

# **MEDIA CENSORSHIP**

**DEMOCRACY DIES IN  
SILENCE**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AT STAKE

The systematic attack on the media in Venezuela is used as a strategy to repress and create an atmosphere of opacity and disinformation that contributes to the gradual destruction of democracy in the country, attacking one of its most important bastions: freedom of expression.

The persecution of journalists, the purchase of media outlets, the scarcity of materials to print newspapers and the continuous threats by the government against digital and traditional media have led to self-censorship and the homogenization of the opinions expressed, having to adapt to official government information to avoid consequences, leaving the country in an informational blackout.

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# 2004: "RESORTE" LAW

## THE GOVERNMENT IMPOSES CONTROL

The Law of Social Responsibility in Radio Television and Electronic Media, or also known as "Resorte" Law or Gag Law, promoted in 2004, intends to regulate the media in Venezuela and to establish the contents that can be transmitted through them. This law has been used to persecute and fine anti-government national media, thus controlling the opinions expressed through these spaces.

### SANCTIONS (1)



72 hours off the  
air



Revocation of the  
concession to broadcast



10% of the broadcaster's  
gross revenue



High fines

### PROHIBITIONS (2)

It is forbidden to transmit messages that:

- Incite hatred and intolerance.
- Make advocacy of crime.
- Constitute war propaganda.
- Encourage anxiety or disturb public order.
- Ignore legitimately constituted authorities.
- Induce murder.
- Promote non-compliance with the existing legal system.

# 2005: CREATION OF TELESUR

## THE TV NETWORK THAT DISTORTS AND SUPPORTS THE REGIME

Telesur was born in 2005 by the initiative of former President Chávez as an alternative to the news coverage of the existing commercial media, allowing for alternative positions of Latin American news. However, **it has been used as an international media platform to favor socialism, presenting a marked bias towards left-wing governments and especially Chávez and Maduro.**

### COVERAGE OF THE 2017 PROTESTS

#### CNN in Spanish

"35 killed in a month of protests in Venezuela" (3)

"Images of the fierce repression in the marches in Venezuela" (4)

#### TELESUR (5)

"Violent images published by the right try to position the government as repressor"

"Security forces armed a line with shields to prevent the entry of protesters, but also responded with smoke bombs"

1 & 2. Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio, Televisión y Medios Electrónicos. (2004)

3. CNN en Español

4. CNN en Español

5. Infobae

# 2007: TERMINATION OF RCTV

## THE ATTACK ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IS CONSOLIDATED

Radio Caracas Television was a Venezuelan television channel with more than 50 years on air, closed by former President Chávez on May 27, 2007, due to its critical line against the actions of the government. **The refusal to renew the concession by the State arises from the position taken by the channel during April 11, 2002** (Coup d'état to Chávez) where the images provided by the government were transmitted, along with those of the security forces attacking demonstrators.

### The only ones who didn't give up

Despite the fact that RCTV, Venevisión and Televen broadcasted the two versions of the events that took place on 11 April 2002, the latter decided to **succumb to pressure from the executive branch and to moderate their political programming**, leaving aside or self-censoring the most critical opinion programs.



**3.000**<sup>(1)</sup>  
**WORKERS LAID OFF**

**42%**<sup>(2)</sup>  
**OF THE TOTAL  
VENEZUELAN AUDIENCE**

### The day of the shutdown

On May 28 2007, at midnight, the RCTV broadcast ended forever. Despite massive demonstrations against the closure, this medium was replaced by the state television station TVES.

**On July 16 2007 RCTV returned to air** via pay-TV services under the name "RCTV International" however, **on January 24 2010, the government ordered cable operators to take the channel off the air** because it allegedly failed to comply with the Law on Social Responsibility on Radio and Television by failing to broadcast official government messages.



1. El Cooperante  
2. Reporteros sin Fronteras

# 2009: RADIOCIDIO

## ARBITRARY CLOSURE OF STATIONS PUTS ENTIRE REGIONS OUT OF THE AIR

In August 2009 the government abruptly decided to close 34 radio stations with the purpose of "ending the latifundio radio and media". Being really a measure to **control the media that reach where television does not**, wanting to control the information and, therefore, the beliefs of people who live in the most remote places of the country.

### Self-censorship to survive (1)

During the Chávez government, more than 250 radio stations have been threatened with closure because of their political and opinion content. **By not changing their programming, they are in danger of becoming commercial, religious or government-oriented broadcasters, as happened with those that were shut down.**



(2)

# 500

**Stations are controlled by the government**



(3)

# 95%

**Stations in Monagas are pro-government or self-censor**

**Of the 10 stations on the Belfort National Circuit, 5 were closed, including the one that broadcasted the political opinion program "Aló Ciudadano" (4)**

## 2010: PURCHASE OF GLOBOVISIÓN SHARES ATTACK ON THE ONLY OPPOSITION CHANNEL

In 2010, Chávez announced the purchase of part of the shares of the news channel Globovisión, which, along with RCTV, had been one of the media critical of the government. The government would acquire 20% of the shares owned by Nelson Mezerhane, president of the Federal Bank, which was intervened, as well as 5.8% that the banker owned through another company, to this would be added 20% of the shares, which belonged to Luis Teofilo Núñez, one of the channel's founders who died in 2007.

# 48,5%

**Of the shares would pass to the government**

(5)

# 2013: SALE, CENSORSHIP AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

## THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY TO SILENCE THE MEDIA

Since Chávez's death in 2013, the government has tightened controls over the writing of national news, forcing the media to broadcast the official version, by using tactics such as (1):



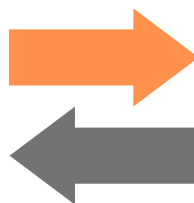
### Opacity

87% of journalists were affected by the refusal of officials to testify



### External pressures

27% of journalists changed their editions due to official pressures



### Change in ownership

15% of self-censorship comes from media ownership change

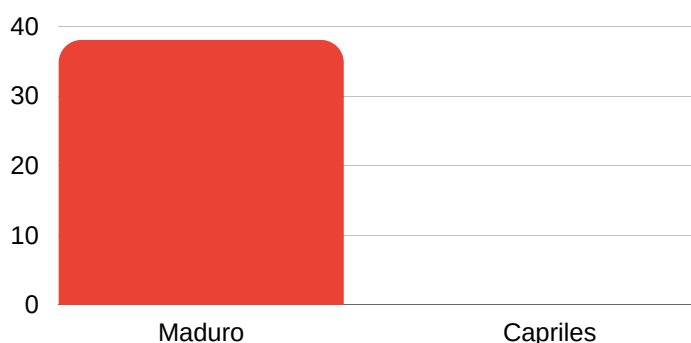


### Layoffs

16% of self-censorship comes from the dismissal of journalists for political reasons

## Censorship of opposition speeches in elections

In the April 2013 elections where the future of chavismo would be decided, faced with a strengthened and united opposition, the ruling party took advantage of its control over the media and generated a highly unequal campaign between Henrique Capriles (MUD) and Nicolás Maduro (PSUV) where the latter enjoyed the greatest media exposure.



ON-SCREEN HOURS PER CANDIDATE ON STATE CHANNEL (2)

**In addition to 342 minutes in national broadcast used by Maduro (2)**

## Sale of Globovisión (3)

In 2013, the Globovisión channel was sold. **After accumulating 350 attacks and threats by the government, he had to change his leadership after the opposition lost the presidential elections.** Marking the beginning of a new more neutral editorial line for the channel.

1. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad Venezuela  
2. El Impulso  
3. Proprietarios de la Censura - Globovisión

# 2013: EDITORIAL CONSORTIUM ALFREDO MANEIRO

## GOVERNMENT MONOPOLIZES PAPER IMPORT

In 2013, the Alfredo Maneiro Publishing Consortium (CEAM as per its acronym in spanish) was created, with the objective to be a state agency that centralized the import of newspaper and other inputs for print media in the country.

Newspaper is excluded from priority import goods

The CEAM is created

Temporary closure of media and reduction of newspapers publications due to the paper shortage

The <sup>(1)</sup> Consortium has no paper

**46**<sup>(2)</sup>  
**PRINT MEDIA OUTLETS WERE AFFECTED**

**IN 2012 → IN 2013 → IN 2014 → IN 2016**

# 2014: INTERNET BLOCKING

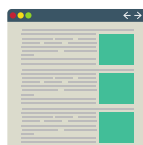
## INFORMATIVE BLACKOUT IN VENEZUELA

As a result of the scarcity of newsprint, many print media switched to a digital format in order to continue reporting. However, web portals were also censored.



(3)

Twitter partially blocked in February 2014



(4)

**1019** blocked websites in Venezuela



(5)

18% of the websites blocked are news outlets **like Infobae and NTN24**

**During the protests from February to May 2014, a strong blockade of digital media was witnessed, this combined with the lack of newsprint caused an informational blackout in Venezuela**

**State owned CANTV manages 58.9% of the internet connectivity in Venezuela. Leaving approximately 15 million users in opacity.** (6)



(7)

In the State of Táchira, the internet service was cut during the protests.

- 1. Espacio Público
- 2. Espacio Público
- 3. BBC
- 4. Comunicas Venezuela

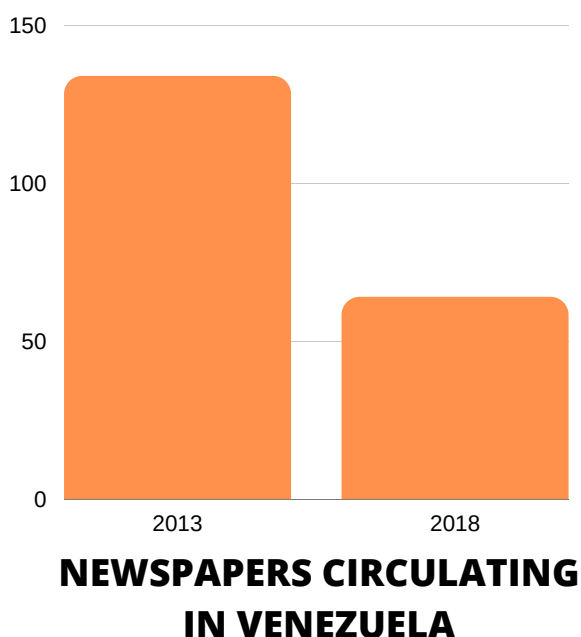
- 5. El Espectador
- 6. CONATEL
- 7. El País

# 2014: NEWSPAPER SHORTAGE

## THE GOVERNMENT CONTROLS THE SPREAD OF INFORMATION

In 2014 with the worsening of the newspaper crisis initiated by the government and the CEAM, a large number of Venezuelan newspapers had to alter their editions or stop circulating momentarily or definitively to save paper, as a result of economic pressures and lack of materials.

### Written press disappears (1)



2 newspapers stopped circulating definitively (2)



13 reduced their editions (3)



6 stopped circulating momentarily (4)

### Censorship strategies (5,6)

Since the creation of the CEAM, the government has managed to restrict the access of privately owned media to newsprint paper, forcing some media outlets to leave circulation temporarily or definitively, while others have managed to survive by changing their editorial line and management.

Newspaper	State/Region	Out of circulation	Reduced its editions due to newsprint paper shortage	Change of ownership/directive
Correo del Caroní (2013)	Bolívar			
El Carabobeño (2016)	Carabobo	X		
EL Nacional (2018)	National	X (only available online)		
Primera Hora (2014)	Distrito Capital	X		
El Universal (2014)	National			X
Tal Cual (2018)	National	X (only available online)		
El impulso (2015)	Lara		x	
Últimas Noticias (2014)	National			X
Versión Final (2013)	Zulia			X
El Norte (2014)	Anzoátegui			X

1. Tal Cual  
2, 3, 4 y 5 Espacio Público

6. Proprietarios de la censura



# 2017: JOURNALIST HARASSMENT

## THE ORDER IS TO ATTACK THE MESSENGER

With tensions rising due to the eruption of protests throughout the country during the first half of 2017, **journalists became one of the main targets for state security forces.**

### Persecution patterns (1)



1. Statements against the government.



2. Persecution by State authorities



3. Detention under false pretenses without a warrant or lawyers



4. Detention without a preliminary hearing



5. Fabricated charges are imputed



6. Guilt is not proven, the journalist is released with prohibition to testify in media

### This resulted in:

**273** (2)

REPORTERS WERE ASSAULTED DURING PROTESTS

**70** (3)

LEGAL ACTIONS AGAINST JOURNALISTS

**66** (4)

ARBITRARY DETENTIONS OF JOURNALISTS (CNP)

# 2017: CENSORSHIP OF CNN

## SILENCE THE TRUTH BY CENSORING A NEWS CHANNEL

On February 15, 2017, after publishing the report "**Passports in the Shadows**", carried out by CNN on the **illegal sale of Venezuelan passports to Iraqi citizens**, Nicolas Maduro gave the order to remove the US network from the cable companies in Venezuela. **This is due to the fact that the report blamed specific high-government figures for the sale of passports.**

THE GOVERNMENT ALLEGES THAT THIS IS A "WAR CAMPAIGN" ORCHESTRATED BY THE US

THIS REPORT WOULD REVEAL POSSIBLE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND TERRORIST GROUPS.



INFO@PROYECTOBASE.ORG

1. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad
2. Colegio Nacional de Periodistas
3. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad

4. Colegio Nacional de Periodistas

# 2017: LAW AGAINST HATRED

## GOVERNMENT OUTLAWS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In August 2017, the National Constituent Assembly (considered illegal by 33 countries and international organizations) approved the Constitutional Law against Hatred, for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance. The Act criminalizes persons who engage in acts of hatred, discrimination or promotion of violence, but it is designed to lend itself to arbitrariness and be a tool to attack freedom of expression in the country.

### Disproportionate penalties (1)



Up to **20 years'** imprisonment for incitement to hatred, discrimination or violence



**Revoke the concession to broadcast** of media that promote hatred



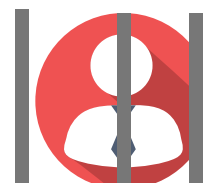
Blocking web portals that **are considered "inappropriate"**



Fines **from 50,000 to 100,000 Tax Units** for publishing hate-provoking content in RRSS



Fines of **up to 4% of the gross income** of the media that violates the law



Officials who abstain or delay the completion of a hate crime **receive 8 to 10 years' imprisonment**



**IS USED AGAINST EXISTING POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE FORMATION OF NEW POLITICAL FORCES PREVENTING THEM FROM REGISTERING WITH THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL (CNE AS PER ACRONYM IN SPANISH)**

**4 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SANCTIONED UNDER THIS LAW: 2 FOR PROTESTING ABOUT FOOD SHORTAGES. 2 FOR MAKING A VIRAL VIDEO MOCKING OF NICOLAS MADURO** (4) (3)

### A legitimate law? (2)

It violates several international treaties and national laws:

- Articles 6, 11, 18, 19, 20 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Articles 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- and Articles 202, 49, 51, 57, 58, 62 and 68 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

1. Efecto Cocuyo 4. Reuters  
 2. El Nacional  
 3. El Impulso

# 2017: CREATION OF DIGITAL MILITIAS

## AN ARMY OF BOTS MANIPULATE NATIONAL OPINION (1)

From the committees controlled by the government, digital militias were created to fight the "media war" that, according to the ruling party, takes place in Venezuela. These are groups of people who spread false positives on the internet to control national opinion.

**11.500**  
SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS ARE CONTROLLED BY A SINGLE "BRIGADE"

**30.000**  
PERSONS BELONG TO THESE COMMITTEES

- Local Supply and Production Committees handle digital communication tasks
- Social networks are run by people between the ages of 18 and 35
- These groups create accounts, messages and information in favor of the government, of the opposition, neutral, aimed to distract or "fake news"
- Organized under vertical military structure

**The State of surveillance constituted by the government is extended to the Internet**

# 2019: SOCIAL MEDIA BLOCKING

## THE ONLY MEANS OF COMMUNICATION ARE BLOCKED

Throughout 2019, with the swearing-in of Interim President Juan Guaidó, the blockades of the only media the opposition has to organize the citizenry intensified on the part of the State.

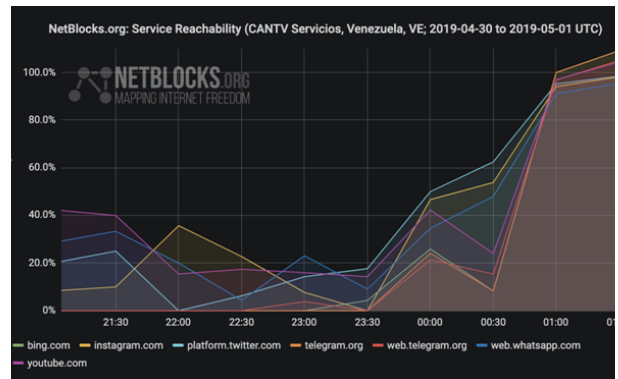
**144** <sup>(2)</sup>  
ATTACKS IN THE FIRST MONTHS OF 2019 (IPYS)

**30/100** <sup>(3)</sup>  
QUALIFICATION OF INTERNET FREEDOM



(4)

**BLOCKING OF GOOGLE SERVICES AND OTHER SOCIAL NETWORKS DURING THE SWEARING-IN OF JUAN GUAIDÓ AS ACTING PRESIDENT.**



**BLOCKING OF SOCIAL NETWORKS DURING THE MILITARY UPRISING OF MAY 1ST. (5)**

1. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad  
2. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad  
3. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad

4. Netblocks  
5. Netblocks

# 2019: CENSORSHIP OF THE VENEZUELA LIVE AID

## GOVERNMENT CENSORS CHARITY CONCERT FOR ITS OWN COUNTRY

During the concert held on February 22 on the border with Colombia to help raise funds for humanitarian aid in Venezuela, both the Spanish channel Antena 3 and National Geographic were censored in Venezuela for broadcasting this charity concert.



(1)

For the first time **TV channels** without a **political tendency** are censored, just for transmitting the concert

Google and Bing services were blocked in Venezuela, **making it impossible for the concert to be seen online**

**USD:** (2)

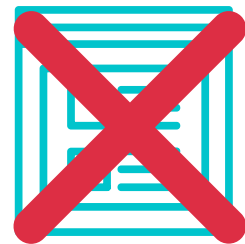
**\$2,351,812**

**RAISED**

# 2019: VENEPRESS

## NEWS AGENCY RAIDED

In December 2019, the Public Ministry issued the order to close the offices of Venepress with the excuse of investigating the newspaper for "legitimization of capital, terrorism and association to commit a felony". The offices of Venepress in Puerto La Cruz (Edo. Anzoátegui) and the private television station Telecaribe were also raided.



The Venepress online portal is **inaccessible via CANTV**, it can only be viewed with a VPN

## Overview of freedom of expression in 2019



**55** (3)

**JOURNALISTS ARBITRARILY DETAINED**



**132** (4)

**ATTACKS DURING PROTESTS (JANUARY AND MAY)**



**148/180** (5)

**IN THE WORLD FREEDOM OF PRESS 2019**

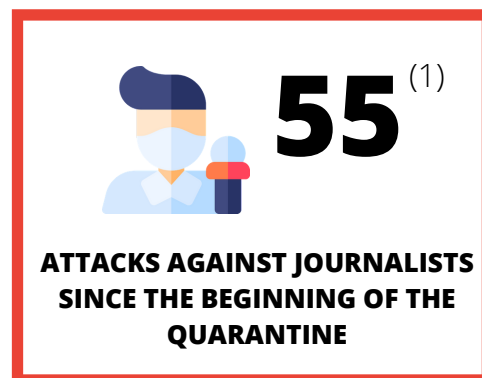
1. Bio Bio Chile  
2. Venezuela Live Aid  
3. Efecto Cocuyo

4. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad  
5. Reporteros Sin Fronteras

# 2020: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN QUARANTINE

## THE GOVERNMENT ATTACKS THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION IN THE MIDST OF A PANDEMIC

The Coronavirus pandemic has generated a global crisis. On March 13, a State of Alarm was decreed due to the appearance of the first cases in the country (according to official statements) and **the government began to attack those who spread a different version of the events.**



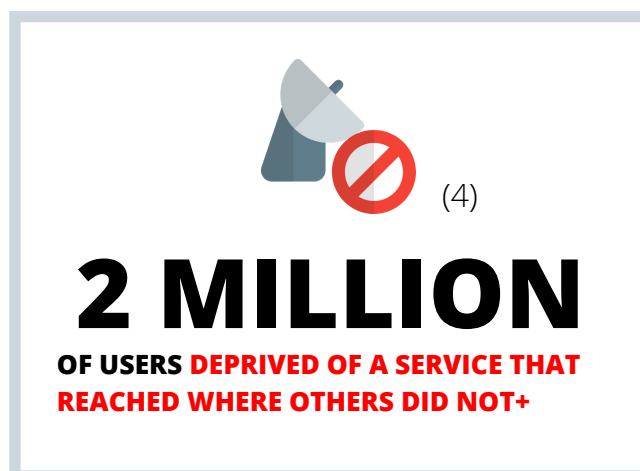
### Arrested for reporting (2)

One of the most prominent cases is that of Darvinson Rojas, a **journalist who was detained for 12 days for informing the population about COVID statistics different from those expressed by the government.** Darvinson summed up the figures of positive coronavirus cases given by different authorities and realized that they showed a greater number than the ones that were being reported by the government of Nicolás Maduro.

### Directv vs. CONATEL (3)

Directv (a company headquartered in the United States) and CONATEL\* **experienced an impasse in the negotiations to maintain the subscription television service in the country.** Directv, complying with the sanctions imposed by the US Treasury Department, would **remove from its programming the channels Globovisión and PDVSA TV, with directives close to the government.**

Faced with the government's refusal to allow this to happen, Directv decided to cease operations in the country on May 19.



1. Instituto Prensa y Sociedad

3. Efecto Cocuyo

2. Voz de América

4. Plataformas

After 3 months of negotiations to reinstate the service, which included **the occupation of the premises by government agents and a ruling by the Constitutional Chamber of the TSJ (as per its acronym in Spanish)**, an agreement was reached stating that the operations of the US service would be acquired by a company from Chile by the name of Scale Capital, who would provide the service through Simple TV, issuing a refund to all Directv users on August 14, allowing them to enjoy the service free of charge for the 3 months that it ceased operating.

### Raid of the Caroní newspaper headquarters (1)

On September 20, Sebin (as per its acronym in Spanish) agents raided the facilities of the Correo del Caroní newspaper and the journalists María Ramírez Cabello and Susana Reyes **were transferred to the state force offices, where they stayed for more than six hours.**



During the detention, **the lawyer who was contacted to support the two journalists was not allowed to be present**, and he therefore complained that the rights to due process and legal aid set out in the Constitution were not guaranteed. In addition, when the detainees were released, **Sebin members did not return one of the computers belonging to the Correo del Caroní Newspaper.**

### Media censorship in 2020



(2)

**27**

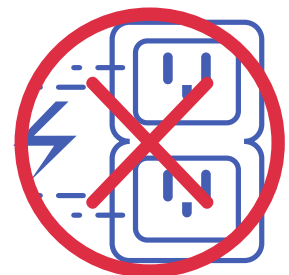
**CASES OF REPORTED IMPEDIMENTS TO ACCESS PUBLIC INFORMATION**



(3)

**5 million**

**VENEZUELANS WITHOUT ACCESS TO INFORMATION**



(4)

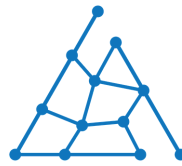
**FUEL SHORTAGES AND FREQUENT POWER OUTAGES HINDER JOURNALISTIC WORK**

1. Correo Caroní

2. IPYS

3. IPYS

4. IPYS



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