

KILLING THE NEWS:

Stories Go Untold as Latin American Journalists Die



Gabriela Ramírez is comforted at the funeral of her husband, Francisco Ortiz Franco, an editor of Zeta, a muckraking weekly in Tijuana, Mexico. Ortiz Franco, who had written powerful reports about drug traffickers, was shot dead in 2004 as he was leaving for a doctor's appointment. Two of his children were with him in the car. His killers remain free, and his wife says police never asked her for information.

Analysis by Tyler Bridges

Two SUVs intercepted Valentín Valdés Espinosa's car in downtown Saltillo, Mexico. Gun-wielding thugs forced the 29-year-old general assignment reporter into a vehicle. It was shortly before midnight on Jan. 7, 2010.

In the preceding days, Valdés Espinosa had aggressively reported the arrest of several drug traffickers in the northern Mexico city — and had committed the cardinal sin of identifying them by name — for his newspaper, the *Zócalo de Saltillo*. In another article, Valdés Espinosa had identified a policeman arrested for being on the drug traffickers' payroll.

The gunmen bound Valdés Espinosa, beat him and shot him five times. Two hours after the abduction, they dumped his body in front of a motel. "This is going to happen to those who don't understand," read a



Valdés Espinosa

One in a series of independently reported articles reviewing Knight Foundation's own grant making. To see previous stories in the series, go to www.kflinks.com/ra

handwritten note beside the body. "The message is for everyone."

Local authorities seemed to get the message. They have barely investigated the case, failing even to search the journalist's computer.

Since then, another eight Mexican journalists have been murdered and another eight have been kidnapped and remain missing for a total of 17 dead and missing for the year. None of their cases have been solved in a country where warring drug traffickers have killed each other in battles over territory, have murdered policemen and politicians and have engaged in bloody shootouts with government troops sent to restore order. In just the past five years, drug-related violence has claimed the lives of tens

of thousands of Mexican citizens and an estimated 61 journalists.

Intimidated, and for good reason, many newspapers throughout Mexico have stopped reporting on drug violence except for publishing official press releases. Newspapers and TV stations in Ciudad Juárez and other cities on the U.S. border have fully withdrawn. They simply no longer report drug shootouts that leave police, drug traffickers and ordinary citizens dead in the streets. They publish some stories demanded by the *narcos*, as they are called in Spanish.

“We’re in the middle of an undeclared war,” says Roberto Rock, who served as editor of the Mexico City daily *El Universal*. This point was underscored when a photographer for *El Diario de Juárez* was shot dead on Sept. 16, and an intern was seriously wounded, while they were heading out to eat lunch. *El Diario* — the biggest newspaper in Mexico’s most violent city — took the extraordinary step of publishing a front-page editorial three days later that asked drug cartels to explain what information the newspaper should not print to avoid more attacks.

Facing the worst wave of violence against journalists ever in Latin America, the Miami-based Inter American Press Association has stepped up its efforts in Mexico by investigating the facts in murders, organizing seminars on how reporters can better protect themselves and issuing resolutions by its 1,061 members that condemn the killings and demand justice. The IAPA has sent two high-level delegations to Mexico in 2010, with the second delegation holding a lengthy meeting with President Felipe Calderon on Sept. 22 at which he promised to push Congress to federalize crimes against freedom of expression.

But with the reversals in Mexico and a worrisome murder spike in Honduras offsetting the gains in Colombia, Brazil and other countries — and journalists elsewhere in Latin America still getting killed or facing death threats — the gnawing question remains: How can IAPA better protect journalists in the region?

It is not an idle question. Since 1995, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has financed an IAPA campaign to provide justice for those slain on the job and to protect reporters on dangerous assignments. Called the Impunity Project, the campaign includes all Latin American countries but focuses on those hit hardest by the violence against journalists: Mexico, Colombia and Brazil. The project has received a total of \$7.6 million, including \$2.5 million over the past four years.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation commissions independent journalists to write occasional articles reviewing its grant making and program strategies. Veteran reporters examine grant documents, conduct interviews and offer their perspective on the lessons learned and impact of Knight-supported projects in stories published online and in print.

This report was written by Tyler Bridges, a freelance journalist based in Lima, Peru, and a former *Miami Herald* foreign correspondent. Bridges is a 2010 winner of the Maria Moors Cabot Prize for outstanding coverage of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The series is edited by Judy J. Miller, who oversaw Pulitzer Prize winning coverage while managing editor of *The Miami Herald*. She is former president of Investigative Reporters and Editors.

Photos in Hermosillo are by Fausto Enrique Ibarra Moreno and *El Imparcial*; photos in Tijuana are by Omar Martínez and *La Frontera*; photos in Mexico City are by Keith Dannemiller; photos in Miami are by Jeffrey Salter. Photos of Adela Navarro are by *Zeta*.

The package was designed by former *Miami Herald* graphics editor Hiram Henriquez, now president of H2H Graphics & Design.

For more information about the series, please visit www.knightfoundation.org.

A two-week reporting trip that included interviews with reporters, editors and IAPA officials in Colombia, Mexico and the United States — and interviews by telephone with journalists in other countries — came up with these findings:

- The organization has clearly moved the needle on perhaps the most important measure: Not all killers of journalists go scot-free anymore. The IAPA’s missions and persistent efforts have put the impunity problem on the agenda of many government leaders throughout the region and of international groups such as UNESCO. Several key countries have toughened laws for the murder of journalists and are actively carrying out investigations

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“The best way to protect yourself is not to accept payoffs.”

– Ignacio Alvarado, who reports from conflict zones for the Mexico City daily *El Universal*

“When there’s a killing, imagine if we used Facebook to gather a lot of voices for an immediate impact.”

– Gonzalo Marroquín, publisher of the Guatemala daily *Prensa Libre*



Ricardo Trotti, pictured in his Miami office, has been the director of the Inter American Press Association's Impunity Project since the program's inception in 1995.

and prosecutions, although rarely consistently. Journalists in Colombia and Brazil are no longer getting mowed down.

• Despite the improvements, the bottom line for Latin America remains distressing: most killers of journalists still face little likelihood of jail time. Prosecutors have won convictions in only 59 of the 258 killings and presumed killings of journalists in Latin America since 1995. To put the situation into context, however, it's important to note that impunity reigns across the board in a region where justice is more of an ideal than a reality. The IAPA can lessen impunity only where its chief tools — investigating killings, issuing resolutions and meeting with political leaders face to face — inspire a government to act. When lawlessness reigns, as it did in Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s and in Mexico today, the IAPA faces nearly insurmountable odds in trying to ensure justice

ABOUT THE IMPUNITY PROJECT

The Impunity Project is one of the major programs of the Inter American Press Association, a Miami-based group of newspaper publishers and editors throughout the Americas.

Created in 1995, the project works to ensure that the killers of journalists in Latin America are punished for their crimes and tries to create safer conditions for journalists who work in risky areas in the region. It is financed by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Ricardo Trotti is director.

The project:

- Presses governments for justice in the murder of journalists through resolutions, communiqués, conferences, published reports and meetings with political leaders.
- Publishes advertisements seeking justice for slain journalists to build public awareness and to try to stir action.
- Investigates journalists' murders through its Rapid Response Units in Mexico, Colombia and Brazil to publicize them and press for prosecutions. The units also review unsolved cases in an attempt to goad authorities into action.
- Sponsors seminars and conferences to train journalists how to operate in dangerous areas.

for murdered journalists.

• The IAPA's Rapid Response Units in Mexico, Colombia and Brazil — consisting of one journalist per country — have provided the foundation for the group's work. They have fleshed out the facts in murder after murder to publicize the crimes immediately afterward and to provide the documentation needed to press for investigations and arrests in old cases seemingly forgotten by authorities. When authorities will not advance a case any further, the IAPA sends it to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Justice, if it comes at all, is slow, and governments might ignore its rulings, although they do carry a strong moral imperative. In two cases, the Washington, D.C.-based commission won reparations for the families of a victim in Brazil and another in Guatemala.

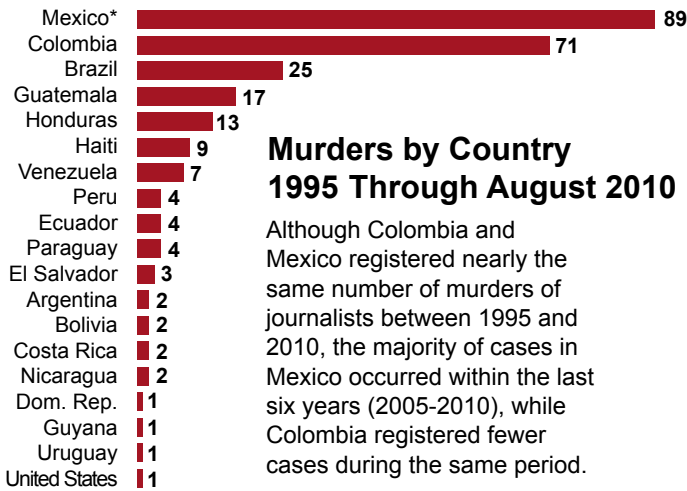
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"The Impunity Project works well where the justice system works well."

– Danilo Arbilla, former publisher of the Montevideo weekly *Búsqueda*

"I believe that Mexico is beginning to react, but it's late."

– Enrique Santos, former publisher of the Bogota daily *El Tiempo*



Murders by Country 1995 Through August 2010

Although Colombia and Mexico registered nearly the same number of murders of journalists between 1995 and 2010, the majority of cases in Mexico occurred within the last six years (2005-2010), while Colombia registered fewer cases during the same period.

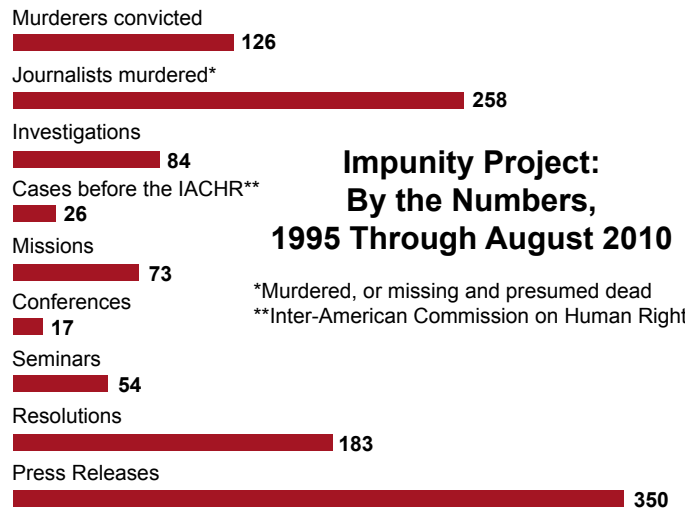
*In Mexico, 19 of the 89 are missing.

• The IAPA has fallen far short of its stated goal of making impunity “everybody’s problem.” The group seems to have raised awareness about the issue in at least some countries — particularly in Colombia and Brazil — but even its supporters acknowledge that the general public does not equate killing a journalist with tearing at the fabric of democracy and civil society.

• Newspaper editors and owners throughout the region seem to view the Impunity Project as a necessary — albeit imperfect — tool. Reporters on the front lines, though, say the project does little to make them feel safer.

• The disappearance of the IAPA’s project would create a void that seems difficult to fill. Other groups are now pressing the case against impunity, but none has the overarching presence or clout of the IAPA, which has members in 33 countries in the Americas. The IAPA, however, should put more emphasis on preventing murders through increased training programs for reporters in risky areas throughout the region and by treating Mexico as an emergency demanding even more time, attention and money, says Robert Rivard, editor of the *San Antonio Express-News*, who has made repeated trips to Mexico with the IAPA.

“Mexico is code red,” says Rivard. “We’re not doing enough there. There is nonstop coverage, communiques, missions



Impunity Project: By the Numbers, 1995 Through August 2010

*Murdered, or missing and presumed dead
 **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights

SOURCE: Inter American Press Association

and meetings, but at the end of the day, cases are not being investigated and solved, and killers continue to act with impunity.”

Mexico presents an especially difficult challenge for the IAPA since drug traffickers have been buying off reporters there, and the country’s journalists are only now organizing to protect themselves. The peril for reporters in Mexico seems likely to worsen before it gets better. (This report pays special attention to Mexico, even though the IAPA has worked for 15 years throughout Latin America, because the deteriorating situation in Mexico has prompted increased attention there by the IAPA and other press watchdog groups.)

More is at stake in Mexico than simply journalists’ lives. The drug traffickers have extended their tentacles so deeply into all levels of Mexican society that what’s happening there has gone beyond a drug war to begin to threaten the functioning of civil government, in ways hauntingly reminiscent to the terrible times that Colombia suffered. With the press silenced in so many cities, especially in the north, Mexicans are not getting basic information about a fundamental threat to their democracy: how the drug traffickers have corrupted mayors, governors, judges, prosecutors and the police. It will be difficult for Mexicans to take

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“I’m more afraid of the local government authorities than the drug traffickers. Many have one foot on each side of the line.”

– Jorge Carrasco, who reports from conflict zones for the Mexican weekly magazine *Proceso*

“It is my belief that the project has promoted the development of a culture against the violence and impunity that surround crimes against journalists.”

– Ricardo Trotti, director, IAPA’s Impunity Project

Making Progress Against Impunity

Since 1995, when the Impunity Project started, 126 killers of journalists have been convicted (the previous 10 years saw only five convictions). Still, those killers, many of them accomplices in the same murder, were held responsible in only 59 of the 258 journalist murders that have occurred in Latin America since 1995. Further, the years since 2008 have seen an alarming spike in murders. Because prosecutions can take years, it remains to be seen whether convictions will also rise.

■ Latin American Journalists Murdered*
 ■ Murder Convictions



*Murdered, or missing and presumed dead
 SOURCE: Inter American Press Association

NOTE: Data represented through August 2010

back their country without the press spotlighting what has gone wrong and highlighting what needs to be done.

'How Can We Make a Difference?'

All too often, journalists in Latin America have to work in combat zones. In 2009, the death toll for journalists hit a record 25, the IAPA reports. The toll reached 26 during the first eight months of 2010, a figure that includes eight kidnapped journalists in Mexico who are presumed dead. In contrast, just one journalist has been gunned down in the United States in the past 35 years, and one each in Uruguay and the Dominican Republic over the past 15 years. But throughout most of Latin America, killers know that, for the most part, they can kill without fear of punishment.

Against this backdrop, the Impunity Project began with a simple question: "How can we make a difference"? It was 1994, and David Lawrence, the publisher of *The Miami Herald*, was beginning a one-year term as the IAPA's president. He was discussing the impunity problem with Julio Muñoz, the IAPA's executive director, and Ricardo Trotti, the IAPA's freedom of the press coordinator. One thing led to another, and soon a team was dispatched to investigate six murders in Latin America and publicize the facts to try to goad authorities to act.

The project was created a year later with Knight Foundation financing. Trotti, a 52-year-old journalist from Argentina, has been the prime mover from its inception.

Are journalists safer today than when Trotti started the project 15 years ago? "Yes and no," he says, while juggling calls from Latin America at his office near Miami's Financial District. "In Colombia and Brazil, violence has lessened but impunity remains in many cases. In Mexico, violence has increased and so has impunity."

Trotti adds, "It is difficult to fight against political systems in which corruption and the lack of independence of the judicial branch of government are normal. The strength of Impunity Project lies in the consistency of its investigations and its insistence on justice being done. These have served to turn around, to an extent, a climate of total impunity."

The Project's Impact

In trying to measure the IAPA's efforts, the key question has been: How do you define success? Joel Simon is an interested observer and supporter as executive director of the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists. He asks: "Is success defined as less impunity? Or is success defined by saying if the group hadn't been raising these issues, would the situation be

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"Is the IAPA doing something to help journalists in Mexico? The answer is yes, but it is intermittent and doesn't have much teeth."

– Darío Dávila, who has worked in the conflict zones and now teaches online classes at the University of Guadalajara

"The IAPA workshops have been good because they have given us the chance to exchange ideas with others and find solutions to our problems."

– Luis Gerardo Andrade, police reporter, *La Frontera* newspaper in Tijuana



Police investigate a murder scene in Hermosillo, Mexico, while the body of Fernando de la Cruz lies nearby. The senior police officer, whose legs are visible in the door of the family van, was gunned down on a Sunday afternoon family outing in August 2010. De la Cruz headed State Investigative Police operations in Hermosillo.

even worse?”

Simon favors the second definition, and he makes a good argument. The actions of governments, the brutality of drug cartels and the attentiveness of newspaper editors and owners have far more say in determining whether journalists live or die than does the Impunity Project.

Given that the IAPA's influence is limited, here's a key statistic to help determine the project's impact: Only five killers of journalists had been convicted of their crimes in the 10 years before the project began in 1995, according to the group. Since then: 126.

The project has been a resounding success under that measure, but the numbers do overstate the case. The 126 convicted killers, some of them accomplices in the same case, were held responsible in only 59 of the 258 killings and presumed

killings of Latin America journalists since 1995.

So impunity still reigns in most killings. And many killers have gone to prison only briefly. Another key statistic: of the 258 murders of journalists since 1995, only six masterminds have been convicted, though prosecutions have risen from none in 1995 to 12 last year.

Another measurement shows the IAPA's impact: three countries (Guatemala, Mexico and Colombia) have approved laws creating special offices to prosecute journalists' killers or toughening punishment for their crimes. But this achievement has been less potent than the IAPA had hoped.

The IAPA helped prompt the Colombian government to create a special prosecutor's office that is sending more killers of journalists to prison. "Police are doing a better job of investigating,"

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“No one else is doing what the IAPA does in Colombia. I don't know if anyone else would assume that role. It's not easy to get funds for this type of problem in Colombia.”

– Nora Sanín, executive director of Andiaros, the association of Colombian newspapers

“Those in the battlefield don't feel like they have any protection from IAPA. But if you knock on their door, they will help you.”

– Carlos Huertas, investigations editor, *Semana* weekly magazine in Bogota

says Fernando López, one of the special prosecutors. “We’re getting more help from witnesses.” López says his office would have more success with more money and wondered whether Knight Foundation might write a check to lend a hand.

“Journalists complain that there isn’t justice,” López adds. “Guerrillas, narcos and paramilitary groups often prevent investigators from carrying out their work. It costs a lot of money to carry out investigations.”

In Mexico, IAPA leaders helped pressure the government in 2006 to create an office to prosecute crimes against journalists. But the prosecutor made little progress. The IAPA began complaining again, and the federal government in March named a new prosecutor. But he remains short of money and staff and is so cowed that he insisted that an interview in August be entirely off the record.

“You can have all the good laws in the world, but that doesn’t matter if you don’t have political will and follow-through,” says Mexican Congressman Manuel Clouthier, who has been pushing without success a measure that would take murders of journalists from local prosecutors — who too often do cursory investigations — and turn them over to federal authorities.

Ad Campaign Losing Effectiveness

Beyond pushing for justice, the IAPA has tried to strengthen political will to protect reporters throughout the region. In 2003, the project began an advertising campaign that once a month has publicized the unsolved murder of a Latin American journalist. The ads, supposed to run in IAPA member newspapers throughout the region, have asked readers to sign petitions calling for justice that the IAPA would forward to the appropriate government. The campaign has aimed to engage readers in the problem and put pressure on governments. Total in-kind contributions by IAPA members of ad space since 2003 exceeds \$28 million, Trotti estimates.

But fewer and fewer newspapers are consistently running the ads. In the beginning, “everyone in IAPA was talking about the campaign,” Trotti said. “You could feel the enthusiasm. Now I have to remind people we are doing the campaign. [It] got a little bit old.”

About 270 of the group’s 1,030 newspaper members run the ads monthly, down from 320 newspapers in 2007, according



The shattered window in the Bogota office of Diana Calderón, the IAPA’s Rapid Response investigator in Colombia, after a car bomb blew up on the street seven stories below.

to an informal IAPA survey conducted for this report. And the campaign has been averaging only 265 signatures per month this year, according to the IAPA.

“The media hasn’t been able to transmit the danger that reporters face,” says Roberto Rock. “Society doesn’t recognize reporters as protectors of their rights and freedom of expression.”

Trotti thinks the ads remain effective even if members are “not being as consistent” in running them. The ads focus public attention on forgotten murders, make governments “uncomfortable” and generate publicity, he said. But the campaign would be “much better” if it also used digital and social media to stir public action, he said.

Trotti also understands that the IAPA needs to improve its drab and outdated website, www.impunidad.com which could be used to humanize the journalist murders in Latin America and stir outrage — but doesn’t.

With that in mind, the IAPA has hired a consulting firm to help the group upgrade its website and shift its focus to more online activities. IAPA hopes the new strategy will help the group reach its projected target of 50,000 unique visitors per month — up from 20,000 currently.

Bomb Targets Bogota Office

Diana Calderón is on the phone with Trotti in Miami. Calderón, 42, serves as the IAPA’s Rapid Response Unit in Colombia. The units were created in 2000 following a conversation between

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“I get death threats all the time. The IAPA must put more pressure on the government, before more journalists are killed.”

– Ignacio Gómez, deputy editor of the Bogota TV station, Noticias Uno, who travels with government-provided bodyguards

“The IAPA’s strategy – ad campaigns and trying to pressure the government through press releases – doesn’t seem to have any impact.”

– Jorge Morales, former editor of *El Imparcial*, the main daily newspaper in Hermosillo, Mexico



Police take a suspected drug trafficker off a helicopter in Hermosillo in the state of Sonora. Journalists who print names or photographs of cartel members risk their lives. As a result, many papers in Northern Mexico have stopped reporting on drug violence.

Trotti and Alberto Iburgüen, then *The Miami Herald's* publisher and chairman of the IAPA's Impunity Committee. He is now Knight Foundation's president and chief executive officer.

Over the past decade, Calderón has documented the facts in scores of unsolved murders and quickly alerted Trotti of each new journalist attack. On this day in early August, Calderón is providing the details on the latest apparent target — the offices of Radio Caracol in Bogota, where she works. A car bomb exploded at 5:30 that morning, injuring 13 people and damaging the building's facade. Calderón is camped out in a colleague's office. Her seventh floor windows are blown out.

Trotti takes down her information and will write a news

release calling for an aggressive investigation by the Colombian government. He will send it to all member newspapers and the wire services.

This type of work is central to the Impunity Project's work in Colombia. The group has also pushed Colombian judges to give higher priority to cases of murdered journalists, gotten the prosecutor's office to review 27 unsolved cases, undertaken an advertising campaign to create greater public awareness and produced a documentary on a slain journalist that was broadcast on prime time television.

The journalist was Orlando Sierra. His assassin was captured and convicted but was released after only five years

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“Journalists now demand justice, and authorities now pursue crimes.”

– Clarinha Glock, IAPA's investigator in Brazil, where 15 journalists were killed during the 1990s but only three since 2000

“I don't understand journalists who censor themselves. You either practice journalism or you don't. We practice journalism every week.”

– Adela Navarro, coeditor of *Zeta*, a weekly newspaper in Tijuana. Two of the paper's editors have been murdered, and a third was badly wounded in an attack



A police investigator looks for evidence following a drug-related hit in Hermosillo, Mexico.

in prison thanks to an early-release program. The IAPA and Andiaros, which represents Colombia's newspapers, hired two lawyers to produce a report on the Sierra case and have used the information to push Congress to impose minimum sentences with longer terms. Congress has been unmoved.

The good news is that violence against journalists has almost disappeared in Colombia. Seven journalists were killed per year on average from 1998 thru 2003 while doing their job, according to the IAPA. But only one journalist was murdered in 2009 and thankfully only one (Clodomiro Castilla Ospino in the provincial city of Monteria) met that fate through August in 2010. The IAPA's efforts have clearly had an impact, as have the efforts of local

groups that have joined the IAPA in working against impunity.

"Nobody talked about the impunity problem 15 years ago," says Nora Sanín, executive director of Andiaros. "Colombian society — to what extent exactly I don't know — understands that when you kill or kidnap a journalist, it's not just a crime against that person but an attack on freedom of expression."

But when asked why murders of journalists have plummeted, Sanín says: "The major reason is the government's policies." During the eight years that Álvaro Uribe served as president and waged war against violence, killings in Colombia dropped across the board.

And while there have been advances, Colombia's judicial

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"We were a close family. This has marked us for life. Only recently have we started going out again as a family."

— Gabriela Ramírez, widow of *Zeta* coeditor Francisco Ortiz Franco, murdered in 2004

"You're careful what you write because you don't want to put your life at risk."

— Nidia Serrano, editor of *El Universal*, a newspaper in Monteria, Colombia

system still falls short. The case of Nelson Carvajal exemplifies this, despite the IAPA's best efforts. Carvajal, a 37-year-old radio journalist in the provincial town of Pitalito, was shot seven times and died in 1998 after denouncing local corruption on the air. His family pressed authorities for action. That's when the phone calls began. If the family knew what was good for them, callers said, they would lay off the case, or else end up like Nelson.

They didn't lay off. Authorities imprisoned four men, including the alleged mastermind. But all were acquitted and released.

Calderón took up the case in 2002. She made three trips to Pitalito to interview witnesses, gather facts and review the court record. Thanks to her efforts, authorities reopened the case. The death threats against Carvajal's family resumed. One of his sisters escaped an attempt on her life. With the IAPA's help, she entered a government witness protection program. Carvajal's widow and other members of the family fled the country, with the Colombian government's help.

In 2006, it was Calderón's turn. "Keep on investigating, and you, too, will earn your final resting place," read a note sent to her office that included crosses meant to evoke graves. The government assigned her bodyguards full-time.

The IAPA didn't lay off the case. Beginning in December 2005, Ricardo Trotti held seven meetings with the Colombian government, accompanied by Enrique Santos, who was then the IAPA's vice president and publisher of *El Tiempo*, the Bogota daily newspaper.

"Diana constantly pressured the prosecutors," says Miriam Carvajal, as she sits in a Bogota café and discusses her brother's murder. "The prosecutor's office moved the case forward because of the IAPA." That investigation has had limited success, however. The Supreme Court rejected a request to review the case.

The IAPA presented Carvajal's case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights but hasn't gotten a favorable ruling there either. "There's still no justice," Miriam Carvajal says. "You have to be realistic. I don't blame the IAPA for not achieving more."

Trotti takes great pride in sending unresolved cases to the Inter-American Commission, which is part of the Organization of American States. Gonzalo Marroquín, owner of *Prensa Libre*, the Guatemala City daily newspaper, echoes the view of other owners when he says that recalcitrant governments do respond



At El Imparcial in Hermosillo, as at other newspapers across Mexico, journalists are no longer writing about drug-related violence. To avoid reprisals, the papers print only the official police version.

to an international body's rulings.

"We have achieved some successes," Marroquín says. One notable example: the commission got the Guatemalan government in 2001 to recognize that it had failed to take steps to prevent the 1980 murder of journalist Irma Flaquer, and then failed to carry out a proper homicide investigation afterward. The family won \$150,000 in reparations. Trotti says the Flaquer case led to the creation of a special prosecutor's office in Guatemala to handle crime against journalists.

In Brazil, a favorable ruling last year in the 1998 slaying of newspaper editor Manoel Leal de Oliveira could lead authorities to reopen his case, says Clarinha Glock, the IAPA's investigator in Brazil.

But winning justice in cold cases is notoriously difficult; the commission has admitted 11 of the 27 cases submitted by the IAPA since 1997 and issued favorable rulings so far in only three.

The process may be long and imperfect, but "it's the best and only avenue we have to keep a journalist's murder from being forgotten and for prodding governments to act through international pressure," says Trotti. "Through these actions, we do not bring the journalists back to life, but we do set an important precedent and force governments to address the impunity issue."

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"The traffickers rely on media outlets they control to discredit their rivals, expose corrupt officials working for competing cartels, defend themselves against government and influence public opinion. ... Unless the Mexican government takes bold action, the narcos will continue to define what is news and what is not. That is no way to win the drug war."

– Joel Simon, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists



The body of Francisco Ortiz Franco, an editor of the Tijuana weekly, Zeta, rests in the car in which he was gunned down in 2004, apparently by drug traffickers' assassins.

Mexican Officials Slow to React

María Idalia Gómez is sitting at her living room table in Mexico City and discussing the growing impunity problem in Mexico. The IAPA's Rapid Response coordinator in Mexico, Gómez stops to read a newly arrived BlackBerry message. "They have freed the final two journalists," Gómez says.

In a case riveting Mexico City's press, drug traffickers had kidnapped four reporters near the northern city of Torreón, including cameramen from Televisa and Milenio, two of Mexico's big TV networks. This act marked the first time that the targeted reporters worked for the networks, and their huge spotlight had turned it into a splashy story.

To the consternation of Trotti and everyone else in the IAPA who has tried to address the impunity problem in Mexico, the Calderón government hasn't made protecting journalists a priority, as have governments in Brazil and Colombia. Nor has the Mexican media, riven by disunity and a weak press association.

All of these elements conspired last year against the IAPA when the organization tried to give Mexican journalists, media executives and government officials the benefit of what

Colombia has learned. In many ways, Mexico seems to be where Colombia was in about 1985. The IAPA brought three well-placed Colombians to Mexico to tell their story. They were former President César Gaviria, Enrique Santos and Oscar Naranjo, the current head of the National Police.

"Not a single member of the Mexican government attended," recalls Santos. "The sad truth is that they [the Mexicans] haven't assimilated our history. It hasn't translated into action by the newspapers."

The IAPA has sent more than a dozen missions to Mexico over the years, as well as organized 13 seminars with reporters and editors. Still, says Roberto Rock, "Violence [against journalists] is not on the public agenda — not even of the executive branch, the Congress or even the media outlets."

Gómez is the IAPA's point person in Mexico for combating the uphill challenge there. Since being hired in 2003, Gómez, 39, has traveled the country documenting the facts of unsolved cases and providing news on the latest slaying. This work frequently puts her in the conflict zones.

"The work is overwhelming," says Gómez, who is often



More than 1,000 journalists marched in downtown Mexico City in August 2010 to demand that the government crack down on the drug-related killings of journalists that are silencing the press.

assisted by her husband, Darío Fritz. A fellow journalist, he works half-time for the IAPA.

Most of the murders she investigates occurred outside Mexico City, in northern cities such as Tijuana where drug dealers have turned the former tourist destination into a killing zone. The Arellano Félix drug cartel and others muscled in, leaving hundreds dead in their wake. Death has become increasingly swift and brutal. Those killed for talking too much are found with their tongues cut off. Those killed for sleeping with a narco's woman are castrated. The message for beheaded victims is clear — a cold-blooded warning not to mess with the narcos.

Héctor Félix Miranda messed with them. A 48-year-old passionate baseball fan, Félix Miranda was the well-liked copublisher of *Zeta*, a hard-hitting weekly newspaper in Tijuana. He named names when he wrote columns denouncing drug trafficking, murders, torture and official corruption.

Félix Miranda was driving to work one morning in 1988 when a black Trans Am cut him off. A gunman emerged to pump two 12-gauge shotgun blasts at Félix Miranda, killing him instantly.

Drug traffickers targeted *Zeta* again in 1997. Gunmen badly wounded copublisher Jesús Blancornelas in an attack that killed his bodyguard.

In 2004, Ricardo Trotti visited Tijuana to help *Zeta* coeditor

Francisco Ortiz Franco gather more facts for the Félix Miranda case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. Ortiz Franco was a marked man himself for his exposes.

Three weeks later, a masked assassin targeted Ortiz Franco as he was about to drive to a doctor's appointment. Two of his children were sitting in the car with him and watched him die.



Adela Navarro

nothing would happen."

Law enforcement authorities have never asked Ramírez for information on the case. Nor have they sought his notebooks or access to his computer. "They never took statements from the suspects," she adds. "The people involved in his killing are powerful businessmen in Tijuana, and authorities don't want to mess with them."

Two of Félix Miranda's killers are in jail, but the mastermind was never punished. None of Ortiz Franco's killers have faced justice.



Journalists threw red paint on photos of murdered colleagues at the end of the Mexico City march, to symbolize how impunity reigns.



This journalist chained shut his mouth for the Mexico City march to symbolize how murders are silencing the press.

Adela Navarro, Zeta's coeditor, praises the IAPA for trying to keep the investigations alive. "It is the only organization that hasn't abandoned the search for answers in the assassinations. It's important that journalists don't feel alone."

Violence Hits Home

The sun is just beginning to warm the day, the first Saturday in August, as hundreds of journalists gather in front of the Ángel de la Independencia, a monument built to honor Mexico's independence, in downtown Mexico City. At 12:45 p.m., they set off down the main avenue, Paseo de la Reforma. "Ni uno más," the journalists chant. "Not one more."

"We're the news now," explains Elia Baltazar, coeditor of *El Excelsior* newspaper and one of the march's organizers.

The violence that has left 61 journalists dead or presumed dead during the past five years — almost all in far-flung cities — is finally hitting home in Mexico City with the television journalists' kidnapping.

"The most important thing about the march is that it happened," says Jorge Carrasco, who covers drug stories for *Proceso*, a hard-hitting news magazine. He decries the lack of solidarity until now.

The first stirrings for change seem to present an

opportunity for the IAPA to press harder to make a difference in Mexico. The group has had practically no success in recent years because of the official indifference in Mexico and the drug cartels' power and ruthlessness. "It's two steps forward and three steps backward," says Ricardo Trotti.

One encouraging sign: Calderón promised to push Mexico's Congress to federalize crimes against freedom of expression, in a meeting with leaders of the IAPA and the Committee to Protect Journalists on Sept. 22 in Mexico City. Calderón also said he wanted Mexico to establish a system to protect journalists at risk, as Colombia has done.

"President Calderón was quite open and engaged in the issues on the agenda," says San Antonio editor Robert Rivard. "He wasn't at all defensive, which was very positive from our perspective."

Until now, the Calderón government has shown little appetite for federalizing crimes against journalists, says Congressman Clouthier, a former newspaper editor, who has been pushing the measure in Mexico's House of Representatives. He characterized Calderón's promises as "just a speech."

Many local government officials have pressured congressmen from their area to oppose the measure, Clouthier says, because "they operate hand-in-glove with criminal elements."

He said IAPA members could do far more. They "see the organization as a way to protect themselves, not their journalists," he says. "They see confronting political leaders as a threat to their business interests."

Or as Marcela Turati, who reports from conflict zones as a freelancer for *Proceso*, put it as the march was about to begin: "I don't feel protected by the IAPA. It's an owners' club."

The group needs to continue its work but retool the Impunity Project to react more quickly and to focus more on keeping reporters alive, especially in Mexico, with more seminars on safety and ethics, says Darío Dávila, a journalist who has long worked in conflict zones and now teaches safety training seminars online through the University of Guadalajara. "We need more action."

Some help could be on the way: Trotti and other members of the Impunity Project met with Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim earlier this year to ask for his support. Slim, who owns a share of *The New York Times*, asked for a set of initiatives that he could fund.

'A Lot More To Do'

Diana Calderón is sitting at her desk in late July in Bogota. Her bodyguards are waiting outside to accompany her when she leaves the building. It is two weeks before a car bomb would damage it. "Every time you think you're tired and you feel bad that you have to travel with bodyguards all the time," she says, "you remember the families waiting for results. We're getting results. But we have a lot more to do."

ANALYSIS HIGHLIGHTS

THE CHALLENGE

In 1995, when the Impunity Project began, killers of journalists had little fear they would face punishment. Could a Miami-based group consisting of editors and publishers work together throughout the Americas to force governments to crack down on impunity?

THE INITIATIVE

With \$7.6 million in grants from the James S. and John L. Knight Foundation since 1995, the IAPA has pressured governments to provide justice in journalists' slayings. Its Rapid Response Units investigate unsolved cases and recent murders to publicize the facts and get them in front of prosecutors. The IAPA has also begun holding seminars to teach reporters how to reduce risks in dangerous areas. Finally, the group has carried out an advertising campaign about unsolved murders to educate the public about the impunity problem.

THE IMPACT

Fifteen years ago, killers of journalists in Latin America simply weren't prosecuted. Since the Impunity Project began, prosecutors have won convictions of some, though not all, of those responsible for 59 of the 258 killings and presumed killings of journalists in Latin America through August 2010. Most of those punished, however, are hired guns, not the masterminds.

Governments now face consistent pressure from the IAPA to provide justice. But the advertising campaign meant to stir public outrage has lost its effectiveness, with only about 265 people a month writing protest letters.

Killings of journalists in Latin America have risen in recent years because more journalists are dying in Mexico at the hands of drug traffickers.

In Colombia, formerly the hardest-hit country, killings of journalists have dropped sharply, as have killings of Colombians in general, thanks to the get-tough policies of President Álvaro Uribe, who just left office.

In Brazil, another violent country, killings of journalists have plummeted, and hired guns almost always go to prison now.

In Mexico, the government's inability to arrest and try the killers of journalists – part of an impunity problem across the board for all crimes – has overwhelmed the IAPA's efforts to bring justice there.

EMERGING LESSONS

A majority of the journalists murdered in Latin America so far this year worked in Mexico, posing the question: How can reporters there keep telling stories about violence and corruption in their communities without getting killed? And how can the Inter American Press Association's Impunity Project help?

Here are some suggestions from journalists familiar with the situation:

- More workshops to teach reporters how to operate safely in risky areas, including how to recognize when they are being followed, how to speak with their sources and how to write about drug traffickers without provoking them, says Darío Dávila, a journalist who has long worked in conflict zones and now teaches classes for high-risk journalists offered by the Center for Digital Journalism at the University of Guadalajara.
- More ethics seminars for reporters. Too many of them "have been corrupted in the past few years," Dávila says. "They are becoming mercenaries of the cartels for lack of journalistic values. They threaten sources that they'll publish information unless they get paid off."
- Beefed up staffing in Mexico. María Idalia Gómez, the group's Rapid Response Unit coordinator in Mexico City, needs help. Another person should be based somewhere other than Mexico City – perhaps in Monterrey, which has had strong newspapers but is under siege.
- A new website where journalists could post news stories on drug violence that are too dangerous to be published in their newspapers. The idea emerged from a March seminar for border journalists organized by the Knight Center for Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin.
- Continued pressure on the government. But it is important to understand that the single biggest factor for creating safe working conditions for journalists in Mexico is to create a safer country for all Mexicans.

This is the lesson from Colombia. While media and the government there took essential steps to protect journalists, their murders dropped primarily because of an across-the-board decline in violence during President Alvaro Uribe's eight years in office through August 2010. When civil strife simmers down, journalists are safer and can again tackle the tough stories.

GRANTEE'S VIEWS

Knight Foundation grantees are invited to respond to the findings of the Reporter Analysis Series if they disagree on some points. Below is a letter from Impunity Project Director Ricardo Trotti.

There is no doubt that this is a very good article which describes in detail the problem of violence unleashed against journalists, the impunity surrounding such crimes and the efforts of the IAPA to combat these scourges.

Nevertheless, the story would have been more complete and balanced if in addition to placing emphasis on the important work of the Rapid Response Unit it had shown the other tasks of the IAPA better, especially its advocacy work regarding laws, jurisprudence and the anti-impunity culture which it managed to modify, as well as the dispatch of 73 international delegations, made up of officers and executives, to countries of the region which met with presidents and other senior officials; the 17 international conferences that brought together judges, prosecutors, Supreme Court justices and experts on the illicit drug trade and organized crime, or the 53 journalist training seminars.

The article downplays the international work that the project has achieved, especially in the involvement of such organizations as the Inter-American Human Rights Court and Commission, through which the IAPA managed to open up a new battlefield, putting pressure on governments concerning their human rights reputation. Although not all the cases submitted to these agencies have yet produced positive results it is important to note that these are proceedings which in themselves have already changed the culture of indifference and negligence that had existed regarding crimes against journalists and their going unpunished. The fact that the Guillermo Cano case has been declared a crime against humanity that must not be subject to any statute of limitations is part of this new judicial culture.

This very proactive anti-impunity culture encouraged by the IAPA is what has permeated other, non-governmental institutions that today are fighting for the same objectives. A great part of the merit has been the fact that all the advocacy work, strengthened by the case investigations as primary material and the efforts mentioned in the first paragraph, have served not only for the prosecution and conviction of criminals to stop being a mere pipe dream but also for this issue to be included in each country's public and press agendas.

Dedicated Reporter Lived — and Died — for the Big Story

EMPALME, Mexico – Off to the side of a city park here, unnoticed by the boys playing basketball and the girls jumping rope, is a gray plaque attached to a pink pedestal. Its simple letters note the absence of a courageous reporter who disappeared in 2005 and makes a demand for justice. “*A la ausencia de Alfredo Jiménez Mota. Exigimos Justicia.*” Jiménez Mota’s parents, who live in this coastal town in Sonora state, come to the park and wonder what happened to their son.

A one-time boxer in high school who sang in a local church choir, Jiménez Mota lived for the big story. In 2004, two years after becoming a reporter, he was hired to cover the drug cartel beat at *El Imparcial*, the biggest newspaper in Hermosillo, Sonora’s capital. “He would not sleep, eat or even go out with his girlfriend in order to work,” recalls former newspaper editor Jorge Morales, who hired Jiménez Mota. “He was very aggressive. We began not publishing bylines on high impact stories. He demanded that his byline be published.”

On April 2, 2005, Jiménez Mota noticed someone photographing him. Nervous because he had begun to get death threats, he ducked into a nearby restaurant before proceeding to the newsroom. Jiménez Mota, 25, didn’t tell any of his colleagues of the day’s events. After he left work that evening, they never saw him again.

Four months later, the Inter American Press Association convened an extraordinary meeting of editors. At the urging of Ricardo Trotti, director of the group’s Impunity Project, the editors took a stand against the growing violence against journalists in Mexico and the lack of punishment for their killers. Jiménez Mota’s seemed like an ideal case to rally around. So many reporters who had been killed in Mexico were suspected of crossing the line and taking payoffs from drug cartels. But no one doubted Jiménez Mota’s integrity.

The editors decided to create a team of reporters to investigate what happened to the young reporter, publish what they found and shame authorities into punishing the guilty. “Everybody was excited,” Trotti says. It was called the Phoenix Project, after a model effort by several dozen investigative journalists who probed organized crime following the 1976 murder of reporter Don Bolles in Phoenix, Ariz.

The promised reinforcements for the Phoenix Project never arrived. One paper after another offered excuses why it couldn’t



José Alfredo Jiménez and his wife Esperanza Mota are still hoping for justice five years after the disappearance of their son Alfredo, an aggressive police reporter in Hermosillo, Mexico.



In the parking lot of this supermarket in Hermosillo, Mexico, Alfredo Jiménez Mota was kidnapped in 2005 after meeting late one night with a source.



Left photo: Reporters and ordinary citizens march in solidarity with the family of Alfredo Jiménez Mota after the reporter was kidnapped in 2005 in Hermosillo, Mexico. Right photo: Jiménez Mota on graduation day with his parents.

spare any reporters. María Idalia Gómez, the coordinator for the IAPA's Rapid Response Unit in Mexico, came to Hermosillo to assist with the investigative work. A reporter with *El Universal* in Mexico City dug out information in the capital. But in the end, Omán Nevárez, a colleague of Jiménez Mota's at *El Imparcial*, did the bulk of the reporting and writing.

Nevárez discovered that Jiménez Mota had met on the evening of April 2 with a law enforcement official who left him in the parking lot at Soriana's, a local supermarket chain, where he would meet another of his sources. The reporter's cell phone records showed that he received a phone call at 11:04 p.m. from the second source, the deputy director of the state attorney general's office. That official initially denied seeing him. Confronted with evidence of the phone call, he then denied having anything to do with his disappearance.

The Phoenix Project published a single story. Thanks to the work of Trotti and *El Universal*, it appeared in some 40 newspapers simultaneously throughout Mexico. But plans for a follow-up evaporated. "The impression was that it was too dangerous to carry out this kind of investigation," said Roberto Rock, *El Universal's* editor at the time.

Nevárez and Morales received death threats for their work. Both came to believe that a minor drug cartel boss ordered a hit on their former colleague. After state authorities failed to

seriously investigate the case, Jiménez Mota's parents appealed to President Vicente Fox, who ordered federal investigators to take over the case. They harassed drug bosses, confiscating their properties, capturing drug shipments and putting them on the run.

One day the presumed mastermind, Raúl Enríquez Parra, was dropped from an airplane. His testicles had been cut off, and he had been shot dead. Enríquez Parra's ID card had been tied to his chest, apparently to create no doubt about his identity. Nevárez and Morales concluded that the drug cartel had sacrificed Enríquez Parra to turn off the government heat. Federal authorities did indeed withdraw shortly afterward. Jiménez Mota's body has never been found, and no one has ever been imprisoned for the crime.

Nevárez and Morales remain haunted by Jiménez Mota's disappearance. Both left the newspaper to work for the Sonora state government. "As a reporter, you're exposed, and your family is exposed," Nevárez says. "It's better to write about sports and entertainment."

He adds, "I'm disappointed we never found justice for Alfredo or his family." Like Morales, Nevárez praises Trotti and Gómez for their efforts.

Jiménez Mota's parents recently visited the park in Empalme. "It's tough not knowing what happened to our son," says his father, José Alfredo, as his wife Esperanza looked down. "Here, they kill and kill, and nothing happens."

"It's tough not knowing what happened to our son. Here, they kill and kill, and nothing happens."

— José Alfredo Jiménez,
father of missing journalist

Lethal Choice: Keep Safe or Report



A man and woman grieve beside the body of a boy shot dead outside his home in the Lomas Verdes neighborhood of Tijuana.

TIJUANA, Mexico — Journalists in provincial cities throughout Mexico operate under a new unwritten code. “I don’t feel free to report on everything as I would like to,” says one Tijuana journalist, speaking on condition of anonymity given the danger. “We have to protect ourselves.”

Federal agents recently arrested 62 Tijuana policemen on charges of taking payoffs from drug traffickers. One of them was well known to local journalists because he organized an annual toys-for-tots Christmas party and got a nice write-up every year for his efforts. Another Tijuana law enforcement official also was arrested for protecting drug traffickers, this time by the DEA in San Diego. He was the state attorney

general’s press liaison.

“You don’t know who is good and who is bad anymore,” says the journalist. “You don’t know who to trust.”

One photographer’s story illustrates the extreme conditions for working in cities like Tijuana, and the significant challenge that the Inter American Press Association faces in protecting journalists and securing justice in strife-torn Mexico.

To protect the photographer’s identity, we’ll call him Mario. The story begins the day several years ago that he received what seemed to be an ordinary call to photograph a big traffic accident. But nothing is ordinary anymore for journalists in Tijuana.

Mario found lots of police and fire rescue officials at the scene



Police lights reveal a grim landscape of death — a drug-related killing in Tijuana, near the U.S. border.

and immediately began taking photographs of the smashed cars and the efforts to tend to the injured. Several minutes later, the driver of the Mercedes that caused the accident noticed Mario.

“Don’t take any photos!” he screamed and pointed menacingly. Mario ignored him. Mario then noticed the man reach across his chest as if he was about to draw a weapon. “Hey, calm down!” policemen shouted at the man.

The man didn’t pull out a weapon but did stalk over to Mario and began to pummel him. The police pulled the man away and escorted him to an ambulance. The police then returned to Mario, and they, too, began to punch him.

Mario shouted into his newsroom radio for help, and onlookers yelled at police to leave him alone. Mario was wearing a photographer’s vest with the name of his newspaper on the back. The police backed away. “If you know what’s good for yourself, my friend, you’d get out of here,” a fire rescue official hurriedly told Mario.

Angry, Mario stayed and watched a convoy of police cars arrive. An official disembarked from one car and embraced the man who had threatened Mario. “I’m so glad you’re OK,” Mario heard the official say. Mario’s colleagues arrived within minutes and spirited him back to the newsroom.

A police chief called a few minutes later. Saying that his nephew had been injured, he said he wanted to buy the photos. The paper’s editor refused. Other phone calls came from the police: “Who was the photographer?” they asked. The editors declined to say. Instead, they hustled Mario out the back door and sent him out of town the next day.

The editors decided they couldn’t risk publishing the photos. They did send them to the DEA and learned that the man who caused the traffic accident and was protected by police was a notorious drug trafficker who of course was wanted by police.

It was about six weeks later, and the heat seemed to be off. Mario had returned to Tijuana. He was downtown and heard a



A shootout with drug traffickers and their hit men claimed more victims in Tijuana, Mexico. The downed policeman in the distance would die.

barrage of gunfire nearby. Everyone ran away from the scene. Mario ran toward it. He first encountered an assistant police chief with a bloody face who had been the drug traffickers' target. Mario began photographing him and the four policemen he saw wounded on the ground. Two of them would die during the next several minutes.

Mario watched policemen whisk away the wounded assistant police chief.

The assistant chief was found the next day. His body had been cut into pieces. "His own men turned him over to the drug traffickers," Mario says now.

Mario has never told these stories to his family, knowing that they would insist he get a safer job. He remains committed to his craft. "I'm not well paid, but this is what I like to do," he says. "I'm careful, but I don't limit myself. When I have my camera, I'm thinking of the photos I'm taking. I'm not afraid. My fear is that I won't take the photos that I should take."



The drug-related violence in Tijuana has become so pervasive that not even schoolchildren can escape it.

Counting the Dead: Accuracy Is Elusive

The Inter American Press Association reports that nine journalists have been killed in Mexico in 2010, and another eight have been kidnapped and are presumed to be dead. These facts sound straightforward. But they are not.

"It's very difficult to get the total truth and be accurate," says Ricardo Trotti, director of the IAPA's Impunity Project.

IAPA includes journalists on its death toll list only if its investigators believe that the killing was a reprisal for the journalist's work. But making that determination can be difficult in a brutally violent country where the police rarely conduct good investigations and prosecutors too often prefer to turn a blind eye.

Was the journalist silenced to keep an uncomfortable truth hidden? Or was it simply a random robbery? Is there evidence showing that the journalist was taking bribes from one cartel and slain by another?

Besides these questions, even deciding whether the dead person qualifies as a journalist can be up for debate.

All of this explains why the IAPA's toll for Mexico in 2010 differs from that of the Committee to Protect Journalists, which counts only one confirmed work-related murder in Mexico in 2010 with another seven murders for unconfirmed motives.

María Idalia Gómez, the IAPA's Rapid Response investigator in Mexico, plays the lead role in determining for the organization why a reporter there was killed. Gómez has spent 17 years working as a journalist covering cases involving crime, human rights and national security.

"I'm well acquainted with the prosecutors, the judges and the law," Gómez says in an e-mail.

Gómez has also developed a network of journalist sources throughout the country to tap when investigating a journalist's death.

"Take the example of María Esther Casimbe, who disappeared in 2009 in Michoacan [state]," writes Gómez. "If you talk with her reporter colleagues, they will say she received money from drug traffickers. However, I have gotten important information which tells me that, if you look at her economic situation and the way she carried out her work, that information is false, that her death had more to do with the fact that she *didn't* accept payoffs."

So why does the IAPA have a higher death toll in Mexico for 2010 than the CPJ?

Take, for example, the case of José Luis Romero. A 43-year-old reporter for Línea Directa, a radio network in Sinaloa state, Romero was kidnapped by masked men while entering a restaurant on Dec. 30, 2009. His body was found on Jan. 16,

2010. He had been shot, and his hands had been broken.

The detective assigned to the case was himself murdered six hours after the kidnapping was reported. The state attorney general said the cases might be connected.

Romero had covered the crime beat for Línea Directa for 10 years. News Director Luis Alberto Díaz told CPJ that he believed Romero was the victim of two warring drug cartels. Díaz also said that "murdering a well-known broadcaster fits into the cartels' intention of intimidating the public."

All together, the facts provide plenty of clues to assume that Romero was killed as a reprisal for his work. But the case is not sealed tight.

The IAPA included Romero on its list of murdered journalists.

The CPJ put Romero on its "motive unconfirmed" list.

Not commenting specifically on the Romero case, Trotti explains that the IAPA typically errs on the side of counting a journalist's death as work-related. In other words, he says, "when we have doubts, we prefer to include the cases" in the IAPA death toll.

This approach serves the group's interests because it uses these cases to demand justice from governments.

CPJ, in contrast, has a stricter standard in which the group puts journalists on its list only

after being certain that the death was journalism-related. This approach is akin to a U.S. journalist's standard of publishing sensitive information only after confirming it with at least one unimpeachable source.

"We're extraordinarily rigorous in deciding who is confirmed and who is not confirmed," says Mike O'Connor, a former newspaper and television foreign correspondent who has been CPJ's representative in Mexico for the past two years. "We have to be pretty damn sure."

"Just because the dead person was a journalist, I don't cut him any slack," O'Connor adds. "I don't care how many orphans he leaves behind."

In looking at the two groups' approaches, it's reasonable to assume that the IAPA might overstate the death toll while the CPJ might understate it.

While the two groups apply different standards, they both agree on one thing.

"It always comes down to a judgment call," says O'Connor, echoing Trotti. "There are really no good [police] investigations. There are no forensics. There are no professional interrogations."



José Luis Romero



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