



Journalist Fellowship Paper

# The press vs. organised crime: strategies from Mexico for safe coverage in Argentina

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# Introduction

When clashes erupted between members of the Sinaloa cartel and security forces in Culiacán, Mexico, armed gangsters harassed and [assaulted journalists](#) who were trying to cover the events, stealing their vehicles and equipment, and threatening to kill them. ☒ With its long history of high-profile cases, this is an all too familiar story for the Mexican press corps.

But just days prior, 8,100 kilometres away in Rosario, Argentina, a similar and less familiar story unfolded. Journalists at Televisión Litoral in Rosario, Argentina, escaped tragedy by mere minutes on the night of 29 Dec. 2022.

It was around 9.30pm, as staff were preparing to leave the office after presenting the evening bulletin, that a masked assailant opened fire on the studio complex. Miraculously, there were no fatalities.

This was the second drive-by shooting targeting the station [in 17 days](#). The first incident took place on 12 Dec. 2022, when the shooter left a threatening note. In Spanish, it read: “[Journalists] stop working with the prosecutors and the AIC [Criminal Investigation Agency] because we will kill a police officer every day. [...] Don’t fuck with the mafia.”<sup>1,2</sup>

All three incidents illustrate why Latin America is considered one of the most dangerous regions on the planet for journalism. Between the years 2000 and 2004, Reporters Without Borders recorded the deaths of 329 journalists in a region extending from the Colorado River in the north to the Cape Horn in the south.<sup>3</sup>

Almost half of these crimes (149) occurred in Mexico; Colombia came in second with 47 cases, while Brazil ranked third with 44 reporters murdered during the study period. The common denominator in all three countries: organised crime gangs – particularly drug traffickers – who see journalists’ work as a threat to the impunity with which they operate.

Disturbingly, Argentina is experiencing a rise in domestic drug consumption that has [strengthened criminal clans](#) and expanded their influence, particularly in border

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<sup>1</sup> Infobae, 2022. Adepa expresó su preocupación y condenó el nuevo ataque armado a Televisión Litoral en Rosario. Infobae, 29 December. Available at: <https://www.infobae.com/politica/2022/12/29/adepa-expreso-su-preocupacion-y-condeno-el-nuevo-ataque-armado-a-television-litoral-en-rosario/> [Accessed 1 August 2024].

<sup>2</sup> Argentine Journalism Forum (2023). Journalism under the threat of organised crime. Retrieved from <https://monitoreo.foepa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/monitoreo-libertad-de-expresion-informe-2022.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Reporters Without Borders (2024). Worldwide Registry of Attacks Against Journalists. Retrieved from <https://rsf.org/en/barometer>.

regions.<sup>4</sup> Los Monos gang in Rosario and Castedo Clan in Salta are two notable players. Moreover, Argentina's role as a transit and distribution hub for cocaine from Bolivia and marijuana from Paraguay has intensified. The northern provinces, such as Salta and Misiones, serve as key entry points for these drugs.

The intertwining of organised crime and government corruption at both local and national levels has further exacerbated the issue. Corrupt officials, including police and politicians, often facilitate these criminal activities, allowing organised crime groups to operate with impunity.

In 2023, the [Organized Global Crime Index](#) reported criminality in Argentina had risen by 0.63 points (+14.4%) between 2021 and 2023, while efforts to combat crime decreased 0.38 points (-6%) in the same period. These changes have meant Argentina has risen 30 places in the criminality rankings, from 125th to 95th out of 195 measured countries.



*Data visualisation from the Organized Global Crime Index's interactive tool shows criminality in Argentina is on the increase.*

While journalists in Argentina are a long way from the reality that our colleagues in Mexico must endure, the time is right to ask ourselves: if these trends continue, what lessons should journalists in Argentina take from our Mexican peers? With the conviction that the maintenance of democracy requires independent and free journalism that can carry out its task securely, we must ask: how can we safeguard ourselves – not just to report on organised crime, but as we go about our

<sup>4</sup> InSight Crime, 2021. Clans, Corruption and Cross-border Crime in Argentina. InSight Crime, 18 March. Available at: <https://insightcrime.org/news/clans-corruption-transborder-crime-argentina/> [Accessed 1 August 2024].

everyday reporting assignments? What strategies must be deployed to mitigate the impact of this growing danger to journalism before it becomes unmanageable?

To answer these questions, I have reviewed existing resources and interviewed experts to record a three-prong multiparty approach to improving the safety of journalists nationally, and a three-dimensional journalists' support plan for newsrooms to implement internally.

# The impact of organised crime

Before we discuss how the situation might be improved, we must understand why the situation requires our urgent attention. What is the impact of organised crime on journalists in Mexico and Argentina?

## Criminality in Mexico

Four Mexican journalists were murdered in a span of four weeks in August 2022, making it the deadliest month on record in the history of the profession there. In a report at the time, [Reporters Without Borders](#) said: “The list of murdered journalists in Mexico is horrifying and seems to inexorably lengthen, without the federal government or local authorities taking charge of the problem’s scope or making courageous decisions.” They continued, demanding a “re-founding of risk prevention mechanisms, protection, and justice, as well as the establishment of a comprehensive and lasting policy to ensure the safety of information professionals, whose role is crucial for Mexican democracy”.<sup>5</sup>

Mexico is a classic illustration of what happens in states across Latin America when electoral democracies are blended with feeble formal state institutions.

General violence has spiralled there ever since former president Felipe Calderon declared a war against drug trafficking organisations in 2007. By 2022, according to the [Global Study on Homicide 2023](#) published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), Mexico recorded 33,287 homicides.<sup>6</sup> (To put this in perspective, compare it to [Indonesia](#) – a state with similar land size and GPD, but almost double the population – which recorded 854 homicides in 2022.)<sup>7</sup>

Nothing better illustrates Mexico’s feeble institutional response to this violence than its conviction rates: 94.8% of homicides committed between 2010 and 2016 have [gone unpunished](#).<sup>8</sup> In the remaining 5.2% of cases, court sentences were delivered many years later, highlighting the ineffectiveness of the judicial system.

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<sup>5</sup> Reporters Without Borders (2022). 2022 is already the deadliest year for journalists in the country’s history. Retrieved from <https://www.rsf-es.org/mexico-2022-es-ya-el-ano-mas-mortifero-para-los-periodistas-en-la-historia-del-pais/>.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (2023). Global Study on Homicide 2023. Retrieved from <https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-intentional-homicide-victims>.

<sup>7</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023. Crime Statistics 2023. BPS-Statistics Indonesia. Available at: <https://www.bps.go.id/en/publication/2023/12/12/5edba2b0fe5429a0f232c736/crime-statistics-2023.html> [Accessed 1 August 2024].

<sup>8</sup> Animal Político (2018). Matar en México: impunidad garantizada. Retrieved from <https://www.animalpolitico.com/analisis/autores/transito-lento/matar-en-mexico>.

Approximately 90% of convictions in Mexico currently hinge solely on confessions, lack substantial physical evidence, and many defendants never even face a judge. While judicial bodies frequently falter in probing serious offenses like murder, the resulting convictions often lack credibility, implying that not only do numerous guilty individuals evade punishment but also that innocent parties face wrongful convictions.

Assaults on the press are yet another signal of Mexico's failing rule of law. Spanning from cyber-attacks to murder, the press there endured an attack every 14 hours in 2021, according to [Article 19](#).<sup>9</sup>

*“In 2021, the organisation recorded 644 aggressions against the press, i.e., one every 14 hours. These aggressions include physical violence, threats, harassment, and other forms of intimidation.” – Article 19*

In the year after President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) took office in December 2018, violence against journalists rose by 85%, and 97.9% of crimes against the press went unpunished. On the rare occasion that arrests were made, the resulting convictions were frequently disputed.

Not even the murder of a journalist receives the attention it should: according to [Human Rights Watch](#), out of 105 investigations opened since 2010, only six have resulted in homicide convictions.<sup>10</sup> This is underscored by the findings of the [Observatory of Killed Journalists](#), which reports 12% of the murders of press workers committed since 1993 have been resolved by the Law.<sup>11</sup>

### **Criminality in Argentina**

Whenever there is a higher density of criminal organisations, [researchers have found](#) a correlating higher risk of homicidal violence.<sup>12</sup>

In central Argentina, specifically in the south of Santa Fe province, where various criminal groups are fighting for the control of the drug commerce and distribution,

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<sup>9</sup> ARTICLE 19 (2023). Mexico: AMLO attacks ARTICLE 19 on World Press Freedom Day. Retrieved from <https://www.article19.org/resources/mexico-amlo-attacks-article-19-on-world-press-freedom-day/>.

<sup>10</sup> The New York Times Magazine (2023). Our only defense is a pen, by Nicholas Casey. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2023/10/03/magazine/mexico-periodistas-asesinados.html>.

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists (2024). Killed journalists in Mexico. Retrieved from <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/observatory/country-overview?country=3c188cb5-cd28-50c5-9229-05a4a3cf4109&hub=72609>.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023). Homicide and Organised Crime in Latin America and The Caribbean. Retrieved from [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/2023/GSH\\_2023\\_LAC\\_web.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/2023/GSH_2023_LAC_web.pdf).

we see this correlation in action. Homicides are increasing in the area, and attacks by organised crime groups against journalists are on the rise too. FOPEA, the Argentine Journalism Forum that unites more than 600 journalists from all over the country, [published a report](#) in May 2023 addressing the issue.<sup>13</sup>

It found that, of the total attacks against journalists in Santa Fe recorded in 2022, 60% were related to organised crime. “The percentage may seem insignificant, especially when compared to countries where this scourge has a depth and extent in geography and time incomparable to Argentina. However, it becomes alarmingly relevant when it is noted that the previous year had zero reported cases of this origin.”

All of the cases attributed to organised crime were reported from Rosario, the largest city in Santa Fe province and the third most populous city in Argentina.

The attacks recorded in 2022 included, among others, [explicit death threats](#) via social media by criminals convicted of drug trafficking, and by their families, as well as [drive-by shootings](#) outside buildings where media outlets operate.<sup>14,15</sup>

Leopoldo Monteil, a lawyer, contributed to the stigmatizing discourse against journalists by [posting on Twitter](#) that “people have to execute one journalist per day” because they are the “cancer of society”.<sup>16</sup>

In another incident, thugs hoisted a large banner in front of Telefé Rosario TV station with a spraypainted [warning that read](#): “To all the media in Rosario: stop smearing and condemning the kids with your words, because we are going to kill journalists. Don’t mess with the mafia, or else you’ll take a trip with El Noba.”<sup>17,18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Argentine Journalism Forum (2023). Journalism under the threat of organised crime. Retrieved from <https://monitoreo.fopea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/monitoreo-libertad-de-expresion-informe-2022.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Argentine Journalism Forum (2022). FOPEA condemns threats against Rosario journalists. Retrieved from <https://fopea.org/fopea-sobre-amenazas-a-periodistas-de-rosario-santa-fe/>.

<sup>15</sup> Argentine Journalism Forum (2022). FOPEA condemns the attack suffered by Televisión Litoral de Rosario. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/fopea/photos/a.200784945729/10161972443500730/>.

<sup>16</sup> Argentine Journalism Forum (2022). FOPEA repudiates and condemns the threats expressed by lawyer Leopoldo Monteil against Rosario journalists. Retrieved from <https://fopea.org/fopea-expresa-su-mas-absoluto-repudio-y-condena-ante-las-amenazas-vertidas-por-el-abogado-leopoldo-monteil-rosario-santa-fe-contra-los-periodistas/>.

<sup>17</sup> Argentine Journalism Forum (2022). FOPEA condemns and repudiates the threats against Rosario journalists. Retrieved from <https://fopea.org/fopea-expresa-su-energico-repudio-a-la-amenaza-registrada-contra-los-periodistas-de-rosario-y-expresa-su-solidaridad/>.

<sup>18</sup> “El Noba” was an Argentinian singer and rapper related to Narcos who died in 2022. Saying “you’ll take a trip with El Noba” means you’re threatening to kill someone.



Violence against press workers continued in 2023 and has worsened since the beginning of 2024. During February and March this year, Rosario dominated the headlines of the main national newspapers following a brutal spiral of violence unleashed by drug trafficking groups that ravaged the streets of the city with shootings at all hours, even committing numerous crimes against innocent civilians with the sole intention of sowing terror and cornering the new provincial government that took office in December 2023.

This new wave of violence generated by organised crime groups includes once again threats against the press workers covering the events. This time, the target of the warnings were not only journalists from Rosario, but also reporters from national media who arrived from Buenos Aires.

# Securing journalists' safety: a three-prong approach

Much work has already been undertaken to address the safety of journalists as they carry out their work. Most notably, the United Nations issued its [Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#) in 2012.<sup>19</sup>

It is also important to acknowledge the worldwide efforts made by [Reporters Without Borders](#) (RSF), the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) (CPJ), the [International Federation of Journalists](#) (IFJ), the [International Center for Journalists](#) (ICFJ), and the [Global Investigative Journalism Network](#) (GIJN), among others.

In the Latin-American landscape, we also find the [Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas](#) and the [Interamerican Press Society](#) (IPS).

In the past two decades, all these organisations have raised concerns and acted in the context of growing danger for journalists across the continent.

Artur Romeu, director of the Latin America bureau of Reporters Without Borders, explained that there are three lines of action that must be pursued to combat violence against journalists. The first line is related to the governmental obligation to guarantee a free press, the second requires action by media companies, and the third involves journalists themselves.

## 1. The duty of the state to protect free press

*“States must comply not only by not exercising violence against the press, but also by creating a safer environment for journalism.”* - Artur Romeu, Director of the Latin American Bureau, RSF

When a state guarantees press freedom in its constitution, it must comply not only by not exercising state-sanctioned violence against the press, but also by creating a safe environment for journalists to operate in.

Ensuring federal and local governments fulfil this obligation requires the joint efforts of civil society organisations, journalists' associations, international

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<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, 2022. The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists. [online] Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384476> [Accessed 6 August 2024].

organisations, and diplomatic delegations. In Colombia, for example, the National Protection Unit (UNP) administers the protection mechanism.

“The advantage of this approach is that it puts the problem on the public agenda, which helps to raise the society’s awareness about the issue,” said Romeu.

Extending security to journalists to operate benefits other social agents too, such as activists, human rights lawyers or prosecutors who investigate organised crime.

Romeu explained: “In Colombia, this protection mechanism currently has 8,000 beneficiaries, involves the work of 6,000 people, and has a budget of \$300 million. It is a giant policy that is certainly not only aimed at journalists, but it is an example of how the state must take responsibility.”

In February 2022, RSF published the results of the analysis of journalists’ protection mechanisms in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Honduras, titled [Protection Paradigm](#).<sup>20</sup> They concluded that these systems suffer from significant structural flaws that prevent their proper implementation. Among the failings:

- they all rely on inefficient institutions (police, army, judiciary),
- risk analysis methodologies do not always consider the specificities of journalistic work,
- protection measures are inadequate or applied too late,
- human and financial resources are insufficient, etc.

These failings foster a climate of widespread mistrust among the beneficiaries of protection programmes and the civil society organisations that participate in them. Protection mechanisms are further distanced from meeting their objectives when state agents (police officers, politicians, members of the judiciary, government officials, and representatives of the state in general) are frequently identified as the main perpetrators of violence against journalists.

As the RSF report stated: “All these factors only highlight the lack of willingness and political vision to effectively reinforce these protection programmes, which do not address the root causes of violence. The problem is manifested in a lack of coordination between the various state institutions, both at the national and local levels. Often operating in isolation, with the 'sole function' of guaranteeing the physical integrity of the beneficiaries, the mechanisms lose their ability to ensure that threatened journalists continue working.”

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<sup>20</sup> Reporters Without Borders, 2022. Protection paradigm: making protection mechanisms work for Latin American journalists. [pdf] Available at: [https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/protection\\_paradigm.pdf](https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/protection_paradigm.pdf) [Accessed 6 August 2024].

## State protections in Mexico

Mexico developed its “Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists”, which is managed by the federal government, in 2012.<sup>21</sup> Press workers question its effectiveness and seriousness. Marcela Turati, a Mexican award-winner investigative journalist whose work is focused on enforced disappearances, hidden mass graves, and massacres of migrants committed by the drug cartels, explained the flaws of the system during a [Global Journalism Seminar](#) hosted by the Reuters Institute in February 2023.<sup>22</sup>

“You can call the government and say 'I am at risk', and this mechanism is supposed to help you. Sometimes they give panic buttons and other times they provide bodyguards, although it's not very common for them to do so. They can also relocate the reporter into a secret house. But you can be killed while they are taking their time to analyse the situation, and you can also be killed despite the panic button or the bodyguards. The mechanism is not effective because it's difficult to protect journalists in Mexico, where reporters get used to living under threats and never know what piece of information may lead them to be killed,” she said.

Sometimes, the bureaucrats in charge refuse to take endangered journalists under their protection. That was the case for [Armando Linares López](#), editor in chief of *Monitor Michoacán*, who was rejected after asking for protection, despite showing concrete evidence of the threats he'd received from the criminal group known as Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación. Four months after protection was denied, Linares López was killed.<sup>23</sup>

The situation becomes even more complex and dangerous when government officials themselves are accomplices to organised crime. Every year in Mexico, dozens of political figures are arrested for their connections to drug trafficking. The most high-profile case in recent times is that of [Genaro García Luna](#), who served as Secretary of Public Security under former President Felipe Calderón's administration.<sup>24</sup> The man tasked with protecting

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<sup>21</sup> Mexico Government (2024). Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. Retrieved from <https://www.gob.mx/defensorasyperiodistas>.

<sup>22</sup> Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2023). Global Journalism Seminar: Navigating newsgathering in the deadliest country for journalists with Marcela Turati Muñoz. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6KUSIaX0ds>.

<sup>23</sup> The New York Times Magazine (2023). Our only defence is a pen, by Nicholas Casey. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2023/10/03/magazine/mexico-periodistas-asesinados.html>.

<sup>24</sup> United States Department of Justice, 2023. Ex-Mexican Secretary of Public Security Genaro Garcia Luna Convicted of Engaging in a Continuing Criminal Enterprise and Taking Millions in Cash Bribes from the Sinaloa Cartel. [online] Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/ex-mexican-secretary-public-security-genaro-garcia-luna-convicted-engaging-continuing> [Accessed 6 August 2024].

the Mexican people from organised crime was found guilty of taking millions of dollars from Sinaloa drug cartel, the nation's biggest crime group.

### State protections in Argentina

In Argentina, [Resolution No. 479](#) of the National Ministry of Security was sanctioned in 2016.<sup>25</sup> It established the General Protocol of Action for the Protection of Journalistic Activity. The aim of this legislation is to guarantee the ability of the press to work freely throughout the country. Before 2016, journalists who needed shielding were referred to the National Ministry of Justice's witness protection programme.

Protection measures provided by the Ministry of Security include temporary relocation of journalists and their families, provision of bodyguards and communication equipment, the installation of security systems or early warning systems in buildings and vehicles, surveillance or video surveillance by security forces, and the provision of personal security equipment, such as panic buttons, among others.

Journalists who are endangered and need to request assistance can contact Fopea or the Ministry of Justice. In Rosario, they can also contact the Press Workers Union.

Speaking on condition of anonymity for security reasons, a journalist who received protection under the general protocol said they were satisfied by the assistance provided by the Ministry of Security at the time.

But the future of the protocol is uncertain under President Javier Milei's rule. The current leader has a [contentious relationship](#) with the press, attacking their integrity in speeches, press conferences and on social media.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. The duty of media companies to protect their workers

*“Media companies often disassociate themselves of protecting and caring for journalists because it is costly.”* - Artur Romeu,  
Director of the Latin American Bureau, RSF

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<sup>25</sup> Infoleg (2016). Resolution No. 479 of the National Ministry of Security. Retrieved from <https://servicios.infoleg.gob.ar/infolegInternet/anexos/265000-269999/266206/norma.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Argentine Journalism Forum (2024). Authoritarian presidents discredit to silence the press. Retrieved from <https://fopea.org/los-presidentes-autoritarios-descalifican-para-silenciar/>.

The second line of action required to ensure journalists' safety falls to their employers: media outlets.

“In general, media companies disassociate themselves from protecting and caring for journalists because it is costly, and because, usually, the people in charge belong to a previous generation and have hero syndrome,” Romeu explained. “They tend to think that journalists who don't receive threats are not doing their job well. Most media outlets don't even have basic teams or an internal policy with specific guidelines on what to do if a journalist receives a threat.”

He continued: “When we investigate cases of journalists who have been killed, we always try to talk to colleagues or the editor of the outlet. We ask if the victim had received threats, and the response is usually that the issue was never deeply discussed. And in cases where the journalist did mention being threatened, we ask what the outlet's response was to that revelation, and most responses are limited to ‘we told them to be careful’. There is no support and there is no prevention or security policy, and the company's reaction in many cases is simply for the journalist to stop working on what they are investigating. Generally, media outlets do not pay attention to these situations unless they are disruptive to daily work.”

Elda Cantú, an editor for the *New York Times* based in Mexico City and author of El Times newsletter in Spanish, also talked about the role of outlet bosses in keeping reporters safe during a [Global Journalism Seminar](#) hosted in February 2024. “I would say that one of the most important resources – and the reason why I want to highlight this is because it's something that is possible for everyone to have – is having a manager, an editor, a boss who understands the pressures you're going through, who can anticipate [risk] when you're going to be tired, who can tell you when it's time to stop and who always has your back, supporting your reporting and your story and standing by you,” she said.<sup>27</sup>

It is essential to mobilise not just discussions but written protocol and strategies regarding journalists' safety on the job. As the first line of defence, managers must be trained in risk analysis and other best practices to protect press workers. “For this to happen, it is necessary to overcome the idea that journalists' lives are only at risk if they are in the trenches covering a war,” said Romeu, who is particularly critical of companies that refuse to spend time or money to implement safety protocols. In these situations, it falls to journalists themselves to organise and collectively demand the resources they need to work safely.

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<sup>27</sup> Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2023). Global Journalism Seminar: Journalistic challenges in Latin America, with Elda Cantú and Azam Ahmed. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKnJY6ktzTg>.

Appropriate organisational action is discussed in the next chapter, but should include protocols to safeguard journalistic communications, physical safety, and emotional wellbeing.

### **3. Self-organisation and collective bargaining of journalists**

The last line of action – arguably the most important of the three, given it is in our direct sphere of control – is the self-organisation of journalists. This is crucial in safeguarding against organised crime for several reasons. Firstly, collective action amplifies voices and strengthens bargaining power when advocating to the state and outlets for safety rights.

By forming unions or associations, journalists can better negotiate the establishment of comprehensive safety protocols, secure adequate resources for protection, and ensure legal support in the case of threats or attacks.

Additionally, organised journalists can create networks of mutual support and solidarity, sharing information about potential dangers and aiding colleagues facing intimidation or violence.

Collective organisation positions journalists to hold the perpetrators of crimes against the press accountable. Through coordinated efforts, they can pressure authorities to investigate and prosecute cases of violence or intimidation targeting journalists, sending a clear message that attacks on the press will not be tolerated.

By raising awareness both domestically and internationally, organised journalists can also draw attention to the broader societal implications of attacks on press freedom, highlighting the importance of a free and independent media in upholding democracy and the rule of law.

Ultimately, journalistic solidarity serves as a formidable defence against the insidious influence of organised crime, whilst simultaneously reinforcing the resilience and integrity of the profession.

“The self-protection process often begins with very simple experiences, such as workshops where risk analysis and protocols are taught and discussed,” said Romeu. “They are also meeting points for self-recognition, mutual appreciation, identity construction, and political articulation. It is about generating a safe space where the issue is discussed, and where press workers can share their experiences of harassment and threats, but also train others and generate collective tools. If journalists are threatened, it is important for them have a repertoire of strategies and alternative options on how to handle the issue without resorting to self-censorship.”

The CPJ's [Journalist Security Guide](#) notes that collaborative efforts can turn into alternative ways to publish dangerous stories.<sup>28</sup> For example, Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* has run stories with generic bylines, such as the “Justice and Peace Unit”. News organisations can also work together on dangerous topics, sharing information and publishing stories simultaneously to spread the burden of risk.

“Egos, organisational rivalries, and political, ethnic, or religious identities must be set aside to pursue such collaboration,” the guide cautions. “But the approach has proved effective in diffusing the risk against any individual journalist while enabling reporters to cover hazardous topics.”

Journalists in Colombia began working collaboratively after a series of attacks on publishers and editors of outlets that reported critically on drug traffickers. The most notable attack was the 1986 assassination of Guillermo Cano, *El Espectador* publisher and editor-in-chief, a crime attributed to the Medellín cartel leader Pablo Escobar. As CPJ board member María Teresa Ronderos recounted in a 2010 CPJ report, *El Espectador* joined with its main competitor, *El Tiempo*, and other media outlets in the following months to investigate and publish stories about drug trafficking's many tentacles in society.

Years later, in 2004, a coalition of Colombian print outlets began working together on dangerous assignments, such as the infiltration of the nation's lottery by illegal paramilitary groups. This and other investigative stories were published simultaneously in 19 Colombian magazines and newspapers.

News weekly *Semana* led another collaborative effort, the Manizales Project, designed to investigate murders and threats against journalists. While violence against Colombian journalists has not altogether ceased, CPJ research shows it has occurred less frequently and at a lower level.

Turati worked with colleagues in Mexico to establish two NGOs for the cooperation and protection of Mexican journalists (Periodistas de a Pie and Quinto Elemento Lab). She also raises the importance of solidarity and camaraderie as a fundamental strategy when facing organised crime.

“My advice is always work together. It's not the time to work alone looking for the scoop by yourself. You have to create networks: organising the community of journalists will probably take time and effort, but you must protect each other, learn to investigate better, and explain to the society why our role is important for democracy,” she said.

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<sup>28</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, 2020. Journalists Security Guide. [pdf] Available at: <https://cpj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/guide.pdf>



### **Mexican journalists' associations**

These are some of the organisations that provide support, resources, and advocacy for journalists working in Mexico.

- [Artículo 19](#)
- [Red Rompe el Miedo](#)
- [Club de Periodistas de México](#)
- [Periodistas de a Pie](#) (currently not active)
- [Sindicato Nacional de Redactores de la Prensa](#)
- [Red Mexicana de Periodistas Ambientales](#)
- [Asociación Mexicana de Investigadores de la Comunicación](#)

### **Argentinian journalists' associations**

These are some of the organisations that offer assistance, resources, and advocacy for journalists in Argentina.

- [Foro de Periodismo Argentino](#)
- [Federación Argentina de Trabajadores de Prensa](#)
- [Foro Argentino de Radios Comunitarias](#)
- [Red Nacional de Medios Alternativos](#)
- [Sindicato de Prensa de Buenos Aires](#)
- [Sindicato de Prensa de Rosario](#)
- [Círculo Sindical de la Prensa y la Comunicación de Córdoba](#)

# Three dimensions of integrity in newsrooms

As discussed in the previous section, there is a prevailing misconception that the protection of journalists concerns only the coverage of violent conflict – provide a Kevlar vest and helmet, and be done.

This is a narrow and overly militarised perspective on protection. RSF has long called for a more comprehensive understanding of protection: one that encompasses physical integrity, psychological well-being, and communication security – regardless of assignment.

## 1. Physical integrity

Ensuring physical integrity is different to ensuring physical safety: it encompasses the overall wellbeing of journalists and their work environments. It means ensuring they have access to secure and comfortable workspaces, along with the necessary resources to cover events safely. Those resources might include protective gear, but also adequate training to mitigate risks inherent in the pursuit of their profession.

Azam Ahmed, a former *New York Times* Mexico bureau chief whose stories about corruption and organised crime helped launch federal investigations, gave the following advice on how to maintain journalists' physical integrity.

“In terms of physical security, there are several layers to consider. Firstly, it is crucial to gather as much information as possible about the situation on the ground. This includes identifying key players, understanding the current dynamics, and gaining insight into recent events, particularly in conflict zones,” he said.

“Secondly, it is important to contextualize this information within the framework of the story you're covering. This involves determining where you need to be, assessing the level of on-the-ground presence required, and identifying potential collaborators or fixers.

“Finally, situational awareness plays a vital role in staying safe. This means remaining alert and attentive to your surroundings, observing street dynamics, and being mindful of any potential risks. Particularly in Latin America, establishing connections with local journalists can provide invaluable insight and assistance, as they often possess a wealth of knowledge about the region and its complexities. By reaching out and communicating with local journalists, you can benefit from their expertise and enhance your understanding of the situation.”

## 2. Emotional integrity

Recognise the profound emotional toll that journalistic work can exact, particularly when faced with threats or while investigating crimes and human rights violations. To ensure the resilience of journalists, media organisations and professional

associations should prioritise the provision of emotional support services for journalists, both individually and collectively.

“Taking care of your mental health is really hard,” said Ahmed. “It’s essential to step away from Twitter and other social media because it’s a place that’s grown more toxic and less hospitable, although signing off is not always possible because social media remains a source of journalistic information. It is necessary to find a balance between work and spare time.”

Cantú agreed: “It’s really important to understand that journalism is a job you do for certain hours of a day and that you deserve compensation for. Also, keep in mind that you have the right to shut down your computer and turn off your phone when your work is done to spend time with your family or just to hang out with other people not talking about work.”

### 3. Communications’ integrity

Communications’ integrity is paramount in safeguarding the confidentiality and security of journalists’ communications, whether digital or otherwise. In an era of pervasive digital surveillance and cyber threats, journalists must have access to regular training and secure communication channels that protect sensitive information and anonymous sources from interception or compromise.

#### The basics

- The first and most basic safeguard is to secure your digital devices and information using strong, unique, and regularly updated passwords across all accounts and devices, preferably via a password manager.
- Using encryption tools, such as virtual private networks (VPNs) and encrypted messaging apps like Signal, can further protect sensitive communications and data from unauthorised access.
- Additionally, journalists should regularly update their software and operating systems to patch vulnerabilities and defend against new cyber threats.
- Turning on two-factor authentication (2FA) where possible, which requests both a password and a secondary verification method for access to accounts, adds an extra layer of security.

Beware of connecting to public Wi-Fi networks and avoid clicking on suspicious links or downloading unvetted files that could compromise devices.

For more security training resources, see the next page.

By adopting proactive security measures, journalists can mitigate the risk of digital intrusion and safeguard their information from potential threats.

## Conclusion

Latin American journalists have spent decades developing countless strategies and resources for dealing with organised crime. Thanks to their efforts, we know that mutual aid, solidarity, and coordinated action are essential for surviving violent contexts without relinquishing the task of informing.

Yet the continued murders, disappearances, torture, and harassment of journalists – particularly in countries like Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil – highlight that the efforts of the press alone are insufficient to safeguard freedom of expression.

Without the commitment and intervention of governments, media companies, civil society organisations, and society as a whole, journalists will remain targets of criminal gangs seeking to carry out their illicit business in the silence of terror.

Robust journalism is essential for a healthy democracy, and the safety and security of journalists is not a “nice to have”, it is a “must have”. Argentinian journalists, who work in an increasingly challenging and hostile environment, can learn from the experience of their Latin American colleagues. But they must not fall prey to believing safety is their burden to bear alone.

Alongside the process of self-organisation, it is imperative to collectively demand that the state and media companies also fulfil their role in this matter. Do not wait until it’s too late to learn from those who have lost lives.

### **Staying safe: 10 useful guides and manuals for Argentinian journalists**

- Rosario Press Workers Union. *A guide to minimizing risks*. Available in [Spanish](#).
- Voces del Sur. *Security manual for covering social protests*. Available in [Spanish](#).
- ARTÍCULO 19. *Comprehensive security for journalists*. Available in [Spanish](#).
- Acos Alliance. *Take control of your security*. Available in [Spanish](#).
- Committee to Protect Journalists. *Journalist Security Guide: Covering the news in a dangerous and changing world*. Available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- Reporters Without Borders. *Safety Guide for Journalists: A handbook for reporters in high-risk environments*. Available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- UNESCO. *Safety of journalists covering protests: preserving freedom of the press during times of turmoil*. Available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- Security-in-a-Box. *Tools and tactics for digital security*, in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- Global Investigative Journalism Network. *Basic steps in digital security for journalists*. Available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#).
- International Journalists Network (IJNet). *Digital security recommendations for journalists*. Available in [Spanish](#).