Mexico remained one of the world’s most dangerous places for media workers in 2014, and freedom of expression faced new threats with the adoption of the Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Act in July. Multiple attacks on journalists and media outlets were carried out during the year, reporters faced police aggression while covering protests, and self-censorship remained widespread.

While the telecommunications and broadcasting law allowed greater competition in both sectors, it also granted the government powers to monitor and shut down internet activity during protests.

### Legal Environment

Freedom of expression is established in Articles 6 and 7 of the constitution. Mexico decriminalized defamation at the federal level in 2007, and a number of states have eliminated their own criminal defamation statutes, including the state of Mexico—the country’s most populous—in 2012. Nevertheless, criminal defamation laws remain on the books in 12 of the 32 states, and both criminal and civil codes continue to be used to intimidate journalists.

In July 2014, President Enrique Peña Nieto signed the Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Act, known as the “Ley Telecom.” Although it facilitated greater competition among television stations and telecommunications providers, some of its provisions drew criticism for threatening freedom of expression. The law gives the government the authority to shut down telecommunications in order to prevent crime, and contains vague wording allowing for the “precautionary suspension of transmission of content.” The law also authorizes the government to geo-locate and track mobile-phone use in real time, and requires internet companies to save information on users without judicial oversight. Such records could theoretically enable authorities to identify or monitor whistle-blowers, journalists’ sources, and individuals engaging in political expression. Activists staged street protests and voiced opposition to the law online.

The competition components of the Ley Telecom, building on related constitutional amendments adopted in 2013, empowers a regulatory agency, the Federal Telecommunications Institute (IFT), to force concessions from telecommunications firms and television networks that are designated as dominant in their respective markets. For example, the dominant players would be obliged to grant smaller competitors access to their
infrastructure and distribution systems. At year’s end the IFT was considering bids for two new television broadcast licenses, whose recipients would compete with the existing duopoly of Televisa and TV Azteca.

However, opponents of the law raised concerns that competition in the telecom and broadcast sectors would still be limited to a handful of large commercial groups, while noncommercial radio stations in particular would be left in an even more precarious legal and financial position. The Mexico chapter of the World Association of Community Radio Operators (AMARC) criticized the law as a step backward on the grounds that it failed to set clear guidelines for the approval of license applications, threatened unauthorized radio stations with possible criminal sanctions and exorbitant fines, limited independent and commercial funding for community stations, and restricted noncommercial and indigenous stations to a small portion of the radio spectrum. The AMARC Mexico branch filed a legal challenge to the constitutionality of the law. Community radio stations tend to serve politically and economically marginalized communities and are regularly targeted for closure over illegal broadcasting, often due to pressure from larger outlets or to serve political and business interests that are threatened by their content.

A law passed at the same time as the Ley Telecom focused on the public broadcasting system. It would reorganize existing public media under a new federal entity with a citizen oversight council and a mission to promote objective and pluralistic content. Media watchdogs raised concerns that the entity’s political independence was not adequately safeguarded by the law, and that public media would remain largely dependent on state funding after proposals to allow more advertising were rejected.

Mexico passed a Freedom of Information Law in 2002, 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, 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 in practice.

A number of press freedom organizations and journalists’ associations operate in Mexico, but they have faced increased intimidation in recent years. In March, the home of press freedom watchdog Article 19’s Mexico director, Darío Ramírez, was ransacked and his work documents and computer were stolen. The incident occurred a few days before Article 19 released its annual report on media freedom in Mexico. Also that month, Reporters Without Borders correspondent Balbina Flores Martínez received threatening phone calls at her office.

**Political Environment**

Media outlets and their employees face pressure from a variety of actors looking to manipulate or obstruct news content, including owners with political or business agendas, major advertisers seeking positive or neutral coverage, and government officials. However, the most acute threat to independent reporting in Mexico is criminal violence. According to
the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), at least 31 journalists and 4 media workers have been killed in connection with their work since 1992, and another 13 have gone missing since 2005, though other organizations have cited much larger figures. The quasi-governmental National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) registered the deaths of 88 journalists and media workers from 2000 through April 2014. The broader lawlessness in many parts of the country makes it difficult to determine whether slain journalists were targeted for their reporting.

CPJ confirmed two work-related murders of journalists in Mexico during 2014. In February, Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz, a crime reporter for the newspapers Notisur and Liberal del Sur, was found dead several days after being abducted in the state of Veracruz; an organized crime group was suspected of ordering the murder. Octavio Rojas Hernández, a crime reporter for the daily El Buen Tono who was based in San José Cosolapa, Oaxaca, was shot and killed in front of his home in August. The murder came shortly after the paper published a story linking the Cosolapa police chief to organized crime and gas theft.

Hundreds of nonfatal attacks on journalists and press outlets occur in Mexico every year, with many allegedly perpetrated by corrupt or abusive government officials. Journalists and media workers frequently faced assaults and brief detentions while covering the many large protests of 2014, which focused on grave human rights abuses and the Ley Telecom.

The offices of a number of media outlets across Mexico were attacked during the year. In August, gunmen opened fire on community radio journalist Indalecio Benítez and his family outside the radio station located within his home. His son was killed in the attack. In September, journalist Karla Janeth Guerrero Silva, who was critical of local public services, was brutally beaten by armed men who forced their way into a newspaper office in the state of Guanajuato. In October, gunmen burst into Radio Fiesta Mexicana in Sinaloa and murdered program host Atilano Román Tirado while he was on the air. He frequently criticized local officials and had received threats related to his activism on behalf of farmers whose lands were flooded by the construction of the Picachos dam.

The prevalence of threats, and impunity for perpetrators, have caused self-censorship to deepen and spread, including to areas that were not considered hotspots for drug-related violence, such as Zacatecas and municipalities surrounding Mexico City. Since 2010, at least three newspapers have published editorials indicating that they would avoid coverage likely to provoke further attacks or threats from organized crime. The Observatory of Public Communication Processes about Violence, a group of outlets jointly monitoring coverage of violence and drug trafficking, reported in 2013 that national coverage of those topics declined following Peña Nieto's inauguration in late 2012, as the federal government implemented strategies to reduce the prominence of violence in the news.

In the state of Tamaulipas, where a dozen journalists have reportedly been killed since 2000 and crime reporting in mainstream media is limited, citizens anonymously use social media to share information on local violence, criminal activity, and missing persons. In October 2014, one such citizen journalist, María del Rosario Fuentes Rubio, was allegedly murdered after being tracked down by a criminal gang. Photographs of what appeared to be her body were posted on her Twitter account as a warning.
Officials sometimes dismiss potential journalism-related motives for attacks and threats with questionable haste. For example, after the February abduction and murder of Gregorio Jiménez de la Cruz, state authorities in Veracruz arrested five people, one of whom was the journalist’s neighbor, and initially claimed that the killing was related to a personal dispute. However, an investigative reporting team discovered work-related motives for the murder and identified important errors in state investigators’ procedures and conclusions. Veracruz is a particularly dangerous place to practice journalism, and state authorities there have repeatedly invoked journalists’ personal lives as motives for their deaths, despite evidence to the contrary. Article 19 recorded the murders of 15 journalists in Veracruz between 2000 and early 2014 with potential work-related motives, 10 of which had occurred since the current governor took office in late 2010.

State and local officials themselves have faced intimidation when investigating crimes against journalists. In May 2014, armed men kidnapped journalist and state government press spokesman Jorge Torres Palacios from his home in Acapulco, Guerrero. His decapitated body was found four days later. Torres had written columns denouncing government corruption and organized crime in the state. The federal special prosecutor’s office for organized crime took over the case in June after local investigators were threatened by crime figures.

While federal government investigators are better trained and more removed from local criminal pressures and government corruption, the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) has been hesitant to assert its jurisdiction over such crimes—as authorized under a 2012 constitutional reform—without state officials’ approval. The office has closed several high-profile cases without resolution and neglected pending arrest warrants. The CNDH reported in April 2014 that 89 percent of crimes against journalists go unpunished in Mexico.

Human Rights Watch warned in late 2013 that another federal program, the Protection Mechanism for Journalists and Human Rights Defenders, was “seriously undermined by a lack of funds and political support at all levels of government.” Journalists and human rights defenders who sought risk assessment and protection measures reportedly faced long delays and inadequate safeguards, although some did benefit from the program. There is no confirmed count of Mexican journalists in exile, but tenuous security conditions have prompted several to leave the country.

In addition to violence, journalists occasionally face arbitrary detention by local authorities. In late February 2014, Alma Delia Olivares, a reporter for the community radio station La Cabina in Veracruz, was reportedly detained for five days on unclear charges before being released. The station was closed following her arrest.

**Economic Environment**

Numerous privately owned newspapers operate in Mexico, and diversity is fairly broad in the urban print media. However, the broadcasting sector is highly concentrated, especially in
television, with two networks—Televisa and TV Azteca—controlling most of the market. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) maintained a close relationship with both networks during its decades in power prior to 2000, and accusations that Televisa was colluding with then PRI candidate Peña Nieto during the 2012 election campaign increased pressure for media-sector reform after the elections. The 2013 constitutional changes that created the IFT and the 2014 Ley Telecom were both products of this pressure.

In March 2014, the IFT designated Televisa, which controls about 70 percent of the free-to-air television market and is also the largest cable and satellite television operator, as the dominant player in its industry, meaning it would have to share infrastructure with competitors. The pending issuance of two new broadcast television licenses would help diversify the market beginning in 2015, though critics complained that true pluralism and diversity of opinion could still be limited if other large and well-established commercial media companies were the only enterprises to benefit from the reforms.

The IFT in March also designated billionaire Carlos Slim’s América Móvil group as the dominant player in telecommunications, prompting similar steps to increase competition. América Móvil at the time controlled about the 80 percent of the fixed-line telecommunications market and 70 percent of the mobile market. High costs and lack of investment have limited access to telecommunications services to date. According to the International Telecommunication Union, only 43 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2013, but 75 percent of households had a mobile telephone as of 2012.

State and local authorities or their allies sometimes interfere with the production and distribution of critical news publications. In September 2014, a federal judge in Quintana Roo ordered the administration of the state’s governor, Roberto Borge Ángulo, to stop creating false cover images of the critical magazine Luces del Siglo and distributing them via social media. Other outlets in the state were also allegedly targeted with the tactic, and Luces del Siglo had previously encountered obstacles to print distribution, including the theft of editions and denial of sales space. False print editions had also been created.

In March, the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers reported that government officials use discretionary authority over some 12 billion pesos ($905 million) in federal and state advertising expenditures to shape editorial policies and advance partisan and personal agendas. The association’s study found that many media outlets slanted their coverage to gain more favorable government ad contracts.