ([Cesppa](#)); the government's accusations calling journalists "terrorists" (23%) and constant beratements in state-owned media (14%), community-based media (12%) and private media (6%).

Keeping mute in order to protect sources

In this context of withdrawal there have been specific situations where the journalists preferred to self-censor themselves during their task of informing in the past 12 months, thus imposing their personal will and not publish information of public interest. This happened even when the events were fully proven and verified. News were left unpublished due to personal fears and not due to the lack of quality, space or hierarchy.

The main reason indicated by the persons consulted why they kept silent was a need to protect their sources of information (26%) or so as not to affect an innocent party (25%). Also, to safeguard their own personal safety the journalists avoided placing persons or institutions they consulted at risk.

There is consistency in these acts by the journalists, upon analyzing the constant pressures put on them to reveal where they get the data they handle. Upon revising the trends, there are few journalists who have succumbed to the pressures by State and non-State players, including principally the State security corps, local government and legislative institutions, users of social networks, private enterprise, criminal and organized crime groups, as well as representatives of media companies and media employees.

Only 3 of the 227 persons consulted openly admitted having revealed their sources of information. Nevertheless, 15 preferred to abstain from answering this question which was completely direct and personal.

This situation generates conflicts in the profession and gives rise to ambiguous situations. On the one hand, the indestructible ethical commitment of journalists to their informants comes to the fore to protect them but on the other hand there are excesses generated that derive in silence in light of the preeminent need for information on affairs of public interest.

This research also evidenced other circumstances where the journalists preferred self-censorship throughout 2015. Meanwhile, 20% did so for precaution sake when faced with threats and warnings of sanctions by civil servants and public officials. There were also some arguments geared towards avoiding threats against their personal safety or integrity (20%) and as a measure of precaution when faced with the application of laws penalizing media-based activities (19%).

The reasons expressed by the journalists to censor themselves had to do with internal pressures and coactions within the media they worked for.

So, 19% described having adopted this attitude so as not to affect the interests of the media shareholders and 18% considered that their task of informing on affairs

of public interest had not been met because anyways the media did not broadcast the news. This latter reason lost impetus compared to the results of the 2014 study, when 29% of the sample had this same perception. In 2015, the reasons to safeguard the benefits of the media owners increased since in 2014 this judgment was backed by 15% of the persons in the survey.

Therefore this phenomenon, understood to be the highest link of censorship, include personal and internal factors –within the media– as well as external factors –of various power forces at stake in society.

Self-censorship is a symptom that merits urgent attention since it denotes a biased society faced with excessive controls and orders to silence. These complex traits pose a challenge for Venezuelan journalism, which requires more autonomy, liberty and plurality. It needs less pressure from the forces of power in the nation. It demands more and better conditions to exercise the task of informing, labor vindications and quality training in this trade. This also encompasses reinforcing journalistic criteria. The compass must be based on strict ethical and quality standards to give journalism a true sense of denunciation and public scrutiny.

Self-censorship is combatted with more protection and less impunity. This is a challenge which must be tackled from the will of the journalists themselves, but must become a commitment the media companies must assume seriously, focusing on their public service function.

But also this must be a commitment by the entire nation. It must be a social and collective responsibility. The greater the possibilities of the journalists to freely inform without running risks, being threatened or pressured, the more ample the possibilities the citizens shall have of getting to know the affairs of public interest in depth and the greater the chances of making the right decisions and practicing good democratic cohabitation.

These proposals must be urgently tackled in any society with problems, but above all in those where the majority of topics these news quashing or silence measures are imposed. As is the case in Venezuela, where the journalists prefer to refrain from informing on the nation's principal problems, derived from a situation of crisis and rampant criminality and violence and political, social and economic difficulties. This climate of complications has even compelled the journalists to broach the risks they and the media face in fulfilling their duties.

The journalists themselves and the sectors linked to communications must reflect on their social function as spokespersons of the citizens who clamor for their rights, as well as their task of scrutinizing the power forces. [IPYS Venezuela](#) has insisted that one of the challenges is the need to strengthen the journalistic criterion and lead the trade towards good practices based on quality standards. This requires training and self-reflection on the task of informing.

Untouchable topics

In this research, the participants recognized some degree of self-censorship in all topics posed, encompassing the fundamental aspects of covering social, political and economic news in the nation. This was reflected by 30% of them who voluntarily decided not to air information related to situations that would expose them or the media they work for to the risk of being sued. Also, 19% stated that they took that decision to safeguard the interests of their sources.

Self-censorship also acted as a shield to avoid covering topics linked to violence and criminal acts (19%); conflicts with government authorities (18%); disputes with violent protesters (17%); the lack of food (15%), activities related to drug trafficking (14%), among others.

But these personal wills that derived in self-censorship were not fortuitous. Behind them are repeated coercion by the media itself and by the forces of State and private powers. The first 5 topics the study simple avoided covering by personal decision are also part of the topics forbidden from being covered by media directors and owners.

However, the perception of prohibitions was higher when the journalists had to respond to instructions received from within the media to avoid covering news sources.

Internal censorship

In all the topics posed there were restrictions from media companies to a lesser or greater degree: conflicts with government authorities (35%); situations exposing the media or the journalist to the risk of being sued (30%); the lack of food and goods (30%); the interests of a source that must be protected (27%); violent events (23%); homeland security (19%); the interests or viewpoints of the announcers (18%); foreign exchange control issues (18%); conflicts with violent protester groups (15%); topics related to childhood or infancy (14%); public morale (10%) and drug trafficking and consumption (9%).

These measures of internal censorship assumed by communication companies derived throughout 2015 in a prohibition issued by media directors and owners to the journalists to avoid covering specific news sources, according to the perception of 37% of the persons in the survey.

Based on these orders a maxim within the editing rooms was consolidated: in journalism there are topics and personalities which cannot be scrutinized. Thus, 36% of the journalists assured us that their bosses had forbidden them from naming specific players.

This excessive zeal in the covering of diverse sources of information also reflects the coercion exerted on journalism, due to the fears imposed from within the media.

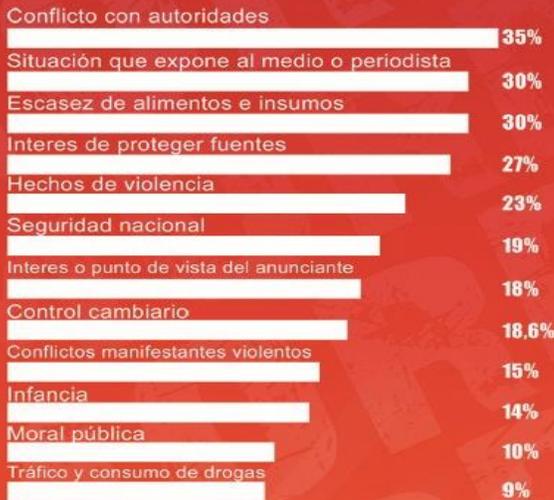
The companies are giving up their spaces for debate and are thus yielding ground to indulgent news coverage with the sources of power.

In this scenario, it is of concern that the 227 persons consulted recognized having suffered some type of restriction while covering affairs of public interest, due to coercion practices imposed in media companies.

This attitude of internal censorship denotes complicity and complacency in regards to the acts by state and private forces, to the extent that the media companies even take over censorship functions. This is how the essence of journalism as a trade for public scrutiny is weakened.

CENSURA INTERNA

En todos los temas planteados hubo restricciones indebidas en las empresas mediáticas, en mayor o menor grado:



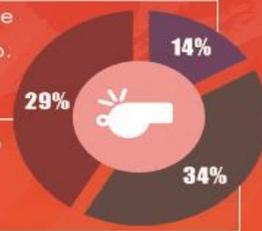
1. ÁNIMO DE SUMISIÓN

En oportunidades estas medidas de censura interna terminaron en acciones excesivas, como tales como: **renuncias forzadas y (10%)** y **despidos arbitrarios (3%)**.

Cambiar fuente de evidente interés público.

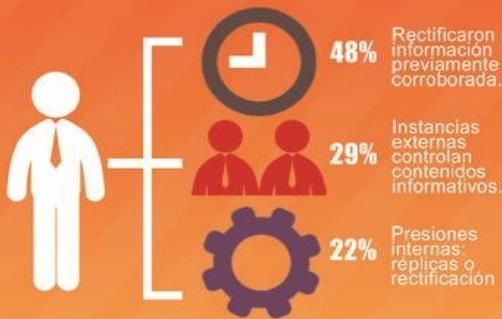
Mandato de no publicar información.

Orden de cambiar redacción



2. AUTONOMÍA EN QUIEBRE

Presiones indirectas se ejercieron dentro de medios, para **debilitar** la labor informativa, su independencia y su libertad editorial.



3. ÓRDENES OFICIALES

El Estado ordena para infringir la **autonomía editorial** de los medios de comunicación en Venezuela.



The willingness to be submissive

Of the total sample, 34% revealed they had received express orders to change their articles, the language regularly employed or specific terms in the information, to soften or disguise the impact of the news. Also, 29% said they had received express mandates not to publish information on an event that was news and 14% pointed out that they were moved from the news source they usually covered after disclosing news of evident public interest.

Sometimes these measures of internal censorship ended up in extreme actions such as forced resignations (10%) and arbitrary dismissals (3%).

Faced with these acts, it was reasonable that –among the main obstacles against exercising free journalism– the participants expressed their discomfort with instructions received from their supervisors or other indirect bosses restricting their work (34%), as well as due to pressures by the media shareholders (28%).

Weak autonomy

Of concern were indirect pressures exerted from inside the media during 2015 to debilitate the work of informing, its independence and editorial freedom.

Within the media companies there were excessive controls in deciding what content was published and what not, regardless of the in preeminence of public interest. At least 48% of the journalists described that information duly verified had been “rectified” after receiving exhortations by government entities in the media they worked for.

This submission stood out among the main concerns of the journalists in exercising their trade, since 22% of the population in this study showed their worry over internal pressures exerted to reply to or rectify information exhaustively corroborated and verified as per the methods practiced in proper journalism practices.

Also 29% of the journalists indicated that in the media they worked for there is some external information content control instance with the capacity to decide which content is broadcast and printed and which is not.

These practices put in jeopardy the editorial autonomy which should exist and is demanded in journalism and condition the role of public service the media must realize in pro of the citizenry.

Official orders

In this research entitled *Journalism in Quicksand*, [IPYS Venezuela](#) revealed patterns of official orders issued by State institutions for the purposes of infringing the editorial autonomy of the media. Faced with these pressures, the media companies have adopted a weak and timid stance.

Due to the constant threats and the need to protect their commercial and political interests, the media representatives have caved in and have surrendered their spaces. This subtly feeds uncertainty in regards to the media's public service work.

There are pressures exerted by the various power forces over the media, which are hardly distinguishable but there are other impositions which are perceived, since they are voiced out loud. At least 41% learned that the media or communications institution they worked for at the time had received outside exhortations asking to refrain from publishing specific information.

Also, 30% learned of orders issued by top State officials forcing the media to publish bulletins, press notes and information furnished by official agencies.

These coercions evidently are aimed at journalists assuming without questioning the official versions imposed. They forget that this is data rather than facts which must be independently investigated and told without bias or pressures.

Institutional information is one other element and not history in and of itself. Besides, a perspective cannot make a mere writer of a journalist or a channel at the service of the powers that be.

Based on the criterion of [IPYS Venezuela](#), these measures deepen the fear and silence in the journalistic trade to the extent that an action that is as natural as consulting sources of information and broadcasting news on political, economic and social affairs affecting the nation are taken to be crimes.

The perception by the sample participating in this study revealed the incidence of other official pressures on the development and freedom of information products. Among the more common events mentioned were editing modifications to news of public interest due to official pressures (28%) and pressures by State-owned groups (13%). They also denounced forced hindrances to avoid the dissemination of journalistic content (9%) and the recalling of journalistic material after its publication (7%).

These results demonstrate that censorship, in its various expressions, has coopted different dimensions in the task of informing in Venezuela. This phenomenon reveals a hinge among the various state-owned, private and irregular powers that have taken root in the nation. These conditions weaken the essential functions of informing news in a democratic society.

Under these conditions there are also prevalent signs of lack of stimulus accompanying a large part of the journalists in exercising their profession in the media. The third of the 27 concerns faced by journalism –according to the perceptions collected in this study– was the depreciation of the remuneration received by the journalists for doing their job in the media throughout 2015.

The interpretation of this by [IPYS Venezuela](#) is that somehow this demonstrates the need to improve the salaries of the journalists, that would offer them stability and solid ground when fulfilling their job. It is also imperative to reinforce their professional training which shall derive in good practices to consolidate their trade

and the journalistic criteria based on quality standards adjusted to the challenges demanded by society.

Censorship by the Powers that be

These conducts seem to respond to a mode of deliberate coercion to impose disinformation as a political strategy. Thus, 18% of the persons in the survey coincided in the perception of an intentional process of omission of news of evident public interest in place.

These perspectives somehow explain –but do not justify– the intentions of the power forces in imposing silence and disinformation. These strokes etch censorship as a social phenomenon that tends to become natural, as a defect that is dosified as per direct and indirect instructions, infringing upon independence, plurality, diversity and the quality of information: vital elements for journalism to be conceived as a true force to counterbalance power.

The findings of this research reveal that in Venezuela, all the power forces –state-owned and non-state owned– exert censorship to a lesser or greater degree.

The Censoring State

The principal censor in the nation is the State. In 2015, the journalists consulted for this research had the perception that the public powers issued express censorship orders which affected freedom of expression and the right to information.

Same as in 2014, the top position on the list of silencers of information was the executive branch of power (24%), followed by the legislative branch of power (15%), the judiciary power (12%), the election power (6%) and the moral power (4%).

Precisely at the forefront of the parliamentary elections, the journalists consulted denounced restrictions surrounding the source of elections-related news in regards to information of public interest on these elections, which were held on December 6, 2015¹.

¹ For more details please consult the report by IPYS Venezuela and the Observatorio Electoral Venezolano, on Keeping mute in the forefront to the elections: <http://ipysvenezuela.org/publicaciones/mutismo-en-la-antesala-electoral/>

CENSURA

1. EL ESTADO CENSOR

El principal censor del país es el Estado. En 2015, los periodistas consultados en esta investigación tuvieron la percepción de que los poderes públicos emitieron órdenes expresas de censura, que afectaron la libertad de expresión y el derecho a la información.



2. EL SIGILIO IRREGULAR

Los poderes no estatales y al margen de la ley también ejercieron la censura durante 2015. Aunque los porcentajes fueron menores en comparación con 2014, los grupos económicos privados fueron los que más desplegaron órdenes de silencio.

3. EL MUTISMO DE LOS MEDIOS

Fue determinante la compra y venta de medios, así como los cambios en la gerencia, (dentro y fuera de las redacciones) situaciones que debilitaron la independencia y autonomía informativa dentro de los propios medios de comunicación.



More than half of the persons in the survey (59%) denounced refusals by the authorities of the National Elections Council (CNE for its acronyms in Spanish), in various states of the nation, to grant interviews to journalists, according to their own experiences or those of some workmate.

This pattern was also framed within restrictions accessing public information on the coverage of the elections, as per the responses by 68% of the persons in the survey.

“It has become recurrent for the State authorities –including the National Elections Council– as well as the parliamentary candidates to refuse to respond to consultations by journalists in regards to the parliamentary elections slated for the coming December 6”, alerted previously [IPYS Venezuela](#) and the Observatorio Electoral Venezolano.

In percentages, the acts by the election power in 2015, was the same compared to the [2014 study on censorship](#).

Nevertheless, the journalists had the perception of lesser express censorship orders issued by the nation’s other public powers.

This research also showed other ways of subtly and secretively imposed official censorship.

A secretive voice

Non-State powers and forces at the fringes of the law also exerted censorship during 2015. Although the percentages were lower compared to 2014, private economic groups deployed silencing orders the most (11%).

This pattern was also manifested in restrictions accessing public information in the hands of private players. At least 6 of the first 10 instances denying the right of citizens to know what is going on were corporate groups linked to imports and contracts with the State.

Among the main topics with manifest censorship and self-censorship involving the private sector were issues related to the lack of food supplies and restrictions in the management of foreign currency in the nation’s economy.

In second place, there was evidence if this same event by irregular groups that are outside the law. This force is beginning to become institutionalized in the nation, evidence of a society muddled in conflict. Organized crime instances have appeared as censors, according to the perception of 6% of the group making up this research.

The journalists also denounced censorship measures coming from political groups (4%); social institutions and independent media (3%) and civil society organizations (2%).

Silence in the media

The private media, the independent media, the state-owned and community-based media also censored information of public interest on the conditions of transparency and quality management of their scope of work. The purchase and sale of media was a determinant factor as well as the changes in management, all of which weakened the independence and autonomy of the information in the media.

Thus, 28% of the 227 participants in this research acknowledged that they did not know who the owners of the media they work for are.

Likewise, among the main obstacles against exercising proper journalism were the change of hands and property and management of the media the persons surveyed were working for, based on the perception of 21% of the sample.

These trends disclose the opacity in the handling of the media which could derive in self-censorship. The purchase and sale of media (13%) appeared as one of the reasons why the journalists voluntarily decided not to publish duly corroborated information of public interest.

Opacity

Restrictions accessing public information are a form of censorship. This is the orifice through which the circle of censorship starts to be erected.

The opaque attitude of state institutions (68%) and non-state owned institutions (22%) continued in 2015, insisting on constant refusals that dissipated the citizens' right to know and also cracked the health of democracy. New players with these attitudes appeared in this measurement: de facto groups on the fringes of the law (22%).

Although the figures making the State and private players responsible diminished in percentage terms compared to 2014, this phenomenon is a wake-up call since the indicators reflected the perception of the persons consulted. This situation is evidence that the restrictions accessing public information are now so commonplace that they are perceived as natural, perhaps because this is the most ethereal way in which censorship is manifested.

This is undoubtedly the principal obstacle faced by the journalists to do their jobs. In the survey, 71% coincided that the shutting down of sources of public information –in state-owned and non-state owned entities – is the principal limiting factor to do their jobs.

The hurdles placed by the State

The three main general instances that refused information to the journalists during 2015 were the ministries, their centralized agencies, public healthcare organisms and institutions in charge of homeland security.

Thus, 7 of every 10 persons consulted coincided in denouncing some type of limitation at the executive agencies. Likewise, 69% stated they had been refused information – very frequently, relatively frequently and seldom– in central state-owned healthcare facilities while trying to do their jobs while 75% indicated restrictions on accessing information from State security corps.

Among the 10 institutions most often mentioned for their practices that weakened the citizens' right to know were other instances of the national and regional government such as the presidency of the republic and local governor's offices.

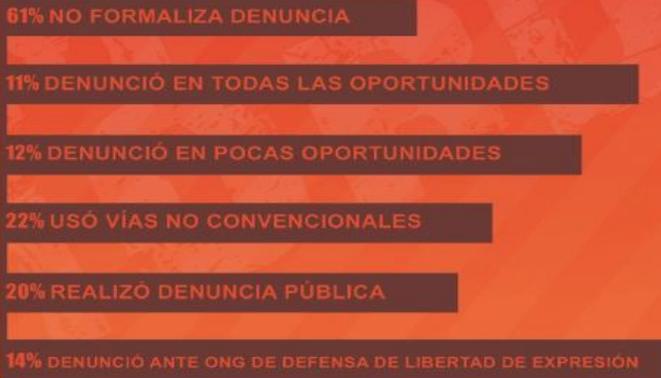
OPACIDAD

Entre 2014 y 2015 se mantuvo actitud opaca de parte de instituciones estatales, no estatales y grupos fáticos.



IMPUNIDAD

Periodistas fueron afectados por diversas violaciones a la libertad de expresión, en su ejercicio periodístico.



1. TRANCA DEL ESTADO

3 instancias generales que, reiteradamente, negaron información a los periodistas, durante 2015, fueron los ministerios, sus entes centralizados, los organismos de salud pública y las instituciones encargadas de la seguridad de la nación.



69% Salud pública



75% Seguridad de la nación

La escasez y déficit económico produjeron opacidad. Rubros con restricciones al acceso a la información:



2. RIESGOS DEL PERIODISTA

Principales inquietudes de los periodistas sobre su oficio

Somber enterprises

The private sector practiced these same opaque habits. The greatest level of secretism was concentrated in violent protester groups who –among high, medium and low frequencies – accumulated 60% of denunciations by the journalists consulted in this research.

The evident panorama of scarcity and economic deficit affecting Venezuela was translated into greater opacity. According to the analysis of general averages, restrictions accessing public information from food distributing and trading companies (58%) and pharmaceutical products (57%), as well as banks and stock exchanges (53%) stood out.

As in 2014, this study revealed limitations accessing public information from vendors for the oil sector and basic industries who are precisely contractors for the State in the two principal economic activities in Venezuela. This was perceived by 50% of the persons consulted, based on the interpretation of the general percentages.

[IPYS Venezuela](#) insists in the need to guarantee and safeguard the access to public information as one of the ways to strengthen democracy and citizen participation in affairs of public interest. It is urgent for transparency and accountability be sincerely and effectively practiced on the actions by each and every institution that cohabit in society.

All the sectors in public life are under the obligation to inform and the citizens have the right to know, so that they can take responsible and conscious decisions.

Journalism risks

Analyzing the full results of access to public information, [IPYS Venezuela](#) determined that there is no sector in the nation – neither state-owned nor private – that fully complies with the principle of full disclosure that sustains the right of all citizens to know.

This is one of the reasons that explain the principal concerns of the journalists in regards to their craft. In the course of 2015, 72% saw with concern the shutting down of sources of public information in the hands of the State as well as in private hands.

This obstacle prevails over the fears of street assaults (59%); violations at the hands of State security corps (49%); the fear of slander and injury lawsuits (40%) and restrictions accessing and consulting Internet content (35%).

Censorship and self-censorship fight, among other aspects, with more and better quality of life and the professional criterion of those who exercise the function of informing. These two conditions were perceived as a risk by the journalists themselves, who acknowledged their deficient training (44%) in fully exercising the craft of journalism.

This also generated some uncertainty regarding the low level of their salaries (58%). This cause was also classified under the general detriment of wages the entire nation is subject to and the high inflation rate which, based on official data, reached an “accrued variation” of 108.7% during the first nine months of 2015.

The study determined one indirect difficulty for the work of journalism in the restrictions importing and purchasing goods for the production of information which has affected the media, based on the perception of half the sample (56%).

The journalists also perceived that the media for which they work are affected by the veto or withdrawal of official advertising derived from the allocation of the Nation’s budget (25%) and denounced this same attitude by private enterprise (13%). They observed the State’s discretionary powers in deciding to assign to the media they work for or not some official ability to broadcast information (22%). They also voiced their concerns over tax-based sanctions (9%) used as forms of harassment.

Impunity deters denunciations from taking place and opens a window to violations on freedom of expression. This takes place because there are no investigations, sanctions, protection or prevention.

The results demonstrate that the journalists were affected by sundry violations to freedom of expression while exercising their journalistic tasks. This was personally reflected throughout this consultation.

However, the majority of these cases fell through the cracks of the justice system in Venezuela, because the first step, which is to file a complaint, did not take place, based on 61% of the persons in the survey. This happened partly due to the lack of interest and the lack of will of the journalists, since they believed that they shall not receive adequate resolution of their problems at the corresponding state-owned institutions.

Therefore, silence was the rule to denunciations. The results obtained revealed that in 2015 the journalists carefully thought about filing a complaint or not in regards to any incident breaching freedom of expression.

Impunity

Only 11% of affected parties denounced every time an event of this kind happened to them at the corresponding justice entities. Others preferred to do so only sometimes (12%).

It is worrisome to see that certain actions were taken outside the law to solve conflicts, since 22% recognized that they used non-conventional means to solve irregular situations jeopardizing their jobs as journalists. This behavior has been systematic since 2014, when [IPYS Venezuela](#) had already raised an alert about this phenomenon.

Meanwhile, 20% filed a public complaint at the media only sometimes, and 15% did so at an NGO that defends freedom of expression.

IPYS Venezuela insists in the need to have protection mechanisms available to safeguard the journalists so that they can do their jobs unencumbered by risks, threats or pressures. Also, it is a pressing need for justice institutions to conduct in-depth unbiased investigations and sanction violations on freedom of expression, since impunity waters the soil of censorship and self-censorship.

Legislative proposals

Above and beyond these problems, the journalists consulted did have solutions to offer, one of which was a review of the regulatory framework on freedom of expression and the right to public information. They demand a revision of the national legislative structure for the purposes of eliminating punitive sanctions and so as to advance towards a progressive regulatory structure that permits the promotion and defense of these fundamental warranties for democracy.

Already 8 of every 10 participants believe that it is necessary to legislate in some of the aspects encompassing the exercise of journalism.

There is a majority consensus as to the priority in the nation for a Law of Access to Public information. This is the clamor of 97% of the persons consulted, so that faced with opacity and secretism, a legislative basis is set that would aid in guaranteeing the right of all citizens to know and the establishment of obligations for all civil servants to give accounts and be at the service of public scrutiny.

The syndicate is also in agreement as to the establishment of a set of rules to regulate the actions of state-owned and non-state owned officials to prevent crimes and assaults against journalists and info-citizens. For this reason, 93% asked for a law for the protection of journalists, since there are no policies or programs in the nation to foster the safety and safeguarding of those who exercise journalism.

Faced with diverse pressures affecting the sources of information and coercing journalism, 90% of the persons who took the survey believe that a Law to Preserve Sources of Information would be useful while 87% of the participants considers that it is necessary to generate a Law on Public Service Media so that the State-owned network can base its functions on the principles of plurality, diversity, liberty and autonomy.

A civil regulatory and protection framework of freedom online is also necessary and 85% think a law on the Internet as a human right would be indispensable.

60% of the sample coincides in mentioning how indispensable a law on civil infractions is. A project of this nature will enable the nation to advance

towards the de-criminalization of slander, injury and vilification or disparagement. This has been one of the requests repeatedly posed to Venezuela by diverse international human rights organizations.

These regulatory priorities are shared by [Instituto Prensa y Sociedad de Venezuela](#). Based on the diagnosis raised with 227 journalists, this organization considers that these recommendations should be parliamentary priorities for the years to come.



Notes to ponder and act upon

The necessary conditions to fully exercise freedom of expression and the right to information.

[IPYS Venezuela](#) insists in 6 recommendations presented at national and international instances for the purposes of generating a climate of respect and safeguarding the exercise of journalism.

1. Provide media plurality and diversity as a basic component for the right to information and ensure that the journalists can complete their functions unencumbered by unjustified proceedings.
2. Renew the commitment to freedom of expression and plural opinions, guaranteeing freedom of access to information and measures to combat threats and attacks against journalists.
3. Intensify the efforts to guarantee freedom of expression as well as the safety of the journalists in this nation.
4. Take action so that the right to life and one's physical integrity are effectively guaranteed and all state instances respect and protect every person's right to freedom of expression.
5. Comply with international obligations on justice and freedom of expression, and implement the recommendations, resolutions and decisions of the regional and international human rights protection system.
6. Harmonize the legal framework in respect to freedom of expression with international obligations subscribed by the State with various human rights agencies.

Notes to ponder and act upon

We believe that the actions and reflections by the State, private institutions, the media and the journalists must be based on the principles of freedom of expression as defined in national and international instruments.

- *“Every person has a right to freely express their thoughts, ideas or opinions out loud, in writing or through any other form of expression, and for said purpose to avail themselves of any means of communication and dissemination, uncensored”. Article 57, Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.*
- *“Nobody can be tampered with because of their opinions. Every person has a right to freedom of expression; this right encompasses the freedom to seek out, receive and disseminate all manner of information and ideas, regardless of frontiers, whether in oral form, in writing or in print or in an artistic form, or through any other procedure of their choice. Exercising this right entails special duties and responsibilities. Therefore, certain restrictions may apply which nevertheless must be expressly established in the law and must be necessary to ensure respect for the rights or reputation of others, homeland protection and security, public order, health and morals”. Article 19, International Pact on Civil and Political Rights.*
- *“Prior censorship, interference or direct or indirect pressure on any expression, opinion or information broadcast through any verbal, written, artistic, visual or electronic means of communication must be prohibited by law. Restrictions to the free circulation of ideas and opinions, as well as the arbitrary imposition of information and the creation of obstacles to the free flow of information violate the right to freedom of expression”. The OAS’ Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression.*
- *Direct or indirect pressures aimed at quashing or silencing the work of informing by social communicators are incompatible with freedom of expression. The OAS’ Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression.*

X-ray in Construction

Journalism in Quicksand presents a balance of the **2015 Study: Censorship and Self-censorship in Journalists and the Media in Venezuela** conducted by the [Instituto Prensa y Sociedad de Venezuela \(IPYS Venezuela\)](#).

The main intention was to take an X-ray of the exercise of journalism in Venezuela, based on a statistically rigorous method. Thus, the main tendencies and patterns where freedom of expression and the right to information in the nation were exercised throughout 2015 were briefly mentioned, including its risks, threats, pressures and challenges and also its proposals.

Besides encompassing the topics of censorship and self-censorship, this research was based on the 10 monitoring and investigation categories used by [IPYS Venezuela](#). This gaze enabled us to delve deeper into what took place in the various trends on restrictions accessing public information, the regulations affecting freedom of expression, the assaults against journalists and the attacks against the media, the obstructions to freedom online, the abusive use of the State's power in regards to communications, prior censorship, internal censorship, indirect censorship and impunity.

This study was reinforced through the national and international principles for the protection of freedom of expression and the right to information set forth in the national constitution as well as diverse instances of the United Nations and the Organization of American States. Other references used were the investigations conducted on censorship and self-censorship by regional organizations.

Consultation perspectives

This X-ray on journalism in Venezuela was deployed in 67% of the national territory, through the direct consultation in 16 of the nation's states. This is precisely the scope of the National Network of Correspondents of IPYS Venezuela.

Among the states included were Anzoátegui, Aragua, the metropolitan area of Caracas, Apure, Carabobo, Barinas, Bolívar, Falcón, Lara, Mérida, Miranda, Monagas, Portuguesa, Táchira, Trujillo and Zulia. It was a challenge to achieve significant representativity in all these states due to the fears and pressures felt during the exercise of journalism in the national geography.

The perceptions of 227 journalists were collected in these states working for the private media (73.13%), independent media and NGOs (10.57%), state-owned and government agencies (8.81%) and community-based medias (7.49%).

At the time, the persons surveyed worked in diverse platforms: printed (54%), digital (29%), radiophonic (26%), television (13%), among others (15%), in the states covered in this research.

Diversity in the participation of journalists fulfilling diverse functions and in various hierarchical levels in the media predominated in the survey. There were reporters and article columnists (38%); editors and chiefs of information (17%); media chairmen and directors (11%); section coordinators (11%); correspondents (8%); radio and TV show hosts (6%); producers (4%) and journalists fulfilling other duties (5%).

The sample encompassed sundry sources of information. At least 25% indicated that at the time they were not assigned to any particular news source, since they worked in current events or diverse sources. Another group represented the sources of politics (24%), community (8%); events (7%); investigations (7%); sports (6%); economics and

labor-related news (5%); cultural and recreational activities (5%); healthcare (2%); election-based news (1%); education (1%); human rights (1%); science and technology (1%) and other news sources (7%).

A group of journalists was surveyed with various age ranges, most of whom have outstanding professional experience: 25-34 years (41%); 35-44 years (25%); 45-54 years (23%) and 55 years or older (6%) and 8-24 years (5%). In regards to the gender, 57% were female and 43% male.

Research Modality

This study was based on a quantitative perspective and was nourished from historical records of trends in freedom of expression kept by [IPYS Venezuela](#). Specific consultations were also made to give more depth to the interpretation of the patterns raised by the research.

The sample was randomly selected, based on strict confidentiality agreements on the information given by the participants. The field work took 6 weeks, from September 18 to October 31st, 2015. The data collection process was through a digital questionnaire, which maintained data protection criteria and review of the consistency of the information received.

This research included participation by 30 journalists and human rights activists. It was a multidisciplinary team coordinated by IPYS Venezuela including statistical, sociology and strategic planning consultants. Its execution was in the hands of a follow-up team located in Caracas, and the field work was directly followed in the regions thanks to the support of the members of the National Network of Correspondents of IPYS Venezuela.

[IPYS Venezuela](#) puts this research at your service for consultation and discussion in diverse national and international arenas.



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