

Guatemala - Media Landscape

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Overview

The media landscape of Guatemala is going through a complex phase of rearrangement. Changes range from the adaptation of print, television and radio to digital versions, to the reconfiguration of business models that were successful for decades, but have then become obsolete due to the new dynamics of communication and the Internet. However, television and radio continue to be the media with the wider reach.

In his book *Historia del Periodismo en Guatemala* (History of Journalism in Guatemala) Alfonso María Landerach indicates that the first newspaper registered in the country was the *Gazeta de Guatemala* in 1729, which was the second newspaper born in Latin America. Up to 1841 there were 57 newspapers, among them *El Editor Constitucionalista* (The Constitutional Publisher), the first to take the flag of the emancipation from Spain. In contrast *El Amigo de la Patria* (The Friend of the Fatherland) was born from a conservative directive and in defense of the crown supporters. "The controversies that both newspapers sustained gave rise to the founding of two opposing parties" points Landerach. Up to 1871, 80 newspapers were registered.

Print news corporations such as *Prensa Libre* (Free Press) and *La Hora* (The Hour) began to form during the era of military dictatorships, which ended in 1985, and consolidated after the signing of the peace treaty in 1996 (e.g. *el Periódico* and the defunct *Siglo XXI*). By 2018, among the relevant active media focused on political news, there are five televisions (three from the same owner), six native digital outlets and five radios, plus others of lesser importance. Two printed formats have disappeared since 2013.

By 2018, 83 percent of Guatemalan households owned a television, whereas a report published by Hootsuite indicates that only 40 percent have Internet access. The gap in digital access to information puts digital versions of print media and digital natives at a huge disadvantage. Their business models are based on the sale of newspapers on the street (increasingly less effective) to attract readers to their website. This implies that no matter how successful their strategies are, at the moment it is not possible for them to match the reach of television and radio, since they will only reach a third of Guatemalans.

The relationship between media and political parties was portrayed in 2015 by the report *Financiamiento de la Política en Guatemala* (Financing of Politics in Guatemala) prepared by the *Comisión Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala* (Commission Against Corruption in Guatemala - CICIG). This report highlights the importance of media in molding public opinion. In different sections, the document emphasises that radio and television have had more weight than print and digital media.

A study published in 2009 by The Trust for the Americas and the *Instituto Prensa y Sociedad* (Institute for Press and Society - IPYS) highlights that "In few countries, such a high level of concentration of ownership of the media will be found, as in Guatemala." The CICIG report confirmed this assertion six years later by ensuring that there are three major problems in the

relationship between media and politics: a) There is a high concentration of national media, especially open television and radio networks that cover the whole country; b) Dispersion in the local, departmental and regional media; and c) Emergence of media groups linked to political leaders.

The concentration of media is represented mainly by Mexican businessman Ángel González, owner of television and radio stations in 14 countries in Latin America. In Guatemala, he owns the *Albavisión* corporation (named after his wife Alba Lorenzana) owner of the frequencies of channels 3, 7, 11 and 13, which technically makes him the owner of a monopoly of open television. The only competition in unpaid television are the channels of the National Congress and the *Canal Maya* (Maya Chanel), the first producing content limited to institutional information and the latter producing little to no content produce.

In Guatemala, the State does not have direct intervention on media, however, for decades it was able to achieve a certain level of influence through millionaire budgets destined for advertising. The current government (2016-2020) was the first to reduce this spending drastically. Those who did try to exercise direct control over the media were some politicians who tried to venture into the media business. While she was vice president, Roxana Baldetti bought the majority of shares of the newspaper *Siglo XXI* through cardboard companies and figureheads, with money coming mainly from bribes. When she was discovered she could not continue with the investment and the newspaper (which used to be one of the most important and critical of the government in office in Guatemala) went bankrupt.

Manuel Baldizón, frontrunner of the 2015 elections until citizen protests against corruption lowered his popularity, founded the magazine *Es noticia*, the newspaper *La Nación* and the television channel *Canal+*. They all disappeared after Baldizón lost the election. He is currently being detained in the United States accused of money laundering; in Guatemala he is also implicated in the globe-wide Odebrecht corruption case, so charges for embezzlement and illicit electoral financing await him. The bankruptcy of these media linked to politicians caused the unemployment of dozens of journalists.

With an approximate population of 17 million, Guatemala, is part of the so-called *Triangulo Norte* (North Triangle) together with El Salvador and Honduras, countries with similar socioeconomic, migratory, violence-related and drug trafficking issues. In the ranking of freedom of the press, the organisation Reporters Without Borders placed the country in the 116th place out of 180, in the range of countries in "difficult situation." In addition to low educational quality, journalists located outside the capital receive lower salaries and are more vulnerable to repression by local governments. Between 2016 and 2017, 11 journalists were killed, two of them died after being attacked with a firearm in the central park of Mazatenango, Suchitepéquez, following a publication made against the mayor of this municipality.

In 2017, a study prepared by *Barómetro de las Américas* (Barometer of the Americas) indicated that the media had a confidence level of 61.9 percent. However, it is possible that this index has dropped in 2018 as a result of the emergence of groups focused on defamation and the discrediting of the media that question the government.

Media

Print

Print media have existed in Guatemala for more than two centuries, but it was not until the democratic era that they gained mass circulation. Gustavo Berganza, cited by *Plaza Pública* explains that, unlike other countries, the Guatemalan media are

not owned by the country's elites. "The media in Guatemala belong to (families), an emerging middle class sector, which through government connections or success, as some exceptions, managed to build their media emporiums," he said.

The three most important printed media of today, *Prensa Libre*, *Siglo XXI* (recently defunct) and *elPeriódico* came to share links at different times. *La Hora* was founded in 1920 by Clemente Marroquín, father of Oscar Clemente Marroquín (current director of *La Hora*), father of Gonzalo Marroquín (former editor of *Prensa Libre* and founder of the new magazine *Crónica*) and uncle of José Rubén Zamora (founder of *Siglo XXI* and current president of *elPeriódico*).

These newspapers, with the exception of *Prensa Libre* which has a wider market sector, are aimed to an audience of medium-high and high socioeconomic strata with a higher educational level, residents of the capital city and the different urban areas of the country. In the political spectrum, these printed newspapers were historically placed in a pro-business segment; some of them included in their board of directors members of the main guild of businessmen in Guatemala *Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales y Financieras* (Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations - CACIF).

It is important to note that the coverage of these print media focuses on politics, corruption and economy. *elPeriódico* mainly focuses on the capital city and its surroundings, *Prensa Libre* specialises in urban centers across the country, which lets it also focus in communitary matters. Recently *La Hora* - with traffic exclusively to the capital city - extended its editorial line to give special coverage to migration topics. Currently it publishes the supplement *La Voz del Migrante* (the voice of the migrant).

The segment unattended by traditional print media began to be covered from the mid-1990s, when the newspapers *Al Día* and *Nuestro Diario* were born. Unlike the previous printed newspapers, these two projects were aimed at a popular audience (with low levels of income and education) nationwide. The editorial line was distinguished by larger photographs, less amount of text, with priority to red notes and photo galleries of models and hostesses. *Al Día* – owned by the News Corporation as well as *Siglo XXI* – opted for a Sunday supplement called *La Matraca*, known for the caricaturing of the characters of national events and political satire and at the time became very popular in its market segment. Although *Al Día* was born first, the then director of the media, Luis Enrique González, explained in 2013 to *Doses* that a bad investment did not allow them to expand. *Nuestro Diario*, on the other hand, grew so much that it became the newspaper with the largest circulation in the country with a print run of up to 300,000 copies per day, far exceeding the copies that *Prensa Libre* (125,000) and *elPeriódico* (30,000) printed at their best period.

Due to the characteristics of its audience, *Nuestro Diario* focuses on publishing crime stories, but also on topics related to migration and social issues from a local point of view. All print media have based their business model on the sale of advertising on their pages, paid for by different types of clients such as large companies, foundations, government, political parties and officials' proclamations. However, this model has become less and less viable for different reasons.

In 2018, the advertising budget allocated to print media by many companies had a substantial decrease, due to two reasons. On the one hand, companies consider print media less effective and prefer to pay for advertising on social networks, thus achieving more accurate metrics on the scope of their ads. On the other hand, in Guatemala there are deputies and businessmen who celebrate "the financial stranglehold to which they have subjected various media," as tweeted in December 2018, by Iván Velásquez, head of the CICIG, in the midst of a political crisis in which the government of Jimmy Morales began a struggle to undermine this commission. These statements were supported by columnists and publishers of different print and digital media.

Between 2017 and 2018 there were two attempts to enter the print media market. A news corporation, and one digital native media sought to expand into physical space by producing a printed edition of their publications. These media were *Soy502*

(by the same corporation that owns *Nuestro Diario*) and *Publimetro* (owned by the same corporation of radio *Emisoras Unidas*), who decided to create a new product aimed at a popular audience, which was called *Diario El Popular*. The strategy for these two new printed media was to go out into the streets of the capital city and nearby areas to give the newspapers for free, thus ensuring the scope of their publications and avoiding rejection percentages in stores where the daily edition is not sold. The model was attractive for some time, but in November 2018, the *Publimetro* Corporation decided to close the *El Popular* project.

Another income cut for print media (and media in general) will be given in 2019 as a result of the amendment of the *Ley Electoral y Partidos Políticos* (Electoral Law and Political Parties - LEPP). After the changes approved by Congress in 2016, political parties will no longer be able to pay for advertising in the media and the media will not be able to make donations or advertorials in favor of political parties. All the ads will be controlled and funded only by the *Tribunal Supremo Electoral* (Supreme Electoral Tribunal - TSE), at 20 percent of the usual rate of the media. After specific law reforms, media that wish to publish advertising paid by the government have to enroll to the TSE. As of early 2019, most media outlets opted not to. Because it comes from state funds, the budget for the electoral campaign that the media will receive will be drastically reduced in comparison to past elections. It is expected that this reduction in income will have a strong impact on their finances.

Among the different crises of print media, the only one that so far has ended in the bankruptcy of a corporation is the one that happened to *Siglo XXI* and its other media products, which existed for more than two decades and it went bankrupt after ex-president Roxana Baldetti bought shares of the company. After being accused of various acts of corruption, the investment in *Siglo XXI* stopped to the point that the print media, together with the popular newspaper *Al Día*, were closed.

Radio

The audience and reach of radio in Guatemala is different from print media. A 2016 study by Multivex Sigma Dos established that 94 percent of households own radios, making it the main route used by Guatemalans to inform and entertain themselves. The prime timetables for radio are between 11:00 and 14:00 and 17:00 until 19:00.

Internet penetration has not displaced the reach of radio, as it happened to other media. As it is estimated that less than 40 percent of Guatemalan households have full Internet access, digital platforms such as Spotify and YouTube have not yet supplanted radio channels. Rush hours and meal times are the moments of the day when the radio has the most audience. Internet podcasts are not part of the Guatemalan consumer culture and therefore do not represent a threat to the radio media.

The main radio corporations have their origins in the middle of the 20th century. As it's the case for television, Ángel González is the businessman with more radios in Guatemala. According to data from the *Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones* (Superintendency of Telecommunications - SIT), 38 percent of the FM spectrum is in the hands of five business groups or families. Of 726 frequencies, González' *Albavisión* group owns 15.9 percent of the radiophonic spectrum, *Emisoras Unidas* owns 10.6 percent, *Nuevo Mundo* 5.4 percent, *Alius* 3.8 percent and *Radio Corporación Nacional* 3.2 percent. Like the television network, the radios of *Albavisión* have been acting in favor of the governments of the day and, in the last three years, in demerit of the fight against corruption.

The community radio movement began in Guatemala around 1960. The *Federación Guatemalteca de Escuelas Radiofónicas* (Guatemalan Federation of Radio Schools - FGER) indicates that historically these frequencies were used at the local level to teach literacy and evangelise people of Mayan descent. Over the years they evolved to a more progressive stance, reducing religious messages. From its foundation in 1966 to the present day, it is estimated that FGER taught literacy skills to half a

million people. This was possible thanks to books distributed in the communities and to the work of local guides that accompanied the lessons offered in the radio.

Currently the programming of these frequencies lowered the religious content to a 10 percent, and the official newsreel of FGER focuses on covering subjects related to human rights, auditing of local governments, environmental issues, defense of their land against big companies projects and of their historic memory. The content is broadcasted in Spanish and then repeated in the local language.

According to SIT the definition of community radio does not exist, the commercial category is the only one with a legal basis. FGER is composed of 32 radio stations of which 75 percent with legal recognition as owners of the frequency. The other 25 percent does not possess legal documents but they do have the local support of their leaders. The stations broadcast 90 percent of their programming in the local language, creating content in the 23 Mayan languages. In regards to the scope, FGER estimates that their stations have a potential reach of 8 million people nationwide.

There are many stations that call themselves “community radios”, however, when listening to their content, they don’t provide any service to the community and are dedicated solely to transmit commercial ads or completely religious content.

The business model of community radios is based on alternative income sources. International cooperation was key to its growth but was lowered strongly years after the 1996 *Acuerdos de Paz* (Peace Agreements) were signed. Afterwards the sustainability of their model is largely based on management of projects, trainings, or alternative business such as pharmacies and community stores. Recently community radios of FGER gain funds with the sales of advertising spots, with the only condition that alcoholic drinks, cigarettes or any other commercial activity that harms people or the environment may not be promoted.

One of the most listened-to programmes from community radios is *Contacto Migrante*, focused in spreading advice for those who want to leave Guatemala, informing about help centers along the route towards the United States and legal counseling. As a result the audience has approached the radio to ask for advice, especially the relatives of missing migrants.

In 2008, the government of Guatemala authorised a resolution to develop a policy that would allow the confiscation of equipment from radio stations not authorised to operate. According to the Movement of Community Radios in Guatemala, this bill could have an impact on the closure of community radios useful to disseminate local information. In 2009, this organisation presented another bill (number 4087) to regulate this type of radio broadcasters. The initiative was approved in two readings but, following pressure from different sectors and the passivity of the deputies, its approval was suspended.

Television

Unlike other media, television has not yet lost the leadership in being one of the most influential channels to shape Guatemalans' opinions. Access to television in the country is possible in two ways: open signal and cable. The first is dominated by businessman Ángel González, owner of the open television frequencies of channels 3, 7, 13 and 11. This transmission format allows Angel González to reach 83 percent of households in the country. González has no real competition in the open signal. The other open signals belong to the Congress of the Republic and *Television Maya*, which focus their production on topics related to citizen participation, education, or appreciation of autochthonous cultures, however their production is scarce or nonexistent. This monopoly allows González's channels to reach groups with fewer resources in rural areas. The rating survey conducted by Multivex Sigma Dos shows that the most watched shows on a national level are those produced by generalist TVs targeting a popular audience. In 2015 the most watched show was *Combate*, a show in which two groups of male and female models compete in different challenges. The ranking also includes the news program for channel 3 (in favor of the government), the *Rosa de Guadalupe* (Mexican novel) and national soccer.

The fact that González has maintained this monopoly for more than six decades is no coincidence. The businessman's modus operandi on Guatemalan politics can be summarised in the criminal accusation presented by the District Attorney's Office and the CICIG in 2016. Checks and documents that were seized revealed how between 2008 and 2011 his companies contributed Q17.5m (US\$2.3m approximately) to the finances of the *Partido Patriota* (Patriot Party - PP) that led Otto Pérez Molina and Vice President Roxana Baldetti to the presidency. The editorial line of the Albavisión group has always been in favor of the government of the day.

On the other hand, cable television has gained more strength. This service is paid-for and can be contracted in any municipality from US\$7 a month; its programming includes channels aimed at a medium-low and low socioeconomic stratum; unlike the medium-high and high levels that prefer to consume entertainment via Internet and streaming platforms.

By 2014, a government study established that cable television reaches 80 percent of households in urban areas and 50 percent in rural areas. That same study established that there were 482 cable companies registered and 49 without licence. Until the last decade, these cable operators were small local companies that provided services to their nearby areas. However, in the last years the company Tigo (the largest telephone company in Guatemala allied with Millicom in Sweden) began an expansion of their business and bought the majority of local cable companies. This lowered the influence of cable owners, who usually introduced the patten of advertising paid by local businesses and politicians. It also ended the broadcast of local news programmes produced by these small companies. So far TIGO has specialised in programming related to sports and has not covered political content. The few cable companies they have not bought are already solid enough companies with a loyal territory, or belong to politicians who need to maintain that influence on the local advertising pattern. Although TIGO is a potential threat to the monopoly of Ángel González, TIGO broadcasts González' channels, so his influence is not really cut off.

Alongside these expansion models, there are two Guatemalan television stations that, contrary to the previous cases, are going through severe crises that threaten to bankrupt them. These are the television stations *Guatevisión* (owned by print media *Prensa Libre*) and *Canal Antigua*, both distributing content via cable for a public mainly based in urban areas, with access to high level education, focused on politics, corruption, public personalities and the economy. In 2018, *Guatevisión* had a sharp staff cut and reduced offices due to the low income it reported. *Canal Antigua* (owned by the same corporation as *Radio Emisoras Unidas*) had a boom during the PP government (2012-2015).

During those years one of its shareholders, Erick Archila, served as Minister of Energy. After the PP government was singled out for acts of corruption, *Canal Antigua* lost credibility and its revenues were also reduced.

There are other television stations of less importance, such as *Canal27* of religious Pentecostal type, *TV Azteca* (subsidiary of the Mexican television) and *Vea Canal* (pro government) among others. Television programmes that do not belong to large corporations are practically null, and those that exist are limited to the broadcast of local cable news.

Digital Media

By the end of 2010, all the traditional print media already had a web version, offering free access from that time. In 2013 a digital media tried to venture into a magazine model in PDF format, but it was not functional.

The top rank of the most visited digital media in the country is constantly disputed between the digital native *Soy502* and the web version of *Prensa Libre*. With a reading average of 2:10 and 3:30 minutes respectively, the web measurement portal Alexa places these two media among the ten most visited sites in the country, followed by *Publinews* (n 8), *Chapin TV*, the web version of the channels of Ángel González (n 9) and *Emisoras Unidas* (n 10) among others.

Unlike traditional print media, the most visited digital media generate the highest amount of traffic from a middle-level socioeconomic stratum, attracted by news related to entertainment, soccer and viral videos. The most visits come from mobile devices and from Facebook. The population that consumes the most news online is between 25 and 34 years old (they represent 28 percent of the visitors of the *Prensa Libre* website). It is important to note that migrants in the United States can represent, on average, a fifth of the traffic of these websites.

The business models of digital media are based on the number of visits they manage to attract and the advertising paid directly by the advertisers. There is no public data regarding how much revenue each corporation receives. In traditional media, printed advertisement continues to be the highest income compared to web versions: A full-page ad has an average value of US\$2,500 to US\$3,000. A main banner on a website has an average cost of US\$2,400.

Unlike print media, some digital native media reduced their dependence on the sale of advertising to private companies, and replaced it with the management of projects with international entities that finance their journalistic production. Such digital media work under the legal framework of a private company, like *Ojo con Mi Pisto* - focused on the supervision of local governments and attracting international donations - or as an annex to a bigger institution, like *Plaza Pública* - characterised by its in-depth reports and that works as an annex of Universidad Rafael Landívar.

Nómada on the other hand is a sample of a mixed model that combines cooperation and advertising. This mix of income has allowed these media to include issues related to the rights of minority groups, human rights and the environment on their agenda, topics that, due to their dynamics, may cause conflicts of interest with potential advertisers.

Social Networks

The country's historically low Internet penetration has begun to break, partly, thanks to telephone companies offering cheap, unlimited access to Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp, but not to other applications or websites, in order to attract more customers. According to the records of the SIT, in Guatemala there are more cell phones than inhabitants, the increase being mainly due to families who want to maintain contact with their migrants in the United States. Long-distance communication costs have been reduced, but limits to accessing information that circulates outside of these social media persist, as they come at an extra cost for the user.

According to the study *Digital in 2018 in Central America*, Facebook is the most used social network with 7.2 million people owning a Facebook account, equalling 42 percent of the population. Of these, 94 percent logged in through a cell phone. By 2017 other social media such as Instagram were used by less than 10 percent of the population.

This new offer from telephone companies, which includes more access to Internet but limited to the content available on the Facebook and Whatsapp apps, is as beneficial as potentially dangerous. On the one hand, it allows serious and professional media to get their message to a larger number of people who previously did not have access to information. On the other hand, the media needs that users access their website to generate more views so they can sell advertising spots to generate income, but this implies an extra cost for the users that is not included in the packages offered by telephone companies. If the complete information still resides on the news media websites, the audience will get to know only the headlines published on social network. In the absence of complete and proven information, Facebook and Whatsapp become a platform where misinformation has a large area to flourish.

Opinion Makers

Guatemalan opinion makers exert their influence from various digital platforms and not necessarily from personal websites or blogs. The only exception is Cash Luna, evangelical pastor leader of the church *Casa de Dios* (Home of God), owner of the second fan page with more followers in Guatemala according to the list prepared by Socialbakers. In this top 100 there is no other opinion maker.

There is no official data to allow making a list of the top 10 opinion makers. Regardless of its location in the political spectrum, José Rubén Zamora, president of *elPeriódico*, may be mentioned among the most influential; Pedro Trujillo, Juan Luis Font and Claudia Méndez Arriaza, hosts on a radio program. These opinion makers are specialised in corruption complaints and journalistic analysis.

There are other columnists such as Carlonia Escobar Sarti or Marcela Gereda, who focus mainly in social complaints. Regarding political analysis, Edgar Gutierrez can be named, or Philip Chicola, the latter specialised in analysis from a business point of view for his connection to the sector.

According to the Socialbakers portal, in the top 10 of Twitter users with the most followers in Guatemala, there are 7 media accounts, which makes Twitter a platform mainly used for gathering information. Although this platform is only used by 7 percent of the population, it is a tool for opinion generators to present their ideas, discuss them and then replicate them on their print and digital platforms.

Sources

Newspapers

- [Diario de Centroamérica](#)
- [elPeriódico](#)
- [La Hora](#)
- [Prensa Libre](#)
- [Publinews](#)
- [Soy502](#)

Radio

- [Emisoras Unidas](#)
- [Nuevo Mundo Radio](#)
- [Radio Punto](#)
- [Radio Sonora](#)
- [TGW](#)

Television

- [Canal 3](#)
- [Televisiete](#)
- [Trecevision](#)
- [Teleonce](#)
- [Guatevision](#)
- [Canal Antigua](#)
- [TV Azteca Guatemala](#)
- [VeaCanal](#)

Digital media

- [Centro de Medios Independientes](#)
- [Nomada](#)
- [Ojo con mi Pisto](#)
- [Plaza Pública](#)
- [República Gt](#)
- [Soy502](#)

Opinion makers

- [Carolina Escobar Sarti](#)
- [Claudia Méndez Arriaza](#)
- [Edgar Gutierrez](#)
- [Pastor Cash Luna](#)
- [Pedro Trujillo](#)
- [Philip Chicola](#)
- [José Rubén Zamora](#)
- [Juan Luis Font](#)

Organisations

Trade Unions

The only journalistic union that exists to this day is the one representing the workers of *Prensa Libre*, but after a strong administrative readjustment in 2018 it lost strength and survives with scarce members.

In the 1970's, the *Sindicato de Medios de Comunicación Social* (Syndicate of Social Communication Media – SIMCOS) was founded primarily by young people connected to guerrilla groups. Due to the context of the war, several of its members were attacked by the army. On November 16, 1979 founding member Jose Leon Castañeda was kidnapped, tortured and found dead in a street of Guatemala City. For this case, in 1981 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a resolution declaring that Guatemala had violated the American Convention of Human Rights. The union ceased its activities one year later.

Journalist Associations

Integration into associations is optional for Guatemalan journalists. There are three main guilds that group them, but only the *Instituto de Protección Social del Periodista* (Journalist's Social Protection Institute - IPSP) guarantees a benefit for their retirement. To join this institute, it is necessary to practice the profession for at least five years and to contribute a monthly fee proportional to the salary. These organisations play an important role when the different communication channels are threatened or one of its members is victim of an attack.

The *Cámara Guatemalteca de Periodismo* (Guatemalan Chamber of Media - CGP) is presented as an advocate of freedom of expression. In May 2018, it unified representatives of different media to request the Constitutional Court to declare illegal the article of the Electoral Law of Political Parties which prevents these groups from interacting directly with the media during the 2019 elections.

The *Asociación De Periodistas De Guatemala* (Association of Guatemalan Journalists - APG) is another association active in the country. It publishes press releases in defense of journalists who have been attacked physical or legally.

News Agencies

As of 2019 in Guatemala there are no agencies focused on the dissemination of news. In 2010, the government inaugurated the *Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticias* (News Agency of Guatemala - AGN) to "offer public information immediately and directly", which, however, does not function as a real agency and its news focuses only on highlighting the positive achievements of the government.

In 1983, in the middle of the armed conflict, the news agency CERIGUA was created to "break the information barrier" that prevented journalists from doing their work freely. It came to be one of references to report the army crimes and abuses committed in the region. Currently, it focuses on guaranteeing the rights of journalists and denouncing abuses against free expression.

Guatemala continues to be an important spot in the region, for this reason news agencies such as EFE, AP, AFP, Bloomer, Radio France International and Reuters have correspondents in the country.

Audience measurement organisations

In Guatemala there is no government agency created to officially measure hearings. This service is provided only by private companies, such as:

- Multivex Sigma Dos, highlighted by its television and radio measurements.
- Doses Guatemala, an organisation which has focused its efforts on studying the media more closely, from the type of

content to the political and business relationships that each of them has had.

- *Océano Azul Comunicaciones* (Blue Ocean Communications) that uses an intelligent algorithm to audit television and radio to verify if the paid pattern was shown on the day and time that was agreed with the sponsor.

During the period of political campaigns, the dynamics change and advertising agencies become audience measurement agencies, their services specialise in monitoring social networks and reach of web ads. The constant measurement of public opinion is important for political parties and devotes a good part of their budget just to hire this service.

Regarding the media, there is no regulation or law that obliges them to make public the data that shows their true scope.

Sources

Journalist Associations

- [Asociación de Periodistas de Guatemala](#)
- [Instituto de Protección Social del Periodista](#)
- [La Cámara de Guatemalteca de Periodismo](#)

Audience measurement organisations

- [Doses Guatemala](#)
- [Multivex Sigma Dos](#)
- [Nielsen](#)

Policies

Media legislation

Journalists in Guatemala are protected by the extensive Article 35 of the Constitution of the Republic, entitled “*Libertad de emisión del pensamiento*” (Freedom of Speech) which contemplates several scenarios of media governance. From its inception the article guarantees freedom of opinion, but the same paragraph indicates that if these comments lack respect for the dignity of a person, he/she who issued them will be held responsible in accordance with the sanctions established by the Penal Code.

The article makes an exception when it comes to public officials or employees, clarifying that any publication made against them cannot be classified as a crime. In case any person feels aggrieved by a publication, they may request a judge to convene a *Tribunal de Imprenta* (Printing Tribunal) made up of Guatemalans who do not work for the State, and who are elected by the *Colegio de Abogados* (Lawyers Association) and the *Colegio de Periodistas* (Journalists Association). If this court considers that the publication did damage the rights of the person, it will give off an opinion that will be sent to the judge who may continue with the trial process to emit a final judgment. These and other points are detailed in the Law of Freedom of Speech.

Personal data are protected by the Constitution; however, there are companies such as InforNet, DigiData and TransUnion that for years traded with the personal and banking information of Guatemalans. For a cost between US\$1 and US\$2, anyone

can access a person's complete information, including their residence address, telephone numbers, debt for loans or credit cards, claims and press releases in which they were mentioned. The Constitutional Court, the highest authority in Guatemala, has repeatedly dictated that these businesses are illegal. In the face of this prohibition these companies changed their modus operandi and now ask that every query be backed with the signature of the person being investigated. Although this does not prevent that private information be consulted without consent, credit companies or hospitals oblige their clients to sign these authorisations, if not the credit or service is not provided.

In 2017 a law project was presented to consider cyber crimes as real crimes; the proposal includes the use of private information on the Internet, harassment, cyber scams and others. The law project did not continue in Congress and there is no deadline to return to the discussion or achieve its approval.

Accountability systems

The closest thing to a system of responsibility in Guatemala is what is mentioned in the Freedom of Speech constitutional law, which regulates the procedures that the media and journalists must face in the event that one of their publications damages the rights of a person. The law requires that published articles are always signed by the author; otherwise, the responsibility falls on the legal representative of the media.

Media manage their own system of responsibility and respond to the criteria of its directors, shareholders or donors.

Regulatory authorities

Digital and print media are not regulated by any governmental authority. By law, they are only required to register with the IPSP (to which they must pay a small percentage of their earnings); they must also register with the Ministry of Interior and, in the case of for-profit organisations, to the *Superintendencia de Administración Tributaria* (Superintendence of Tax Administration - SAT). Media wanting to buy a .gt web domain must purchase it from the *Universidad del Valle*, which holds the registry for the country-code domain name.

Radios and television stations, on the other hand, are regulated by specific government entities. The General Law of Radio Telecommunications establishes the procedures to acquire a radio frequency. The SIT is the governmental entity delegated to administer the frequencies of Guatemala, which are considered property of the State and are granted to private companies only as usufruct. All frequencies can be purchased only through an open auction and the best offer is granted. This procedure harms community radio stations that usually operate on unauthorised radio frequencies. In case the State decides to auction the frequency in which they operate, they will not be able to compete with a large media corporation such as *Albavisión* or *Emisoras Unidas*.

In 2016, the Congress approved a reform to the Electoral Law of Political Parties that directly affects all kinds of media. The electoral campaigns were a period in which the media increased their profits because candidates invested large amounts of funds in advertising. With this modification of the law, the government is the only one that can pay the price of political campaigns, at a price lower than the market price, and only to the media registered before the *Tribunal Supremo Electoral* (Supreme Electoral Tribunal – TSE). The law also prohibits advertising media disguised as reports. The aforementioned CGP filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court on the grounds that this regulation is illegal.

Sources

- [Infornet](#)
- [Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones](#)

Education

Universities and schools

The largest training school in Guatemala is at the state university, Universidad San Carlos. Its School of Communication Sciences offers technical degrees in journalism, locution or advertising (3 years each) and a degree in Communication Sciences (two more years). Although it is the largest school, the lack of state investment means that students do not have updated and modern equipment to practice journalism. The career of journalism can also be found in most private universities, all with a duration of five years with different specialisations.

Currently, there are other 4 accredited institutions where it is possible to study journalism in Guatemala: Universidad Rafael Landívar, Universidad del Istmo, Universidad Galileo, and Universidad Mariano Gálvez.

Professional development

The best opportunities to develop professionally for Guatemalan journalists are in the capital city. Although universities offer careers in journalism in their campuses located in different regions of the country, the training given in these study centers is of low quality. This reflects in the low quality of the writing and reports of local newspapers. The best journalists in the country have been trained directly in the newsrooms (located in Guatemala City) and not necessarily in universities.

Media Development Organisations

There are organisations that work to support the development of media in Guatemala, during different times of the year they work in training programs supported by both local sponsors and international cooperation.

Among these organisations we can mention *Laboratorio de Medios* (Media Laboratory), a company that under the auspices of local banks or the United States cooperation, carries out training programs for journalists, especially for those who live outside the capital city or work for local and independent media. In the workshops they instruct them to better use the open data tools published by the government pages and to create databases to sustain their research.

In terms of journalists' security, the IREX organisation runs a training program to educate Guatemalan and Central American reporters who have been in risk situations.

Sources

Universities/Schools of Journalism

- Universidad del Istmo: [Licenciatura en Comunicación y Periodismo](#)
- Universidad Galileo: [Licenciatura en Medios de Comunicación e informativos](#)
- Universidad Mariano Gálvez: [Licenciatura en Ciencias de la Comunicación con énfasis en Locución,](#)

Periodismo o Publicidad

- Universidad Rafael Landívar: [Licenciatura en Ciencias de la Comunicación](#)
- Universidad San Carlos: [Técnico en locución, técnico en publicidad, técnico en locución, licenciatura en Ciencias de la Comunicación.](#)

Media development organisations

- [Laboratorio de Medios](#)
- [IREX](#)

Telecommunications

Mobile network ecosystem

4G services are available in Guatemala but the bandwidth allocated to this service is limited and few devices can navigate at this speed. The AWS band, which could be used to provide more bandwidth and Internet load capacity, belongs to the State and current laws prevent it from being auctioned. The government offered to work on these legal contradictions and plans to bring it to auction in 2019.

The study presented by Affordable Internet Alliance's indicates that 1 gigabyte of Internet costs 4.2 percent of an average monthly income per capita. On the other hand, a study prepared by the Directorate for Latin America and the Caribbean of 5G Americas indicates that, on average, Guatemalans consume only 400 megabytes per month. For comparison, this means that a Guatemalan can only watch five YouTube videos of average quality each month, then lose access to the Internet. For this reason people tend to limit the use of data and browse mainly in apps with free temporary access.

Due to an unresolved legal problem, the government has not auctioned the necessary frequencies and Guatemalans still don't have access to a better Internet quality.

Company profiles

In Guatemala there are three main Internet providers: Claro, Tigo and Movistar (owned by Telefonica), the latter is owner of Tuenti, another telephony brand aimed specifically at millennials.

Claro is owned by the Mexican Carlos Slim, the company was born after the privatisation of the national telecommunications company in 1998. Tigo is owned by Mario López, a Guatemalan businessman cataloged by Forbes magazine as the richest man in Central America. The company has grown exponentially in the last decade and currently focuses its efforts on owning the largest number of providers of cable television service. Movistar is co-owned by Telefonica in Spain and the Gutiérrez family, owners of the largest restaurants and food products corporation in Guatemala. In 2017 Movistar inaugurated Tuenti in Guatemala and aimed to a young market to which they wanted to reach with low prices, nevertheless, the problems with the headquarters made Telefonica opt to sell their assets in Central America. In January 2019 Telefonica de Guatemala and El Salvador were sold to America Movil (owner of Claro) for US\$645m. On the other hand Millicom (Tigo) purchased the rights to Telefónica Panamá, Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Main trends

Based on data from the App Store of Apple and Google Play of Android by 2018 the two most downloaded applications by Guatemalans are WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. This can be used as an indicator that establishes the most used digital tools to communicate in the country. These applications are also the most used to consume and share information and news.

The most important factor that has allowed the increased use of these applications is that companies, in order to gain more customers, sell data packages that allow unlimited access to certain applications at low prices. According to the study Digital in Central America in 2018, there are 7.2 million active social media users in Guatemala. Other networks such as Youtube, Twitter, Instagram do not exceed 7 percent of the population. Only 2 percent use an application to perform banking transactions, and 4 percent pay their bills online. The apps developed by media are not yet attractive for Guatemalans.

Mobile coverage

The study Digital in 2018 in Central America indicates that from 2017 to 2018 Internet users grew by 16 percent, the number of connected cell phones increased by 4 percent and the number of social network users via mobile grew by 19 percent.

At a Central American level, Guatemala is the fifth in penetration level. Mobile phone coverage is focused on urban areas while it's limited in rural areas, either because the towns are scattered or because of the mountainous geography of the country.

The study carried out by *Fondo para el Desarrollo de la Telefonía* (Fund for the Development of Telephony - Fondetel) indicated that the departments of Quiché, San Marcos, Huehuetenango and Alta Verapaz (areas with high poverty rates) are the regions where the residential Internet access gap is bigger. The study Digital in 2018 in Central America gave a rating of 45.95 points out of 100 to the coverage of the Internet infrastructure.

Mobile ownership

In Guatemala there are 19.06m smartphones with Internet connection, this is equivalent to 112 percent of the population. A very important fact revealed by this study is that 94 percent of users enter the Internet using prepaid plans, compared to 6 percent who have postpaid plans. This means that Internet consumption is very expensive and only a small part of the population has the ability to be connected 24 hours a day without relying on Wi-Fi signal.

Of all cell phone users, in 2017, 52 percent is a Tigo customer, 27 percent belongs to Claro and 21 percent to Movistar/Tuenti. A study by Google for the region indicates that out of every 10 mobile devices, eight use an Android system and two IOS. Access to the Internet and mobile devices is similar between men and women. 46 percent of Internet connections come from desktops, 52 from smartphones, 2 from tablets and 0.09 from other devices. The average age of Internet users is 22.4 years old, 49.2 percent are men and 50.8 are women.

Sources

- [Claro Guatemala](#)
- [Fondo para el Desarrollo de la Telefonía](#)
- [Movistar](#)
- [Tigo](#)
- [Tuenti](#)

Innovation

Landscape analysis

During the last five years, the Global Innovation Index (GII) has positioned Guatemala as one of the least innovative countries in Latin America. In 2013, the country was ranked number 87 out of 127 economies studied, falling to 98th place in 2017. The study analysed the knowledge of technology, number of patents created, expenses on computer software, export of technology, among others. Another report presented by the World Economic Forum indicates that one of the factors that affect the competitiveness of Guatemala is the limitation to Internet services through broadband.

In 2017, the government launched the *Sistema Nacional de Innovación de Guatemala* (National Innovation System of Guatemala) with the aim of coordinating the implementation of innovation projects to influence the country's productivity. Since its creation, no other news has been recorded that refers to any achievement of this system. The *Programa Nacional de Competitividad* (National Competitiveness Program - PRONACOM) of the Ministry of Economy has a plan to support youth entrepreneurship, although these tutorials do not specialise in technology.

Profiles of main tech parks, accelerators, hackathons

Despite global indicators, there are efforts to create technological innovation in Guatemala. In the sector of Guatemala City known as *4 Grados Norte*, the Technological Campus TEC was founded, which is a hub of technological innovation that houses spaces for coworking and event management for entrepreneurs.

The TEC has been the headquarters of different types of hackathons specialised in blockchain, but also of journalistic type, to create collective databases using public information from central and local government entities, with the objective of improving auditing process. The proposals and innovative programs related to technology are mainly focused on the capital city and eventually on one of the five main cities of the country.

Sources

- [Global Innovation Index](#)
- [Pronacom](#)
- [TEC](#)
- [World Economic Forum](#)

Traditional forms of communication

Summary

The final report of the Hearing Study conducted by USAID indicated that in rural areas, churches and community assemblies are the most reliable means for obtaining information; in second place are television, radio, national newspapers and institutions in general; in the less reliable range they locate local and regional newspapers.

Guatemala is an eminently religious country. The Evangelical Alliance estimates that in the country there are more than 40 thousand evangelical churches, this means a proportion of 96 evangelical churches for each Catholic one. Evangelical churches are present in communities where there is not even a police station or a local delegation of the health system.

Churches play an important role for the public opinion. Contrary to all journalists and opinion generators, one of the Guatemalans with the most followers is Pastor Cash Luna, mentioned in Opinion Makers, who also has 6.05 million followers on Twitter. Only the singer Ricardo Arjona surpasses him with 17.8 millions followers, which makes his the most influential fanpage in the country. It is important to point out that after taking office, all presidents have attended religious ceremonies with Cash Luna to appear before this community and obtain the approval of his religious followers.

Sources

- [Alianza Evangélica de Guatemala](#)
- [Evangelical Pastor Cash Luna](#)
- [USAID](#)

Conclusions

Conclusion

Although there are more mobile phones in the country than people, Guatemala has not been able to fully enter the digital era and this has caused a strong limitation to the development of new media. On the one hand, users who do have complete access to the Internet (less than 40 percent of the population) cannot access at high speed due to the limitations in the use of broadband. The Internet is still expensive in the country, only 19 percent of users have prepaid full Internet access plans in their smartphones, the rest of mobile Internet users need a Wi-Fi connection. For the media, this means that their audience has limited access to innovative platforms like podcasts or YouTube videos.

On the other hand, telephone companies have facilitated access to social networks through the sale of low-cost Internet packages. These combos offer unlimited Facebook and WhatsApp access, but limit the use of other applications and Internet browsing. This combination of Internet access and restrictions means that the media - which depend on the number of visitors captured on their pages - have a very small audience. Without access to the full information, social networks become a field where mainly incomplete information circulates.

This scenario has allowed open television, directed by the monopoly of Angel González, to continue being the media with the most audience in Guatemala. For more than five decades, González's media have maintained an editorial line in favor of the

governments of the day. The ongoing fight against corruption in Guatemala, has caused several pro-government groups to actively campaign to erode the credibility of media.

Community radios are an undervalued channel, mainly because they work outside the capital city and because their labour is more renowned at local level. With a potential reach of 8 million people (around half the population) community radios can influence the public opinion of Guatemalans that live in rural areas. At present they are working on a plan to broadcast their content through web applications.

Improving Internet access for Guatemalans would be a solution to the financial crises that different media are facing: If more people have Internet, media will increase their audience. However, the country's structural conditions and government policies have not facilitated such technological innovation and this is not expected to happen soon.

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