

El Salvador - Media Landscape

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Overview

The political transition experienced by El Salvador with the Peace Accords signed on 16 January, 1992, meant an advancement for the freedom of expression. Diverse actors from political life had the chance to express their ideas without

fear of explicit repression by the state. New communication media surged and traditional press consolidated. The main emphasis of the negotiation process between the government and *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front - FMLN), focused on the right to express opinions freely, thus displacing concerns about demands for structural changes in the media landscape. In addition, this democratic opening occurred simultaneously with the development of structural adjustment policies, which promoted the privatisation of the telecommunications sector and the transition from a profound control of the state over the media towards "savage deregulation."

The idea of a minimal state with few interventions on the media system was consolidated in 1992, which has contributed to a fertile ground for the media concentration in the hands of the private sector of communication, under the premise that "the best law is the non-existent one." This scenario has impacted the authentic exercise of freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Although some laws and regulations about media institutions have been changed, especially for radio and television, the advancement in favor of a public sense of the media is still in an inception phase, with few solid structures and still far from the international standard set by the United Nations and the Interamerican System.

In consequence, the commercial media sector has reached a strong development especially in the audiovisual media system, where television has a dominant role. According to a report from the Superintendency of Competition of El Salvador (2016), terrestrial television is a relevant market in the country due to the national reach of the service, as well as the content commercialisation and advertisers linked to the industry. In addition, the market structure of the open television is highly concentrated; according to the same report, there are a total of 42 licensed channels, of which 35 focus on the private or commercial activity and the other 7 to public, social or non-commercial activities. Even though there are several commercial players, their relevance as economic agents is not proportional. Therefore in El Salvador, we witness a media system that is not diverse nor plural.

Another topic that explains the strengthening of oligopolies is that the mass media market is small and has faced continuous economic crisis, which makes the struggle for advertisers more acute and confrontational. Print media have been affected the most by the crisis, due to their low levels of consumption compared to audiovisual media. According to the Public Opinion Institute from the Central America University José Simeón Cañas (2012), only 3.9 percent of the population consumes news through newspapers, while 88.1 percent does so through television, which has made print media unprofitable, forcing close links with political and economic elites to guarantee their sustainability (Pérez and Carballo, 2013).

However, the strong development of the commercial media and the limited state intervention did not imply a distancing between the political elites of the media system. On the contrary, a close relationship was generated between powerful economic groups owners of mass media and the groups of political power (Rockwell and Noreene, 2003, Becerra and Mastrini, 2009, Perez and Carballo, 2013). This shows that "the development of private mass media markets does not automatically eliminate political parallelism" (Hallin and Mancini, 2008, p.196). In this order of ideas, it can be concluded that there is a high level of political parallelism in the Salvadoran media system. The media contents reflect ideologies and evident political biases that are explained by the structural links between the political, media and economic elites. In addition, part of the audience expects the journalist to be an editorial guide and not an independent mediator in matters of public interest. As a result, the presence of "persons directly related to the ownership of the media that embark on a political career, including presidential candidates, some of whom are elected" (Becerra and Mastrini, 2009, p. 178) can be identified in the recent history of El Salvador, as in the cases of former presidents Elías Antonio Saca and Mauricio Funes; the first one is in prison indicted of corruption during his term, and the second exiled in Nicaragua for reasons of political persecution.

This context of media concentration and high political parallelism determines the journalistic exercise that takes place in the midst of a high vulnerability situation. This has generated little space for advocacy on the part of the journalistic guild, which makes it difficult to pursue an independent journalistic exercise focused on the public interest. The low professionalisation of

the journalistic activity in the country can be explained by the little interest that exists in the academia on the specific professional standard guidelines for the journalistic activity, which is increased by the weakness of the Association of Journalists of El Salvador (APES in Spanish), that plays a small representative role, agglutinating but without a real influence. In addition, the high political polarisation in the country also impacts on the guild, which is divided and with little chance of becoming a real check and balances system to the other actors in the political and media system (Carballo and Cristancho, 2014).

The precariousness in which the journalistic activity is performed in the country, threatens the freedom of the press, according to the Freedom of the Press annual report from The Freedom House (2017). *El Salvador* is ranked 47th and labeled as "partially free". This grade is consistent with the high levels of self-censorship associated with a survival-oriented and ideological submission. In the study "Between censorship and discrimination, a threatened Central America", 67 percent of the journalists interviewed expressed that they have been the subject of some type of censorship and 50 percent acknowledged that they practice self-censorship, which demonstrates very little plural dynamic within the media companies. As noted before, the state has favored large media entrepreneurs who enjoy privileges, which has led to a strong pressure from the market and political elites over the journalistic activity. Regarding the agents that generate censorship those identified are the owners of the media, advertisers and public officials. In addition, half of the information professionals have received aggressions of different kinds and three out of every ten communicators have suffered some restriction to the information.

To conclude, in El Salvador the journalistic activity is performed in a context characterised by high levels of censorship and self-censorship, partially explained by the links between political, media and economic elites. Additionally, the lack of clarity on the regulation of the advertising from the state enables the pressure from the government over media companies and journalists.

Media

Print

The written press has been the most influential in El Salvador, particularly during the second half of the last century and the first decade of the current. Its informative influence, in particular, lies in the dissemination of political content. Various political and communicational analyst agree that print media in El Salvador set the national and international informational agenda, and that principally television and radio are used as sounding board of the informational content.

Two factors have contributed to earn the print press its influence: The proximity of the business groups that own the newspapers to the political sectors, and the distribution - sometimes - of a more refined journalism, in many cases distant from the frivolity that it is appreciated on television and radio.

However, newspapers have begun to lose ground in many ways. The most obvious is the economic one: In the absence of official figures to put it in perspective - the owners of newspapers are not obliged to show their profits nor are they audited by independent agencies - in recent years the reduction of newsrooms and administrative staff has been notorious in the newspapers.

In January 2017, more than 25 journalists and administrative staff were dismissed from *El Diario de Hoy*, one of the most

renowned newspapers in El Salvador. Later the same year, in September, the other morning newspaper with the largest circulation, *La Prensa Gráfica*, also fired a group of journalists. The dismissals were publicly denounced by the Association of Journalists of El Salvador (APES). It is necessary to clarify that *La Prensa Gráfica* had a significant personnel layoff, many of them journalists, in August 2008, when more than 170 employees were dismissed. Neither *La Prensa Gráfica*, nor most of the media commented or even reported the dismissals in 2008 or 2017. The dismissals, according to the versions of those affected, were motivated by economic losses of the journalistic companies.

In its website, APES informed and denounced also that on May 3, 2018 "Several journalists and workers of other areas of *La Prensa Gráfica* were laid off", precisely on the Freedom of the Press Day. The journalists guild states that initially they "had knowledge that at least 120 workers were fired. However, to date the information of only 10 from those 120 workers, has been effectively proven. Editors, photojournalists, multimedia operators and drivers are included among the workers dismissed. Among those affected by the downsizing is Frederick Meza, who was threatened for his job activities on November of last year." APES also states that the newspaper justification for the downsizing is due to "company readjustments". In fact, the downsizing, according to those affected, was motivated by economic losses of the journalistic companies.

Newspaper sales have also declined. In the absence of audits, the most reliable information so far is the internal one, which indicates that the runs of the main newspapers, the morning papers, the so-called big ones, have reached the minimum. Even if they surpassed the 100,000 copies in the 1990s, newspapers like *La Prensa Gráfica* or *El Diario de Hoy* current runs vary between 40,000 and 70,000 copies each day. This is a very small percentage for a population of just over 6 million inhabitants, where more than half -53 percent of Salvadorans, according to a survey by CID Gallup from June 2017- say they never read the printed version of the traditional newspapers.

Usually print media are reluctant to express their political ideology, although some studies about content and informative agendas, easily reveal their ideology and political ties by the level of media coverage and its leanings. Two elements may explain this: First, economic groups owned by powerful traditional families in El Salvador as a result of the privatisation of the financial system in 1990. These economic groups have the power to finance business projects using the privatised banks; among those businesses are the communication media and advertising agencies. Second, the known relationship between high regarded journalists with political activities parallel to their journalist position, produce a higher level of influence in the decision-making process within the journalistic companies. In that way, print media and almost the entirety of the media map, reveal an important tie with the political sphere that endangers a democracy sustained by the diversity and plurality of mass media.

The print press market is controlled by three family-owned business groups. The main one, by history, number of newspapers and circulation, is the Dutriz Group, owned by the Dutriz family. It is closely followed by the Altamirano Editorial Group, owner of *El Diario de Hoy*, and by the Group Borja Bavaria and Editorial Group Bavaria, owner of *El Mundo* daily.

The Group Dutriz and Editorial Grupo Altamirano, keep investments in business as diverse as: coffee, supermarkets, shopping malls and real estate in rural and urban areas. In 2013, in a newspaper note released by *La Prensa Gráfica*, one of the Dutriz Group executives, declared that "it is a diversification as an empresarial group, maybe different to our daily activities, but it goes hand in hand with our vision."

The Borja Group and the Bavaria Editorial Group, are the owners of *El Mundo*. According to information from the National Registry Center (CNR in Spanish), they are strategic partners of Banco Agrícola (a Colombian investment), of a construction company, a phone company and of providers of electric power among other companies.

The most relevant printed publications are:

- Dutriz Group: Newspapers *La Prensa Gráfica* (national), *El Gráfico* (Sports), *Mi Chero* (national); and local magazines: *Ella*, *Motor city*, *viva y blur*. *The Economist* for the Central America Region.
- Altamirano Group: Newspapers *El Diario de Hoy* (national) and *Más* (national); and magazines: *Buen Provecho* and *Mujeres*.
- Borja Group y Bavaria Editorial Group: Owner of El Mundo editorial, owner of the newspaper *El Mundo* (national, although not published on Sundays) and the newspaper *El Migueleño* (local).
- Cooperative Society of employees from the CoLatino daily: it publishes the newspaper *CoLatino* (national). Founded in 1890, it was an evening paper until November 2017, when it announced that it would become a morning one.
- Distribuidora El Independiente: Owner of the weekly *El Independiente* (local).

In short, four newspapers with national circulation are published daily in El Salvador: *La Prensa Gráfica*, *El Diario de Hoy*, *El Mundo* and *CoLatino*. It should be clarified, however, that due to the low circulation and because of the many rural areas of the country, newspapers do not reach the whole country, which is divided into 14 provinces, formed by 262 municipalities. *El Mundo* is, in fact, the only one of the four states its daily circulation on its website: 40,000 copies. However, in the absence of an external audit, the data cannot be verified.

Traditionally, the main newspapers – except for the *CoLatino*, located at the extreme left wing of the political spectrum- have communed ideologically with the right wing and extreme right wing of Salvadoran politics. It is also noticeable that there is an interest to protect or promote the business groups, linked to political parties, which are behind the publications.

It is necessary to note that in the last decade different publications have emerged within the two main Salvadoran editorial groups, the so-called "popular newspapers" – *Más*, from the Altamirano Group, and *Mi Chero*, from the Dutriz Group. The characteristic of these publications is that they appeal to an audience with little academic background, publishing sensationalist notes, explicit photos of homicides and tabloid-style headlines.

Radio

Unlike the press, or even digital media, radio and television are subject to more control, since the radioelectric space is owned by the Salvadoran state – the Telecommunications Act establishes that concessions will be auctioned and renewable, even though not automatically, for up to 20 years. On May 2016 the Telecommunications Act was reformed, with two highlights that directly impact the Salvadorian media landscape: The first is the acknowledgement of the Community Radiodifusion; the second one enables the regulator to enact in the short run the National Plan of Digital Terrestrial Television, which will constitute one of the first steps to advance towards the digitalisation of television and radio in the country.

The radial space is divided into frequencies: AM and FM. The former has 67 concessions allocated, while the FM is more numerous, with 245 concessions of radio spaces, according to a 2014 report on the concessions, from the General superintendence of Electricity and Telecommunications (SIGET), the national entity in charge of radioelectric spectrum regulation.

It should be noted that most of these concessions in both frequencies, have a regional and local reach. Many of these radio stations, especially in AM, have been licensed or are under management of religious groups, particularly, Roman Catholic

and evangelicals known as Pentecostals.

According to the Latin American survey made in 2013 by Latinbarómetro, radio and television are the main means of entertainment and information for most Central Americans. In the Salvadoran case, according to the same report, people devote an average of 3.3 hours a day to listen to radio.

Despite its popularity, radio is not the main recipient of the advertising pattern, according to a study by the Superintendency of competition, developed in 2016. According to the report, 41 percent of the total advertising revenues for media in El Salvador are allocated to open television, 29 percent to the press and 11 percent to radio.

The radio market is controlled by business groups that are also dedicated to open television: the Telecorporation Salvadorian Group (TCS), Megavisión Group and AS Media. They are not the groups with the most radios stations, but the economically more profitable ones, taking into consideration that they are conglomerate owners of radios and chains of open television. The report of the Superintendency of competition points to these three groups as the main ones within the radio spectrum of El Salvador.

The other important groups, by the number of radios and by their national scope, are Group Radio Stereo, owner of five radio stations; Corporación YSKL, owner of one of the most listened-to information and sports chains in the country; Radio Corporación, with six other radio stations – mostly juveniles; Samix Group, owned by former Salvadoran president Antonio Saca.

The case of the former president Saca is particularly interesting. Arrested for numerous cases of corruption in 2016, he was also questioned for maintaining the concessions of his radios despite being a public official, something that the Salvadoran Constitution expressly prohibits.

The radio space also has a portion for community radios, which are tuned into small community spaces. The Association of radios and participatory programs of El Salvador (ARPAS) has 22 concessions to operate in many Salvadoran municipalities. It should be noted that most community radios owned by ARPAS use the same frequency, 92.1 FM, a frequency of national reach acquired with international cooperation funds as the only way to access the radio electric spectrum.

Some organs of the Salvadoran state, such as the central government, through the Presidency of the Republic, and the Legislature (Congress), also have radio frequencies, albeit with little popularity. Public Radio, *National Radio*, has traditionally operated more as a government propaganda agency than as a means of informative communication.

Television

The press has been the most influential when it comes to generating informative content, particularly the political one. Nevertheless, it is clear that it loses the battle for economic profit, and for reach to the mass of consumers. Television is the queen of the media market in El Salvador. It not only controls more than 40 percent of the advertising market, according to the Superintendency of Competition, but also has tended to growth, as part of the telecommunications sector, between 1990 and 2007, until reaching 4.13 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) last year, according to statistics from the Central Reserve Bank. In 2013, the sector represented 3.96 percent of the total added value in the national economy.

SIGET has reported that there are 53 concessions of television channels. However, the actual number, according to a study of 2016 by the Superintendency of Competition, is reduced to 42 channels because, in some cases, the concessions were reported to the same owner with complementary geographical scopes. Most channels – 35 out of 42 – are private and have a strictly commercial purpose. Eighteen of them have national coverage.

Regarding the remaining 7 non-commercial channels, most of them have religious contents: Three are related to the Roman Catholic Church – the only one with legal recognition in the Salvadoran Constitution – and two are Evangelical Christians. The remaining two are authorised (not licensed) by the Presidency of the Republic (*Channel 10*, titled *El Salvador Television*) and by the Parliament (*Channel 9*). As it is with state radios, *Channel 10* has served as a propaganda medium rather than as public television. In addition, media companies managed by the state, were grouped by the Presidency which increased their influence on the informative agenda.

The 25 channels of commercial television, according to the competition report, are owned by 16 business groups or companies. Only five groups own more than half of the licensed channels: Telecorporación Salvadoreña (TCS), with five channels; Megavisión Group, with five; Máxima, with four; Master, with four; and Cable Frecuencias, with three channels. However, only the first two, together with the companies As Media (owner of *Channel 12*) and Tecnovisión (owner of *Channel 33*), are the most profitable and most rated groups of Salvadoran television.

TCS owns the main channels of open television: 2, 4, 6, 31 and 35. It is also the highest-income group, according to Competition. In 2013, according to the aforementioned report, TCS presented revenues of US\$45.7m in its financial statements. TCS, which began transmitting in 1965, has as main shareholders the Eserki family. The family, one of the most prominent in the Salvadoran economy, has traditionally supported the political right. Its informative and editorial spaces as well. This group of channels has historically been consumed because it has growth amidst an environment of wild deregulation and the absence of antitrust measures, which has given them an advantage over other operators. For example, it has had the rights to transmit the main sporting events, such as the World Cup, and entertainment broadcasts, such as beauty pageants and the American Film Academy Awards.

Its closest competitors reported revenues much lower than TCS: *Channel 12*, owned by the company AS Media, reported revenues of US\$7.1m for 2013; while Grupo Megavisión (of the company Indesit SA de CV), owner of channels 15, 17, 19, 21 and 69, reported US\$7.6m; Tecnovision, owner of *Channel 33*, reported US\$2.9m.

By reviewing the ratings of television stations, measured by the company Rivera Media, and validated by the Superintendency of competition, TCS is again at the forefront. In 2014, the most-watched channels were 2, 4, and 6 (all three owned by TCS), 21 (Megavisión), 12 (from as Media) and 19 (also from Megavisión). As a group, TCS channels (2, 4, 6 and 35) had a rating of 66 percent in 2014; Megavisión (with its channels 15, 19 and 21) had a rating of 21 percent .

Nevertheless, even though television has a dominant place in the media market, it is not exempt of the deep transformations occurring in the Salvadorian communication media system due to the changes in the news consumption habits fostered by the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Digital media are getting increasingly more consumers. According to the iLifebelt report about the social networks dynamic in Central America and the Caribbean, 75 percent of the population use Social Networks to be up to date with current events and news. Although the country has a high digital divide, the increase of news consumption on social networks continues to increase.

Digital Media

All the main newspapers, television groups and radios of have their digital version, a process that began since the first decade of the new century. This shift, coherent with the global news landscape, has not been the most significant in Salvadoran digital journalism.

During the last decade, and particularly in the second half, El Salvador has experienced a surge of the digital native media. Independent calculations estimate that since 2009 more than 200 new digital native media have emerged. Many arise in

political junctures--in support of determined candidates, officials, and specific political parties--and their main characteristic is the anonymity of alleged journalists who write the news, in fact biased information.

However, El Salvador has also been the scene of the birth of independent journalistic endeavors, which have marked a trend in the Central American region. *El Faro*, founded in 1998, was the first digital newspaper created in Latin America, and has since marked a difference for its multi-award-winning investigative journalism.

Other publications such as *La Página*, the *Blog* or *Diario 1* have more audiences, according to measurements made by the Alexa statistical site and reports of preference of the Salvadoran universities Tecnológica and José Matías Delgado. It is important to emphasise that the digital versions of the two main newspapers of the country, *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario de Hoy* are much more popular than any of the digital native media.

Other relevant digital media companies by their number of reader and their topics are: *El Salvador Times*, *FACTum*, *Diario1*, *Contrapunto*, *VOCES Diario digital*, *El Metropolitano Digital* and *Verdad Digital*.

Social Networks

According to a study of 2016 made by the company iLifeBelt, there are 22 million Facebook users in Central America and Dominican Republic. Facebook is the most used social network in the region. In El Salvador, according to the study, there are 3.1 million users, the second country, after Guatemala, with more active accounts. Also in the 2018 report by the same company, 94 percent of Internet users in Central America, accessed using a smartphone. In 2017 Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube are the most used social networks.

The 2016 survey of Latinobarómetro indicates that 45 percent of Salvadorans who claim to use social networks prefer Facebook, 20 percent YouTube and 14 percent Twitter.

Despite the number of users - El Salvador has just over 6 million inhabitants - Internet access is not yet so widespread in the country. Another Latinobarómetro survey showed that in 2013 there were 68 percent of Salvadorans who said "never or hardly ever" make use of the Internet. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in a report of 2016, said that El Salvador was one of the countries in the region with the highest growth in Internet introduction, when the data of 2010 and 2015 were compared. However, it was also one of the countries in the region where the gap between urban households that have Internet, compared to rural households that don't, was greater.

Regarding the social network YouTube, the channel *FernanFloo* has to date more than 28 million subscribers, more than four times the population of El Salvador. On Twitter, the microblogging social network, 6 out of the top ten accounts by number of followers, belong to news media accounts. This is also the case with the Facebook Fan Pages. In the top ten are *La Prensa Gráfica*, *Noticias4Vision*, *El Grafico*, *Elsalvador.com*, *El Noticiero* and *Noticiero Hechos*.

Opinion Makers

The evolution of social networks has diminished the importance of blogs as opinion generators in El Salvador. In the past, it was easy to identify influencers and opinion makers through their blogs, as in the case of former diplomat Ernesto Rivas Gallont. Currently, several personalities that strive to become opinion leaders can be identified. They are supported not only by their blogs, but have also access to print and television media, as in the case of the op-ed writer from *El Diario de Hoy*, Paolo Luers, a Salvadorian journalist of German origin; the political pundit Alberto Arene, anchor of the broadcasted show FOCOS; Dagoberto Gutierrez, political pundit, social leader and former guerrilla combatant from FMLN who publishes his weekly columns in media such as *VOCES Diario Digital*, and the jesuit priest José María Tojeira, who broadcasts his points

of view about national current events in *Radio YSUCA*, radio station from Central America University and *Diario CoLatino*. Also, some opinion leaders stand out on television shows such as the Q & A format from journalist Ernesto López and the tv program “Thinking Out Loud”, directed by Alfredo Mena Lagos.

Sources

Newspapers

- [Diario El Mundo](#)
- [Diario CoLatino](#)
- [El Diario de Hoy](#)
- [El Gráfico](#)
- [El Independiente](#)
- [La Prensa Gráfica](#)

Radio

- [ARPAS](#)
- [Grupo Radio Stéreo](#)
- [Grupo Radial Samix](#)
- [Radio Corporación](#)
- [Radio Grupo Medavision](#)
- [Radio Mayavisión](#)
- [Radio Nacional de El Salvador](#)
- [YSKL](#)
- [YSUCA](#)

Television

- [Canal 12](#)
- [Canal 33](#)
- [Grupo Megavisión](#)
- [TCS](#)
- [Televisión Nacional de El Salvador](#)
- [TVO](#)

Digital media

- [Contrapunto](#)
- [Diario 1](#)
- [El Blog](#)
- [El Faro](#)
- [El Metropolitano Digital](#)
- [El Salvador Times](#)
- [La Página](#)
- [Revista Factum](#)
- [VOCES Diario digital](#)

- [Verdad Digital](#)

Social Network

- [El Grafico](#)
- [Elsalvador.com](#)
- [El Noticiero](#)
- [Fernanfloo](#)
- [La Prensa Gráfica](#)
- [Noticias4Vision](#)
- [Noticiero Hechos](#)

Opinion makers

- [Alberto Arene](#)
- [Dagoberto Gutiérrez](#)
- [José María Tojeira](#)
- [Paolo Luers](#)

Organisations

Trade Unions

The Constitution of El Salvador establishes the right of public and private workers to form unions. However, this is not a common practice, it is rather non-existent within the media of El Salvador. To date, the only organisation closest to being considered as a union is the so-called *Sindicato de Periodistas y Similares de El Salvador* (Syndicate of Journalists and similars of El Salvador, SINPESS), created in 1989 by the employees of the *Diario Latino*, who subsequently founded a Cooperative Society of Employees of the *Diario Latino de R.L.*, owner of the current *CoLatino* newspaper. The SINPESS is made up of employees of that newspaper and by people who do not exercise the journalistic profession.

There is awareness among journalists that they have the right to be part of a union and that it is an essential political instrument they have available whether they work in the public or private sector, to promote and defend their interests. However they manifest little to none interest in forming a union within the companies they work for. This situation has allowed massive layoffs, harassment and violations to labor rights. Recently, the Ministry of labor and social prevision (MTPV in Spanish) and APES have made joint efforts to attempt to guarantee labor rights for journalists in situations such as unjustified layoffs, no pay of overtime hours and unreported social benefits. Sandra Guevara, an official from the Ministry has presented detailed information reporting that just from August 2017, more than 56 complaints have been issued, with a close follow-up to achieve a positive outcome. She pointed out that these 56 cases were in traditional media companies such as printed, television and radio media but also in digital media. The complainers argue that their labor rights have been violated.

It also states that a big issue for the Ministry of Labor is that journalists from media companies do not issue complaints about violations of their rights. Some representatives from the journalist guild have publicly declared and published on their website that one of the outcomes of the agreement between them and the Ministry is the signature of a letter of engagement. This

document proposes that both institutions (the Ministry and APES) ensure the journalists rights, independently of the kind of media they work.

Journalist Associations

The Association of Journalists of El Salvador (APES) was born in 1936. It is the main and most recognised association that represents journalists, workers from public and private institutions – who are not journalists – and even academics. Despite being the most important institution, the APES does not aggregate the majority of Journalists in El Salvador. In fact, most journalists do not belong to any association.

The APES is responsible for producing reports on freedom of expression, denouncing attacks against the press, and delivering journalism awards – in some occasions, awarded to employees of political parties.

Currently, they are also working in the creation of the Bureau for the Protection of Journalists and Workers Related to Information Activities. This initiative is supported by the Office of the Procurator for the Defense of Human Rights (PDDH in Spanish) as well as representatives from association of journalists and workers from media related to information, universities and human rights defenders. One of the main objectives of the Bureau is the formulation of a Law of Integral Protection for Journalists, in labor and emotional safety. They also propose the creation of an early warning system to protect their members. Finally, the bureau proposes a registry that allows them to monitor the safety situation for journalists and make recommendations to authorities. With this they hope to avoid reaching horrible situations such as journalists killings like those of the neighbouring countries of El Salvador.

There is also another organisation, the *Asociación de Periodistas Independientes de El Salvador* (Association of Independent Journalists of El Salvador - ASPIES), with little representation and formed, again, by journalists, communicators and other professionals outside the journalistic profession.

Private companies owning most of the radios and television channels are represented in the Salvadoran Association of Broadcasters (ASDER in Spanish). The association has worked as a political instrument to defend the commercial interests of large media companies.

The *Consejo Nacional de la Publicidad* (National Advertising Council - CNP) is responsible for ensuring the ethical advertising code that appears in the media. The CNP is private, and it is composed by the *Asociación Nacional de Anunciantes de El Salvador* (National Association of Advertisers of El Salvador - ANAES), the *Asociación Salvadoreña de Agencias de Publicidad* (Salvadoran Association of Advertising Agencies - ASAP) and the *Asociación Salvadoreña de Medios Publicitarios* (Salvadoran Association of Advertising Media - ASMP).

News Agencies

El Salvador does not have a national news agency or a private agency with true relevance. The Salvadorian Press Agency (APS in Spanish) operates since 2017, although it is not official nor there is a government statement about its existence. The daily content they produce is mostly news, related with the current government and its achievements, and their sponsors are only from public agencies. Journalists interviewed about the existence of the press agency did not confirm either the government ownership over the press agency.

In the past, during the civil war that the country suffered between 1980 and 1992, United Press International (UPI), Associated Press (AP), NOTIMEX de México, among other relevant agencies, were essential to deliver news to different media outside de country. Also during the past conflict, the insurgent movement FMLN owned 3 news agencies, most notably

the Salvadorian Press Agency (SALPRESS in Spanish). At present, there are private companies that are dedicated to selecting news from local media to offer them to companies. Their presence is not representative given the ease, nowadays, of accessing the online portals of the various Salvadoran media.

Audience measurement organisations

The country does not have an institutional (state owned) body to measure audiences. The most similar thing is done by a private company, Rivera Media, which is dedicated to measuring the audiences of television channels. These analysis focus their attention towards the audience rating and the struggle for getting advertisers; the transformations of the audiences and the way that traditional media should face these changes are not analysed.

Another topic that has been highlighted are the studies on electoral behavior; in this dimension the Public Opinion Institute from Central America University José Simeón Cañas stands out. The Research Center for Salvadorian Public Opinion from Technological University of El Salvador and LPG Data, run a poll from *La Prensa Gráfica*. The continuous electoral campaigns have had an important role for the strengthening of this specific research topic.

There are several academic papers about the behavior of audiences, that contribute to the analysis of the role and thoughts of audiences. Nevertheless, there is no academic instance that analyses the behavior of audiences in a systematic way, their change dynamic and the chance to become a central player in the media system, through training process in critical reception (Marroquín, 2007). This topic is still focused on political and marketing interests, without a public approach in the analysis of audiences.

There is no real measurement of the circulation of newspapers; they are not required to report the number of copies of their circulation. Except for the newspaper *El Mundo*, which does so for strictly commercial purposes as information for potential advertisers, newspapers do not report their number of copies.

Sources

Trade unions

- [SINPESS](#)

Journalists associations

- [APES](#)

Other organisations

- [ASAP](#)
- [ASDER](#)
- [CNP](#)

Policies

Media legislation

The regulations on the communication media in El Salvador answer to the logic of minimal state intervention. The telecommunication laws give the state a limited role, making the market intervention on the media system easier. This tendency is persistent in the left-leaning government from FMLN. In the last five years there have been adjustments in the regulations that, although they constitute an advance, still do not reflect a public use of the radio spectrum.

There is no general media law in El Salvador and there is no control over what is published. Instead, the granting of the radio spectrum, where radio and television operate broadcasting, is regulated, because it is owned by the state. All the regulation on concessions – and also on telephony and cable television – is included in the Telecommunications Act, which gave life to the General Superintendency of Electrical Power and Telecommunications (SIGET in Spanish), adopted in 1997.

Access to the frequencies was granted through auctions. Once they were granted, the companies could have exploited the concessions for 20 years, with automatic renovations. On May 5 2016, the National Assembly approved the amendment to the General Act of Telecommunications. Among the main changes are the acknowledgement of the non-profit Community Radiodiffusion, the suppression of the auction system as the only mechanism to access frequencies and the revocation of the automatic extension of the licenses granted.

The amendment seeks to establish more equitable rules for the three sectors that exercise communication in the country. That way, state media will access frequencies in a direct way and the community media will access through a contest, where the evaluation criteria will be the communicational project and their social impact. Commercial media will access frequencies through the auction mechanism. In addition, with the amendment, the granted licenses will not be able to be transferred or leased without express permission of the SIGET, including an assessment from the Superintendency of Competition. That way the limitation of media concentration and monopoly practices is expected.

In spite of these advances, the amendment does not modify the current media landscape. A specific portion for community media was not allocated, nor was the public media acknowledged. To summarise, the audiovisual media system is still concentrated in commercial media oligopolies. Besides, the regulations about contests are not completely defined, which leaves a wide room for maneuvering for governments and the business sector (Carballo y Crispancho, 2014).

The press has a legal handle in the law of printing, a regulation approved in 1950. Article 8 of the Act assures: "Printers will not be subject to any caution tax. For the purposes of this law, printed Press will be understood as any production, diffusion or sale of newspapers, magazines, leaflets, books, manuals, loose sheets." In this context, print media is subject to very few regulations by the state. The Inter American Press Society (2017) has informed against the hostility toward communication media due to the critics expressed by the President Salvador Sánchez Cerén about their coverage in topics such as safety. In spite of this tension, to date there are no news about regulations focused on limiting the role of the press.

There are some regulations on the content of communication media such as the Article 34 from the Law of Equality, Equity and Eradication of Discrimination Against Women, focused on the expression of an "equal image, plural and without stereotypes of the women and men role in society." Also, there is the Integral Law for A Life free from Violence Against Women. Nevertheless, both regulations do not establish juridical consequences for noncompliance, with the exception of a fine for communicating "hate content against women", included in the Integral Special Law (Iglesias, 2014).

There is also the Law of Integral Protection of Children and Youth (LEPINA in Spanish) that forbids the use of images of children without explicit approval from their parents. Also, it promotes the divulgation of rights, duties and guarantees for children and teenagers (Art 97). To summarise, even though there are some laws about content-related issues, regulation in

El Salvador is minimal, and this has enabled the growth of an mass media market with few competitors.

On February 2016, the National Assembly issued the Special Law against Informatic Crimes and Related Offenses. In its First Article it establishes that "its purpose is to protect the legal rights of juridical assets from criminal acts committed by means of Information Technologies and the Communication, as well as the prevention and punishment of crimes committed for the detriment of data stored, processed or transferred; their systems, infrastructure or any of its components, or those committed through the use of said technologies that affect interests associated with the identity, property, privacy and image of the natural or legal persons in the terms here established and provided in this Law." This law, that did not get the unanimous vote from all legislators, also implies amendments to the Penal Code, so crimes related to data and information protection could be included and cybercrimes can be typified.

Accountability systems

Self-regulation mechanisms are very weak in El Salvador. The closest thing similar to a self-regulation system for journalists is the Ethics Code from APES. This code is not acknowledged by the owners of the communication media. There are no organisations or mechanisms within the communication media to establish an ombudsman.

Owners of media companies have always publicly rejected any attempt to regulate their actions, arguing that "there is already a self-regulation." They also implicitly argue the traditional motto that "the best law is the inexistent one." Nowadays there are only fading memories of the 2006 initiative implemented by commercial media titled Media United for Peace (MEUNO), where most of communication media committed themselves to give a more professional approach to news about violence to seek an improvement in the peace climate of the country.

Regulatory authorities

Radio, film and television are the most regulated media in the country. Or rather the only ones. In El Salvador the Direction of Public Broadcasting, Radio and Television (DEPRT), depends from the Ministry of Government and Territorial Development. The directorate is in charge of censoring and categorising - if they are suitable for all audiences, for teenagers or only adults - the national television programs and the films that are shown in the cinemas. The direction, in theory, also has power over radio programming; in practice, however, radios escape this control. It is common that censorship occurs almost exclusively for moral and/or religious issues, and not for themes of graphic violence.

In the last six years DEPRT has been conducting sensitivity sessions on topics about genre, rights for children and youth, as well as values and principles. These sessions have had the participation of children, teenagers, senior adults and persons with disabilities. These activities have been carried out through cinema forums where movies about values and principles are projected. Also, they provide information about violence prevention, respect to the film rating system as well as radio and television programmes. In addition, they inform about content rights within the current legal regulations that support DEPRT actions, such as: Integral Special Law For a Life Free From Violence Against Women, Law of Equality, Equity and Eradication of Discrimination Against Women and the Law for the Integral Protection of children and Youth (LEPINA in Spanish).

Sources

- [Code of Ethics for journalists in El Salvador](#)
- [Dirección de Espectáculos Públicos, Radio y Televisión](#)

Education

Universities and schools

There is no Journalism University in El Salvador. This means that the media are not obliged to recruit only graduate professionals as journalists in their newsrooms. Graduate studies in journalism are almost non-existent at the main universities of the country, which have instead activated graduate courses in Organisational Communication and Strategic Communication. It is important to say that the degree in Journalism by the University of El Salvador, the only public university in the country, has a curriculum that dates back to 1993.

Communication degrees are relatively recent. Most of them were created during the 1990s, and in their inception had a generalist journalism-oriented approach (Marroquin, 2005). After that, they moved to organisational communication studies, due to labour market demands and socioeconomic conditions of those dedicated to the informative activity. In this process, the discussion about the journalistic profession and its specific norms was not faced thoroughly by the academy, which has contributed to the weakness of this career. In addition, regarding the undergraduate and graduate degrees, it is necessary to look beyond the instrumental vision of the journalistic activity and rediscover the public vocation of this activity.

There is a challenge to create and maintain an academic community that can contribute to the discussion on the journalism identity in the current transformation of the communication media system, so that the journalistic activity can provide answers to the issues faced within the country and the region.

These are the universities that, to date, issue a degree in journalism or similar:

- Andrés Bello University: Bachelor Degree in Communications
- Central American University: Bachelor's degree in Social Communication
- Don Bosco University: Bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences
- José Matías Delgado University: Bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences
- Mónica Herrera Communication School: Bachelor's degree in Communication and Digital strategy
- Technological University: Journalism technician degree University of El Salvador (public): Bachelor's degree in Journalism

Professional development

The development of the journalistic career is weak in El Salvador, given the fact that it has been structured within a context of strong economic, political and social tensions. Journalists carry out their activity in precarious conditions and high vulnerability, according to the paper research *Between Censorship and Discrimination* (2014), seven out of ten Salvadorian journalists have suffered censorship at some point in their profession. Half of the information professionals received different kinds of aggressions and three out of ten communicators have suffered some kind of restriction to information.

The precariousness in which journalism is practiced as well as its low level of professionalisation, can be partially explained

by the low interest that this topic has received by the academia, which makes it difficult to receive inputs about the day to day situation of journalists and their challenges. In addition, currently there is no statistical data or institutions that ensure a stable future for journalists or similar professions. It is a poor situation that the university educational system (private or public) entrusts to their students and alumni. There are, however, some kinds of relationship between universities and communication media. Private universities such as the Central America University José Simeón Cañas or public universities such as El Salvador University, have agreements with some of the main printed and digital media (*La Prensa Gráfica, El Diario de Hoy, El Faro, El Mundo, VOCES Diario digital, Diario CoLatino y Contrapunto*), so their students can do their internships in their newsrooms. It is not a written rule, but some of these students are hired after they finish their internships.

This scenario, has limited the chance to consolidate an organised journalistic guild, as it jeopardises its social function. The guild can be identified as a polarised group with low capacity of influence over the actors in the media and political system. This low agency, reduces its autonomy and prevents it from consolidating the identity as a guild (Carballo y Cristancho, 2014).

Sources

- Central American University: [Bachelor's degree in Social communication](#)
- Don Bosco University: [Bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences](#)
- José Matías Delgado University: [Bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences](#)
- Mónica Herrera School of Communication: [Bachelor's degree in Communication and Digital strategy](#)
- Technological University: [Journalism technician degree](#)
- University of El Salvador (public): [Bachelor's degree in journalism](#)

Conclusions

Conclusion

Most of the communication media in El Salvador are defined by their closeness with political and business powers. Many of them, specially the so called traditional media (newspapers and television), have been essential for candidacies and political campaigns of political parties.

This dependence and the surge of social networks, have been paramount to explain the audience reduction of traditional media, especially newspapers, that have experienced significative losses in recent years.

The regulation of the media landscape is associated to the logic of minimal state intervention. Even the Telecommunications Act still grants a limited role to the state, enabling the market intervention. This kind of regulation has been maintained by both right-leaning governments as well as left-leaning FMLN governments. The amendments promoted in the last 5 years constitute an advancement, but still do not reflect a public use of the radioelectric spectrum, neither a substantial advance to the operation of a plural and diverse media system as it is indicated by the international standards on freedom of speech.

Television is the most important medium in the country. It is the most widespread and the one that receives the most from advertisers. Therefore, its political influence is essential.

Finally, it is necessary to emphasise that the media landscape in El Salvador, defined by its low level of specialisation, has been deeply impacted by the surge of social networks and digital age, enabling a dissemination of digital media. In most cases these have been useful to perform a serious and rigorous journalism, but in other cases to boost political projects and even the 'fake news' phenomenon.

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