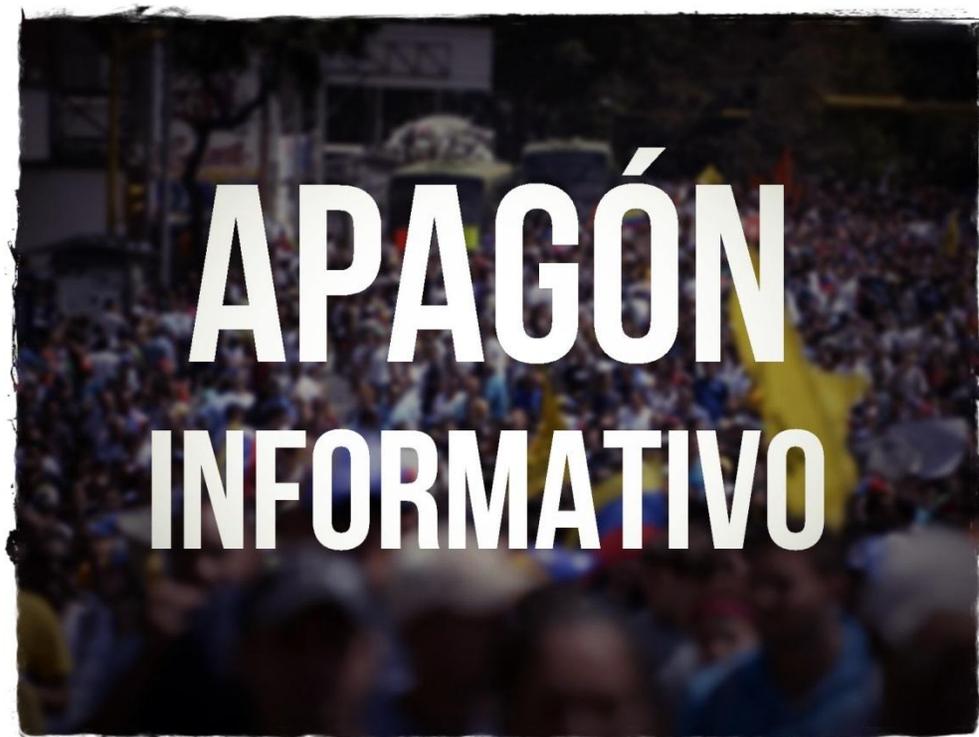


Report IPYS Venezuela 2014

Disinformation and opacity condition journalism

The lack of information or disinformation, the abuse of power by the State and opacity have weakened the conditions for the proper exercise of journalism in the course of 2014, when there was a predominance of coercion practices, turning Venezuela into a nation where the autonomy and independence of the institutions is now compromised, including the entities that tally the votes.



In 2014, life in Venezuela was marked by actions restricting freedom of expression by means of direct and indirect actions, such as limitations on accessing public records/information and the abuse of power in communications handled by the State. In a heated panorama of socio-political conflictivity, in the course of last year the marked tendency towards physical assaults against journalists and attacks against the media have persisted, with a clear intention of exerting pressure and inhibitions to weaken information guarantees in the nation, through irregular actions by state and non-state groups. The challenges at the discretion of the State against national and international printed and TV media due to these platforms -of greater audience and information scope – were not fortuitous and were acutely felt through censorship and opacity. These are the prospects arising from the 2014 annual balance drafted by the Instituto Prensa y Sociedad de Venezuela (IPYS Venezuela), analyzing indicators relating to freedom of expression and the right to information.

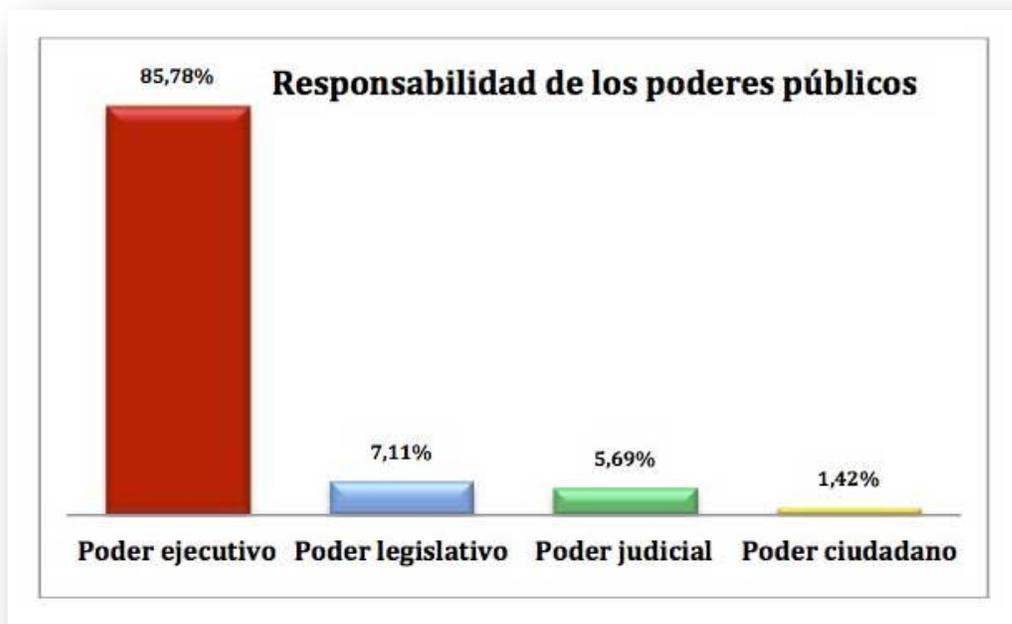
The government against freedom of expression

The executive branch of power has the accrued responsibility in 53% of the cases of violations to freedom of expression

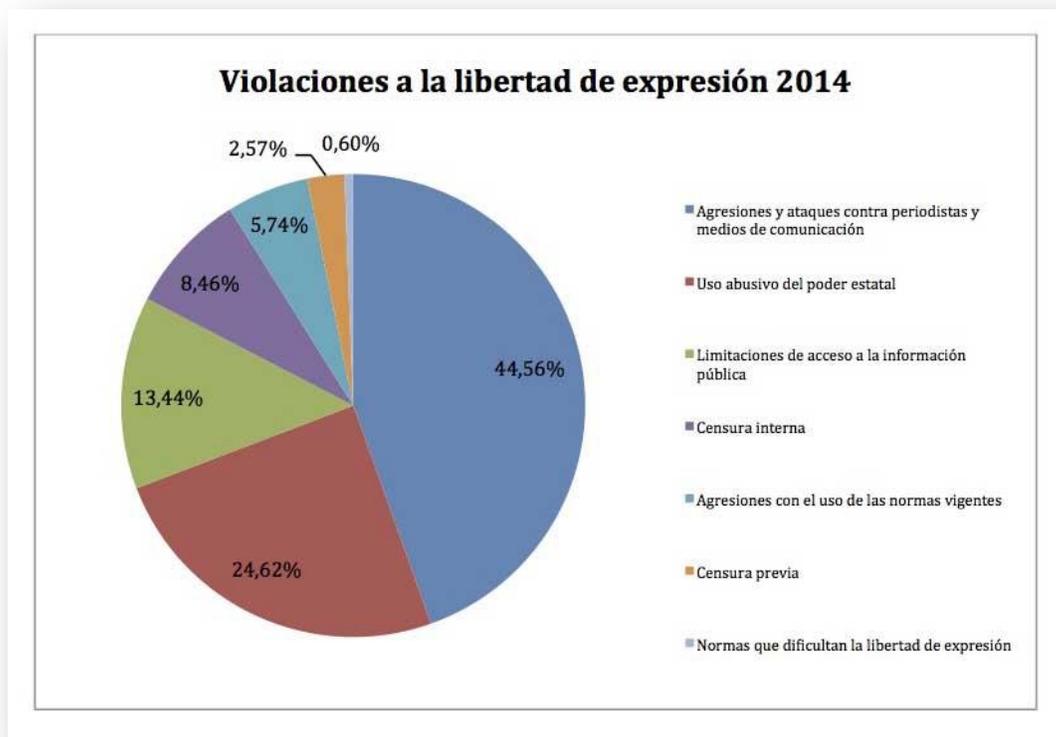
which took place in Venezuela in the course of 2014, a total of 341 from January to December. This figure converted this time lapse into one subjected to the most limitations, risks and threats for Venezuelan journalism, in the past 14 years. Local, regional, and national government instances appeared as perpetrators in 181 cases, close to half of the total reports tallied by IPYS Venezuela in the course of the year.

This restrictive practice was also predominant in the acts by the various instances of public power, with an accrued responsibility in 62% of the incidents against freedom of expression in Venezuela. This means that 6 of every 10 coercive actions against journalists, human rights activists and the media were undertaken by state power instances, and their various competencies: the executive branch of power (181); the legislative branch of power (15); the judiciary (12) and the citizen branch of power (3).

This behavior was similar to that in 2013, when state forces committed 209 incidents but unlike the past 5 years, no case of violation of freedom of expression directed by the election branch of power was tallied since no elections have been held in the course of the past twelve months.



The 341 cases accrued 662 freedom of expression violations, including 295 physical assaults against journalists and attacks against the media; 163 cases abusive use of the State's power regarding communications; 89 limitations accessing public information; 56 cases of internal censorship in the media; 38 assaults to regulations in force; 17 incidents of self-censorship or prior censorship and orders issued by the State, and the approval and execution of rules and regulations that restrict all manner of expression.



Misinformed citizens

From January to December 2014 direct and indirect actions destined towards imposing silence on the media and the journalists were evidenced. The intention of these practices was to respond to orders prohibiting or modifying the nature of the information collected by the journalists. The evident aim was also to favor diverse political party, economic and entrepreneurial sectors.

Beyond the impediments for the proper exercise of journalism, the direct repercussion of these actions affected the citizens principally since the right that Venezuelans have of learning about information and diverse and plural opinions in a timely, pertinent and appropriate manner was repeatedly trampled upon.

This tendency -the purpose of which is to impose censorship and self-censorship- became more acute starting in February 2014, when street conflicts broke out throughout the nation. It was also demonstrated that with the increasing protests, the risks of exercising freedom of expression and the right to information also increased.

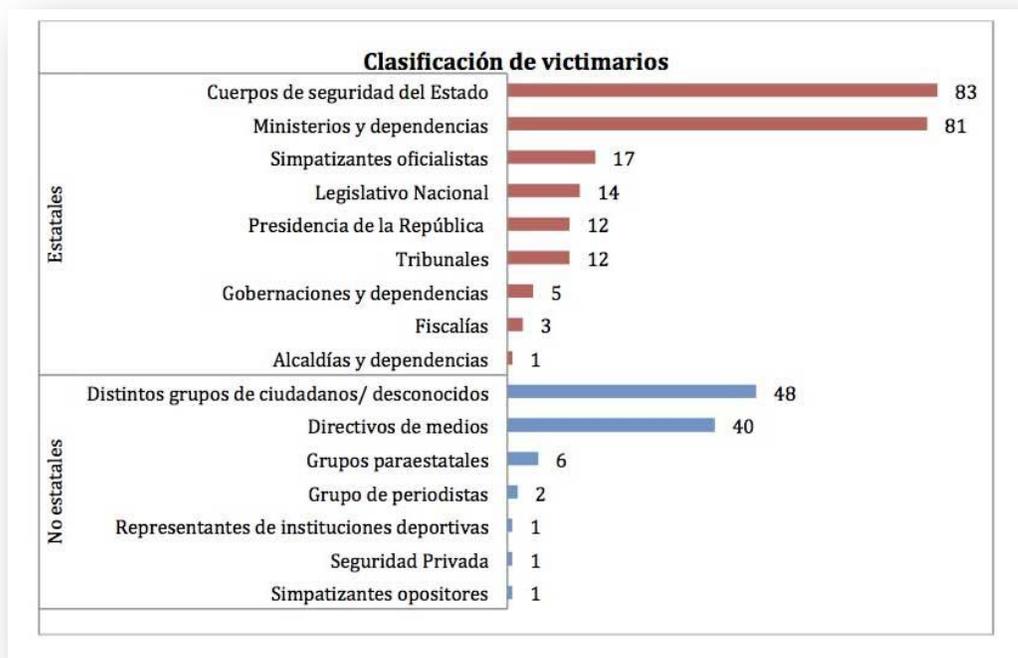


Deliberate actions by state- and non-state-managed groups affected journalistic guarantees. In regards to the official sector, IPYS Venezuela determined that most of the incidents were committed by State security corps (83), ministries and government entities (81). These two players held the accrued accountability in 44% of the incidents, a trend which is ongoing since 2013, when police and military officials, as well as officials of the executive branch of power, were the main culprits of violations to freedom of expression, and committed 72% of the cases tallied in the course of that year.

In 2014, events promoted by supporters of the official political party (17) were also registered, who in many cases acted due to the oversight of state authorities. There were cases with the recorded participation of the national assembly and regional legislative councils (14); local and national courthouses (12); the public prosecutor's office and state district attorneys' offices (3), and one case in which the accountability was set on a mayor's office.

48 cases were registered, in which the perpetrators were unidentified persons, neighbors, armed men on motorcycles and organized groups of delinquents

Among the non-state perpetrators, groups of persons –unidentified persons, neighbors, armed men on motorcycles and organized groups of delinquents– were signaled out as accruing direct responsibility in 48 cases. Also, on six opportunities, the participation of para-state groups, responding to factual powers and acting violently, under the inaction or complicity of state authorities was mentioned. These cases were committed within the framework of street conflicts, mostly during February and May 2014. Events were registered in which groups of journalists (2); representatives of sports clubs (1); private security officials and (1) supporters of the opposition party (1) were accountable.



The censors of the media

Comparing the records for 2013 and 2014, there is an evident increase in incidents against freedom of expression within the media (also called self-censorship). In 2014, there were at least 39 cases committed by directors, mostly derived into internal censorship, layoffs and resignations for information-related reasons, while in 2013 17 similar cases were registered.

The heightened actions by media representatives also coincided with a change of hands of the media in Caracas and other regions of the nation, resulting in direct restrictions on the handling of journalistic sources related to the sociopolitical context, as well as the disintegration of specialized instances of investigative journalism, as was the case in Cadena Capriles.

Opacity in state-issued news

In 2014 there was concern over the four legal norms and judicial decisions adopted, which affected freedom of expression and the right to information. In August of that year, the political administrative court of the Supreme Court of Justice considered, through a [sentence](#), that the right to access public information or records “cannot be abusive” and requests by citizens cannot be destined to hindering the workings of the public administration. This sentence sets forth restrictions on the right of citizens to be informed, since through these requirements, persons are compelled to explain the reasons why they are requesting the information. These limitations promote opacity and the discretionary powers in the hands of public officials.

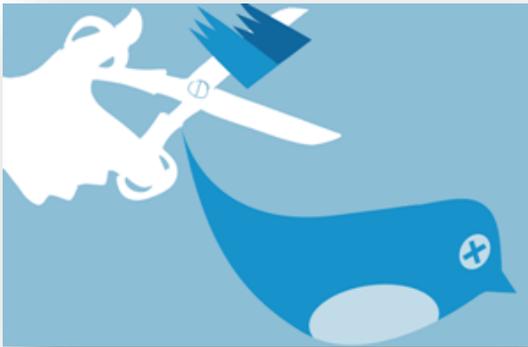
Another sentence was issued in December when the [TSJ](#) declared that any information related to telecommunications in the nation is a State secret, and that public dissemination could attempt against the “homeland security”. This measure was adopted as per a declaration of inadmissibility of an arrest lawsuit filed by [Espacio Público](#) against the [popular power ministry of university level education, science and technology](#). In parallel to these regulatory actions, other measures also generated alarms. One of them was the enactment of the Strategic Center for Homeland Security and Protection (Cesppa for its acronyms in Spanish) -which started operations in February 2014- and the Special Brigade against Acts by Groups Generating Violence (BEGV for its acronyms in Spanish) -constituted on June 26, 2014- the founding decrees of which legalize police intelligence and surveillance actions, and establish restrictions on the freedom of expression and the right to accessing public information.

Blackout on the Internet

In the course of 2014, at least 22 incidents affecting freedom of expression, access to and content on the Internet were reported. In February, within the context of acute conflicts in various of the nation's cities, partial blockages were registered on [Twitter](#), as well as slowness and ABA Internet service interruptions –offered by state-owned company CANTV (Compañía Anónima Nacional de Teléfonos de Venezuela) to more than 80% of the users in the nation.

22 incidents affected access to, content on and freedom of expression on the Internet

During the first semester of 2014, IPYS Venezuela corroborated that at least 454 web pages were blocked from Internet services in Venezuela. This censorship measure - which started in November 2013 - was ordered by the government against [523 web pages](#), to avoid information from leaking out on the price of the parallel dollar due to the foreign exchange control system in place and restrictions on the handling of foreign currency in Venezuela. The measure was also extended to portals deploying all manner of information.



In this context, 14 cases of restrictions on freedom of expression on the Internet were due to death threats on social networks, slander campaigns, blockages, hacks and the illegal tapping of personal communications. The vast majority of the persons affected were journalists, citizens acting as reporters and human rights activists.

Under pressure to procure paper to print newspapers on

In the course of 2014 there was also a preponderance of disproportionate use of the State's communications power. These acts were translated into increased government control to hinder the exercise of journalism and the defense of human rights.

From August 2013 to December 2014, at least 34 printed media denounced difficulties finding supplies and purchasing paper to print newspapers on and other raw materials for printing -such as inks, chemicals and photographic plates- since the market of these goods are exclusively run by the State, through the Complejo Editorial Maneiro (CEAM), ascribed to the ministry of the secretary of the presidency.

This situation derived in the slashing of pages from printed issues, and the newspapers were forced to suppress some sections.

During that same period, IPYS Venezuela confirmed that 7 printed media suspended their operations temporarily and at least 3 closed down definitively.



IPYS Venezuela corroborated that several media managed to start circulating again and partially solved their lacks after entering into negotiations with the Complejo Editorial Alfredo Maneiro S.A (Ceam). "The objective of the Ceam, which was created by means of presidential decree N° 104 printed in the official gazette of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela N° 40.168 dated May 16, 2013, is the production, distribution and trading of diverse publications, destined to information, dissemination propaganda and publicity", as per the summary posted on the portal of the national assembly.

Since May 2014, directors of different newspapers told IPYS Venezuela that administrative blocks and difficulties in the allocation of preferential foreign currency to private importers are part of the government strategies to force the owners of newspapers and magazines to resort to the Complejo Editorial Alfredo Maneiro. There was concern that this relationship could condition the editorial line of the private and state-owned media and compromise the autonomy of the media companies.

Based on recurrent denunciations of these indirect measures, IPYS Venezuela and the raconteur for freedom of expression were criminalized and labeled "[liars](#)" by the authorities at the ministry of communications and information.

Reporters at risk

Several international information chains were accused by State spokespersons of promoting "[media warfare](#)" and "psychological warfare" against the national government. In this context, at least 26 aggravating declarations and 7 slander campaigns by government authorities were registered and promoted in the media that is in agreement with the national government to smear the names of journalists and the directors of local and international media and threaten them.

From January to December 2014, the news coverage by foreign correspondents and some international media dwindled. There were limitations linked to the allocation of credentials, a permit granted to reporters to be able to work as journalists in the nation. IPYS Venezuela followed up on the [irregularities denounced](#) by journalists of Cable News Network en Español, better known as CNN en Español, who were denied the necessary accreditation to cover news in the nation, a situation which was later resolved in a few days.

7 slander campaigns by government authorities, promoted in the media that is sympathetic to the national government, to smear the name of, and threaten, journalists and the directors of local and international media

Foreign correspondents appeared as the third most vulnerable group, since IPYS Venezuela received complaints from 20 journalists and graphic reporters from international media, who were the victims of assaults, arbitrary arrests and attacks against their work tools. This supposes a substantial increase compared to 2013, when the sum total of foreign correspondents affected was only 5.

These actions to criminalize the foreign press were endorsed by the government. Throughout the year there were admonitions and threats of lawsuits from the State against local and international media, which hinted at a bout of an alleged bacteriological virus at the Central Hospital in Maracay, Aragua state. There were also scathing accusations on the journalistic coverage of the murder of Robert Serra, a former congressman to the national assembly, by the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV), the government party.



In April 2014, Johana Álvarez, correspondent of Mexico's Cadena 3 TV station, was assaulted and threatened with kidnapping by an alleged member of collective sympathetic to the government, while covering a student protest at Universidad Central de Venezuela.

Detentions as punishment

The abusive use of the State's power against journalism was also observed in practices limiting the coverage of street news by journalists, graphic reporters, cameramen, citizen reporters and human rights activists. In this context, arbitrary arrests doubled in comparison to the previous year: From 17 detentions reported in 2013, the number rose to 36 in 2014.

There were 36 arbitrary arrests by state security corps of journalists while doing their job of informing, which puts in evidence a 111% increase in this category compared to 2013, when 17 reports of this type were recorded. The majority of these cases took place during the first quarter of 2014, within the context of covering protests. This situation was coupled to limitations to the news coverage by journalists of public affairs, a category which accumulated 91 cases. These data allow us to verify that the street -as the natural scenario for reporting- has become a hostile and risky environment for reporter crews.

The riskiest period in 2014 was the first semester -January to June- due to the continuous conflicts and protests for political, social and economic changes. And 2014 -with 341 cases- became the period with the highest number of violations to freedom of expression since 2002, according to historic records kept by the Instituto Prensa y Sociedad de Venezuela.

341 total cases were registered in 2014: The Metropolitan area of Caracas had 175 cases and Bolívar state, with 30, were the states with the most number of obstructions

The metropolitan area of Caracas with 175 cases and Bolívar state, with 30, were the states with the highest number of obstructions, and both accrued 60% of the total incidents tallied all over the nation. Between the two they even surpass the total number of cases reported by IPYS Venezuela in the course of 2012 nationwide (with 200 alerts).

From January to December 2014, incidents were also reported in Carabobo (22); Aragua (15); Táchira (14); Lara (11); Zulia (10); Monagas (9); Miranda (9); Barinas (7); Mérida (5); Anzoátegui (4); Trujillo (4); Falcón (3); Apure (3); Portuguesa (2); Nueva Esparta (2); Guárico (1) and Sucre (1).

In these cases, 140 media companies and communications and telecommunications management institutions were affected, as well as 317 journalists, human rights activists and private, state-owned, communal and foreign media workers, 307 of which were men, 104 women and 5 persons of unidentified gender.

As has been the trend in the past 8 years, the most vulnerable members were the reporter crews that cover street news, accruing 70% of the affected parties including reporters, photographers, cameramen and foreign correspondents.



The State must enforce compliance with the Constitution

In light of this restrictive panorama for the proper exercise of journalism and citizen freedoms in Venezuela, IPYS Venezuela demands that the Venezuelan State, media companies and all other social players respect and enable freedom of expression, access to information and journalistic guarantees, which must be safeguarded under all circumstances.

"Every person has a right to freely express their thoughts, ideas and opinions by voice, in writing or by any other means of expression, and for this purpose to make use of any uncensored communications and dissemination media". Article 57, Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

"Nobody can be harassed or heckled due to their opinions. Every person has a right to freedom of expression; this right includes freedom to search, receive and disseminate all manner of information and ideas, without consideration of frontiers, orally in writing or in print or artistic format, or through any other procedure of their choice. Exercising this right implies special duties and responsibilities. Therefore, it may be subject to certain restrictions, which shall nevertheless be expressly set forth in the law if necessary, to ensure respect for the right to one's reputation, homeland security protection mechanisms, safeguarding public order and public health and ethics". Article 19, International Pact on Civil and Political Rights.

This report

- *The results in this annual report presented by IPYS Venezuela are derived from the ongoing and permanent follow-up by this organization, through a systematic and rigorous monitoring based on international standards for the protection of freedom of expression and the right to information.*
 - *This research is backed by the system of alerts carried by IPYS Venezuela, which are public records and are available at www.ipys.org.ve.*
 - *All cases are raised as per a journalistic methodology of consultations to direct sources and the revision of information in the printed, audiovisual and digital medias, as well as official documents, surveys conducted by NGOs and confidential denunciations and complaints filed.*
 - *This balance is also drafted with the participation of a multidisciplinary team that includes journalists, researchers and human rights activists, backed by a group of reporters who*
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comprise the national network of IPYS Venezuela, with presence in the 13 principal states of Venezuela.
