Mexico continued to be one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists in 2012, with widespread violence and impunity plaguing the media environment. Experts lauded the June passage of a constitutional amendment making crimes against journalists a federal offense, but urged Congress to pass enacting statutes in order to ensure successful implementation.

Freedom of expression in Mexico is established in Articles 6 and 7 of the constitution. Mexico decriminalized defamation on the federal level in 2007, and a number of states have eliminated their own criminal defamation statutes, including, in 2012, the state of Mexico—the country’s most populous. Nevertheless, state criminal and civil codes continue to be used to intimidate journalists. In October, the government of Puebla state sued two journalists for opinions that the government claimed “morally damaged” the reputation of public officials. The suits were filed hours after a list of 19 journalists who were being monitored by the authorities was leaked. State Governor Rafael Moreno Valle’s press agent wrote on Twitter that other lawsuits would follow, and that all press “excesses” were under review.

In 2011, two journalists were arrested on terrorism charges in Veracruz after transmitting unconfirmed information about a school attack on Twitter. Although charges were dropped after an outcry, the state passed a law criminalizing the dissemination of rumors that resulted in a “disturbance of public order.” Activists took the case to the Supreme Court, which had not issued a decision as of the end of 2012; in November, the Veracruz state legislature altered the law to specify that penalties would target those who “knowingly” spread false rumors.

In 2002, Mexico passed a Freedom of Information Law, and a 2007 amendment to Article 6 of the constitution stated that all levels of government would be required to make their information public. However, that information can be temporarily withheld if it is in the public interest to do so, and accessing information is often a time-consuming and difficult process.

Mexico is among the most unsafe environments in the world for journalists due to the expansion of Mexican drug cartels, the government’s decision to fight the cartels with the armed forces, criminal organizations’ turf battles, and the weaknesses of Mexico’s public security institutions. As in previous years, journalists faced threats from several actors. Political authorities and police forces—mostly local, but also state and federal—were responsible for the largest share of attacks, but criminal organizations were primarily behind the most chilling incidents.

The National Center of Social Communication (Cencos), a Mexican nongovernmental organization, reported that eight journalists or news company employees were killed in 2012, while four disappeared and nine media installations were attacked with incendiary devices. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that one journalist was killed as a result of his work in 2012, and five others were killed but the motive could not be confirmed. The reported death tolls varied in large part due to doubts about the integrity of police investigations, making it difficult to document which reporters were targeted as a result of their work. Advocacy group Article 19 recorded a 20 percent increase in attacks against journalists from the previous year, with acts of violence occurring in 25 of the 32 Mexican states. The organization reported that violent acts against journalists in Mexico City rose an alarming 64 percent in 2012.

The state of Veracruz, disputed territory among the cartels, was a highly dangerous place for journalists in 2012. According to Cencos, coverage of public security, organized crime, and corruption was behind the May murders of Veracruz photojournalists Gabriel Hug Córdoba, Guillermo Luna Varela, Esteban Rodríguez Rodríguez, and Víctor Manuel Báez Chino, as well as newspaper advertising department employee Ana Irasema Becerra. The dismembered bodies of Córdoba, Luna, Rodríguez, and Becerra were found near the town of Boca del Río; Báez was kidnapped, killed, and his body dumped the next day in the state capital, Xalapa. Veracruz authorities claimed that members of a cartel had confessed to the murders. However, federal authorities told CPJ that they had serious concerns about the state’s evidence in the case. Veracruz was also the site of the April beating and strangulation of Regina Martínez Pérez, a respected political correspondent for the national newsmagazine Mexico | Freedom House

2013 SCORES
PRESS STATUS
Not Free
PRESS FREEDOM SCORE
61
LEGAL ENVIRONMENT
16
POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT
31
ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT
14

El Regional de Sonora reported that 18 journalists had sought aid from the Mexico City Human Rights Commission in 2012, up since its inception. The office is hampered by progress in the prosecution of cases of murders and intimidation of.

Guardian prosecutions of attacks on journalists and owned companies control radio.

The government: politicians and police officers are often among those threatening them. Article 19 reported that during his term and improve broadband to death in his home in Culiacán, Sinaloa. Drug gangs have sought to exert control over the content of online message boards, engaging in verbal sniping at their adversaries and threatening both users who post sensitive information as well as reporters and editors who delete comments related to the gangs’ online sparring.

Impunity is pervasive in Mexico, with little progress in the prosecution of cases of murders and intimidation of media workers. In 2006, a special prosecutor’s office was established to combat crimes against journalists, but it has been largely ineffective, achieving only one conviction since its inception. The office is hampered by jurisdictional weaknesses, an insufficient number of investigators, the need to draw upon the resources of several rival agencies, and a lack of transparency. A unit for the protection of journalists has been similarly criticized as being underfunded and underutilized. Journalists may be unwilling to use the program because of their

Coverage of the July 2012 presidential election—which was won by Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—was relatively free. In general, political reporting is much more pluralistic and balanced than it was in the past, with widespread coverage of the competing political parties, which also have direct access to significant broadcast time. In June, less than a month before the election, Britain’s Guardian newspaper published a report claiming that Peña Nieto had purchased favorable news coverage from Televisa, the country’s dominant broadcaster. Televisa denied the accusation, questioning the authenticity of the documents the Guardian had offered as proof. In August, Mexico’s Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) rejected a complaint by the opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) that included charges of political bias by Televisa stemming from the Guardian’s investigation. During Peña Nieto’s inauguration in December, two photographers were rouged up, arrested, and held incommunicado for eight days while taking pictures of protests. The photographers were arrested along with 69 other people, 56 of whom were later released.

The Televisa controversy, and the protests it had ignited among university students over the network’s perceived support of Peña Nieto, helped to place broadcast ownership concentration on the campaign agenda. After winning, Peña Nieto promised to license two more open-air networks during his term and improve broadband access by opening the market to increased competition. Mexico’s broadcasting system is highly concentrated, especially in television, where two networks—Televisa and TV Azteca—control 85 percent of the stations. These stations are the only networks with national reach, while about a dozen family-owned companies control radio. There was no movement in 2012 by the Mexican Congress or executive-based regulatory bodies to legalize and support community broadcasters or act on demands to diversify ownership of the broadcast spectrum, and only a
handful of community radio operators have been awarded licenses. There are numerous privately owned newspapers, and diversity is fairly broad in the urban print media.

In 2012, 38 percent of the Mexican population accessed the internet. Though content is not limited by the state, telecommunications ownership is also concentrated, resulting in poor infrastructure and high access costs.