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FEATURED Q&A

Why is Mexico Such a Deadly Place for Journalists?



Javier Valdez, an expert on Mexico's drug war and founder of the weekly newspaper Riodoce, was fatally shot last week outside the newspaper's offices in Culiacán, Sinaloa's state capital.
// File Photo: Riodoce.

Q Veteran journalist Javier Valdez, who was known for his reporting on Mexican drug trafficking and organized crime, was shot and killed on May 15 in Sinaloa state. He was among several journalists to have been killed this year in Mexico. After Valdez's killing, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto vowed to defend freedom of the press in the country, pledging to order an investigation into the murder. Although more than 100 journalists have been killed in Mexico since 2000, critics complain that too few assailants have been prosecuted. Why is Mexico such a deadly country for journalists? Is Mexico doing enough to protect the freedom of the press? What should Peña Nieto do to make Mexico safer for journalists?

A Raúl Benítez Manaut, researcher at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Science and Humanities at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM): "The killings of journalists in Mexico has a long history. In May 1984, Manuel Buendía, a journalist who specialized in denouncing links between politicians and drug traffickers, was assassinated. The gravity of the situation led the government to create the Specialized Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Journalists in 2006. That office became the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE). Since Mexico's war on drug trafficking began, threats against and attacks on journalists have increased, and the government has been unable to stop the murders, the number of which are growing by the day. Since 2000, 129 journalists have been killed and 20 have disappeared, and there have been more than 50 attacks against media facilities. Most

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Temer Deploys Troops as Protest Turns Violent in Brasília

Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Brazil's capital, calling for President Michel Temer's ouster.

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BUSINESS

Agents Raid Odebrecht's Buenos Aires Offices

The Brazilian construction conglomerate has admitted to paying hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes in several countries.

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POLITICAL

Moreno Sworn in as Ecuador's President

Lenín Moreno was inaugurated Wednesday as president of Ecuador, ending Rafael Correa's decade in office as the country's leader. In his inaugural address, Moreno took a conciliatory tone that contrasted with the combative style of his predecessor.

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Moreno // Photo: Ecuadorean Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Moreno Sworn in as Ecuador's President

Leftist Lenín Moreno was sworn in Wednesday as Ecuador's president and delivered a conciliatory inauguration address, promising open dialogue with the press and his adversaries, a contrast from the combative approach of his predecessor, Rafael Correa, Reuters reported. "I am the president for all of you," Moreno said

“All of us will form part of a deeply enriching national dialogue.”

— Lenín Moreno

after taking the oath of office. "I owe you all a great debt and respect you all." Moreno promised to continue Correa's efforts to help the poor with free education, as well as health care and housing for low-income families and subsidies to wipe out extreme poverty. However, his speech also indicated a change of style. "All of us will form part of a deeply enriching national dialogue," said Moreno. The new president's softer tone contrasted with the last weeks under Correa, who was in office for a decade. Correa's government recently fined media outlets for not publishing a story it had wanted to be published, threatened to jail a journalist for messages he posted on Twitter and raided the offices of a polling firm, The Wall Street Journal reported. "Rafael Correa's last actions have been to leave a country even more polarized and prevent any kind of possibility for dialogue," César Ricaurte, executive director of Fundamedios, a Quito-based group that works for press freedom, told the newspaper. Despite his conciliatory tone, Moreno has expressed support for controversial legislation that critics say muzzles the press by allowing authorities to punish media outlets for unfavorable coverage. "I don't see a major reversal of policy with Moreno," said Sebastian Hurtado, president

of Quito-based political-risk consulting firm Profitas. Moreno has also vowed to continue providing asylum to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has lived in Ecuador's embassy in London since 2012, while concerns remain about Assange possibly being extradited to the United States. The new president has also said he will lower taxes and on Tuesday named cabinet members that include executives with close ties to the business community.

Protest Turns Violent in Brasília, Temer Deploys Troops

Brazilian President Michel Temer on Wednesday deployed federal troops to restore order in the capital after an anti-government march that drew tens of thousands of people into the streets turned violent and protesters set fire to the iconic Agriculture Ministry building, state-run news service Agência Brasil reported. Some government buildings, including the Finance Ministry, were evacuated after masked protesters shattered windows, and paintings in the gallery of former ministers were reportedly destroyed. Rioters also vandalized bus stops,



Wednesday's protest in Brasília turned violent. // Photo: Agência Brasil.

portable toilets and public phone booths. Authorities said 49 people were hurt, eight of whom were police officers, and one protester was shot, but the injury wasn't life-threatening, The Wall Street Journal reported. The total crowd size was estimated at 35,000. Temer's order provides for troops to guard major buildings and maintain security through May 31. "A protest that was supposed to be peaceful deteriorated into violence, vandalism and disrespect," Defense Minister Raul Jungmann

NEWS BRIEFS

Death Toll Rises to 56 in Violent Venezuela Protests

The death toll rose to at least 56 on Wednesday in Venezuela as nearly two months of violent anti-government protests continued in the Andean nation, the Los Angeles Times reported. Three protesters were reportedly killed by gunfire Wednesday in Barinas state.

OPEC Extends Oil Output Cuts for Nine Months

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries today decided to extend cuts in oil output among members by nine months to March 2018, Reuters reported. The move was strongly supported by Venezuela, a producer that has been perhaps the hardest hit member as a result of continued low global oil prices. "The most important issue is to regulate and stabilize the market ... and bring inventories down to their five-year average," Venezuela's oil minister, Nelson Martínez, told reporters. OPEC's cuts this year have helped push oil back above \$50 per barrel, although that figure is half what it was during the energy boom last decade.

DEA Misled U.S. Congress on Deadly Honduras Drug Operation: Report

Inspectors general for the U.S. Justice and State Departments announced Wednesday they had found sweeping problems with a 2012 Drug Enforcement Administration operation that led to a series of deadly confrontations involving agents in Honduras, the Associated Press reported. The report found the agency failed to fully investigate the case and that officials gave inaccurate information to Congress. In one incident, a botched drug raid led to the shooting deaths of four innocent civilians, including a teenage boy, on a Honduran river, which the DEA was found to have lied about despite knowing the facts.

said Wednesday on national television. He said the armed forces would be used only to restore calm and not repress free expression. For more than a week, public pressure has been building for the unpopular Temer to resign amid graft allegations. Meanwhile, police officers in Rio de Janeiro came under attack Wednesday by demonstrators wielding slingshots in the city's downtown, The New York Times reported. Lawmakers in the state have been debating unpopular austerity measures.

BUSINESS NEWS

Agents Raid Offices of Odebrecht in Buenos Aires

Argentine federal agents on Wednesday raided the Buenos Aires offices of Odebrecht, the Brazilian construction conglomerate that is a main focus of the massive "Car Wash" corruption case in Brazil, the Associated Press reported. The search of the company's offices in Buenos Aires were part of an investigation into bribes the company allegedly paid in connection with the granting of permits for a water-treatment plant during the administration of former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Odebrecht said it is cooperating with authorities and has admitted to paying some \$788 million in bribes to officials in 10 countries in Latin America and two in Africa. Fernández, who is the target of a graft probe in connection with her government's handling of the dollar futures market, has denied wrongdoing.

InterGen Planning to Sell Business Interests in Mexico

Massachusetts-based InterGen said Wednesday it is selling its business interests in Mexico and will launch the process "shortly." The company describes itself as one of the largest independent power producers in Mexico, with

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of the attacks have happened because of journalists' investigations of drug trafficking and their links to protective politicians, and also because of their reporting on political corruption. Many journalists have had to abandon their cities and take refuge in safer places such as Mexico City. Some journalists in cities of northern Mexico have taken refuge in the United States. Most journalists killed have worked at the local level, and the state that has had the largest number of journalists killed is Veracruz. During the governorship of Javier Duarte, who was arrested last month in Guatemala, 20 journalists were killed. Some of them, like Regina Martínez, worked for national publications such as the magazine Proceso and the newspaper La Jornada. These murders are part of the war on drug trafficking, and they affect those who refuse to be silenced. These are brave people and victims of a war that increasingly affects the innocent in Mexico—especially those who investigate every day."

A Delphine Halgand, North America director of Reporters Without Borders: "Mexico is certainly not doing enough for freedom of the press. This year alone, six journalists have been killed with impunity. None of the assailants have been caught or charged. President Peña Nieto has taken too long to acknowledge and act on these deadly attacks, which has essentially given assailants the courage to continue their attacks. Mexico is one of the deadliest countries for journalists because journalists are targeted both by criminal cartels and corrupt politicians alike.

Journalists who take too close of an interest in sensitive stories or in organized crime are liable to be threatened and even gunned down in cold blood, as we have seen too many times this year. If the government and often the police are targeting journalists,

“Mexico is certainly not doing enough for freedom of the press.”

— Delphine Halgand

who are they to turn to? President Peña Nieto announced that he plans to reinforce the Federal Mechanism for Protecting Human Rights Defenders and Journalists and the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE). This is a good first step. He also announced that he plans to establish a national protocol for investigating crimes of violence against journalists and for looking after the victims. We at RSF truly hope he will follow through on this. In terms of recommendations, RSF published a report in January on the state of Veracruz, Mexico's deadliest state for journalists. Among the recommendations are that the federal legislature enforce respect for the rule of law throughout the country and step up efforts to combat corruption and organized crime, and also guarantee respect for fundamental freedoms including respect for media freedom and the public's right of access to information. The report

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more than 2,200 megawatts in operation with six combined-cycle gas turbine plants throughout the country. The portfolio includes a new 220 MW combined cycle plant, San Luis de la Paz, and a 155 MW wind farm with partner IEnova, Energía Sierra Juárez, which reached commercial operations in 2015. InterGen also owns and operates three compression stations and one 65-kilometer gas pipeline in Mexico.

Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Barclays have been retained as joint financial advisors to oversee the process. InterGen, which has operated in Mexico for 20 years, is jointly owned by the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and China Huaneng Group/Guangdong Yudean Group. Last month the company confirmed that it is in talks with shareholders about changing its ownership structure.

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also recommends that FEADLE provide the public with information about the cases it handles, including as much detail as possible about the types of attacks and violations as well as profiles of the victims."

A **Steven Dudley, co-director of InSight Crime:** "Mexico is such a dangerous place for journalists for one simple reason: there are so few costs for killing them. In short, none of these cases are resolved. And there are a lot of cases. And while 'narcos' are often blamed, that ambiguous way of describing the assailant does not give us any deep understanding of the motives, and it gives politicians a pass. These are all complex

“**Mexico is such a dangerous place for journalists for one simple reason: there are so few costs for killing them.**"

—Steven Dudley

cases, but in each, the journalist violated some code, a code that was made up by some outside actor who felt he or she could control what the journalist wrote or said. This censorship is only partially a result of the bloody wars criminal groups fight. It is mostly a result of the fight for political power. And unfortunately in that fight, most politicians and political parties view the journalists as their pawns, and in some ways (due to the way that journalism is financed via political parties and government advertising), they are. That model is at the core of why journalists frequently find themselves between battling political and criminal groups."

A **Amanda Mattingly, director for Latin America at The Arkin Group in New York:** "Mexican journalist Javier Valdez is the latest victim of the ongoing violence related to the drug trade and organized crime that continues to grip Mexico. Sadly, his death should not come as a surprise to President Enrique Peña Nieto or Mexican authorities who have known for many years the threat the cartels and criminal groups pose to journalists seeking to expose their illegal activity. The Mexican government established the Special Prosecutor's Office for Crimes against Freedom of Expression more than 10 years ago, knowing the degree to which journalists and a free press are under assault in Mexico. However, this office is totally ill-equipped, underfunded and incapable of confronting the human rights abuses that it is tasked to prosecute. President Peña Nieto should empower this office with the proper authority and resources necessary to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the death of Javier Valdez and other journalists in Mexico. Mexico should call upon international organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to assist in investigations and to give greater transparency to the government's effort to bring these assailants to justice. Going beyond that, the Mexican government needs to reform its local and federal police forces to end the corruption and collusion between Mexican authorities and the criminal organizations they are supposed to be fighting. President Peña Nieto is running out of time to make a difference, but at the very least, he should make the defense of a free press and journalists, human rights and the rule of law in Mexico top priorities in his last year of office."

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