

PALABRAS IMPUNES:

ESTIGMATIZACIÓN Y VIOLENCIA

CONTRA MUJERES PERIODISTAS
EN MÉXICO 2019-2022



Executive Summary

Unpunished words:

Stigmatization and violence against women journalists in Mexico 2019-2022

During the last decade, violence against women journalists has been constant. Between 2013, with 47 registered cases, and 2021, with 232, the number of aggressions has almost quintupled.

This report shows how, during Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration, violence against journalists persists, without any reduction in the levels of risk they face. Public servers continue to be their main aggressors, and attacks have multiplied in the digital space. A situation heavily influenced by the president's stigmatizing discourse against journalists, which has been a hallmark of his government. The phrase "we are not the same", which he uses so often, loses meaning in the face of the figures exposed by this research, which also evidences the growing number of femicide, which in 2021 totaled 978 victims.

CIMAC's Freedom of Expression and Gender Program documents and keeps track of cases through media monitoring, interviews, and data comparison with networks of women journalists and human rights defenders. If we compare the 248 aggressions suffered by women journalists during Enrique Peña Nieto's first three-year term, from January 1st, 2013 to July 31, 2016, with the 767 cases in the first three years of López Obrador's administration, from January 1st, 2019 to July 31, 2022, the increase is 209.27%.

Morena's presidential candidate victory in 2018 augured an era of fighting corruption, austerity and a gradual cessation of the violence that had infiltrated Mexico since the "war on drugs" began in 2006. But after more than half of his term in office, militarization of our country has set off alarm bells after the Congress of Union approved his initiative to give greater power to the National Defense Secretariat by incorporating the National Guard, in charge of the public security, into its structure. Both instances accumulate hundreds of complaints before the National Commission of Human Rights.

The polarization that exists in our society has deepened since the beginning of Lopez Obrador's administration after he turned his morning conference into a platform from which he disqualifies those who criticize or do not agree with his government. The president has labeled society organizations as "coup plotters" and has called journalists "mercenaries" and "traitors of the homeland", whom he places as adversaries.

During this six-year term, from December 2018 to August 2022, 36 journalists were murdered. In that same period, according to CIMAC data, five women journalists were killed: Norma Sarabia Garduza (2019), María Elena Ferral Hernández (2020), and Lourdes

Maldonado López, Yesenia Aurora Mollinedo Falconi and Sheila Johana García Olivera (2022).

Aggressions against women journalists during López Obrador's government

Increase by month ¹				
	2019	2020	2021	2022
January	5	7	18	13
February	10	28	9	11
March	12	24	45	45
April	12	25	16	14
May	17	24	27	21
June	17	21	23	12
July	23	25	29	11
August	9	24	13	
September	14	37	13	
October	14	12	7	
November	20	15	27	
December	4	9	5	
Total	157	251	232	127

Source: CIMAC.

Aggressions against women journalists, up to July 2022, extended to 30 of the 32 states of the country –except Zacatecas and Campeche-, and Mexico City, with 199 cases, concentrates the higher number. Women reporters have been the most attacked for their work, with 54.49% of the cases, and the political source, with 45.63% of the attacks, is the riskiest source to work with.

The criminalization of feminist protests has contributed to making their coverage dangerous for journalists. 13.16% of the total of attacks happen in this context, above those investigating acts of corruption or electoral issues.

¹ Based in information provided by the Liberty of Expression and Gender Program.

As in past administrations, the aggressors of women journalists are, in 41.72% of the cases, federal, state and municipal officials, committing 320 attacks against them, and it is the institutional sphere that poses the greatest risk to riskiest to their job, accounting for 37.28% of the cases.

During Lopez Obrador's administration, cases of digital violence multiplied. CIMAC documented 193, while in Peña Nieto's first triennium 31 were registered. The most frequent aggressions were harassment, consisting of mockery and insults, threats and intimidations with the aim of generating a state of uncertainty, fear and constant alert among journalists. This type of violence, which takes place in the virtual world, surpassed community violence with 25.16%, which occurs in public spaces.

Perpetrators of violence against women journalists

Aggressor ²	Cases	Percentage
State official	171	22.29%
Private or civil	134	17.47%
Municipal official	93	12.12%
Social media users	88	11.47%
Unidentified	83	10.82%
Federal official	56	7.30%
Political party team	31	4.04%
Criminal structure	22	2.86%
Fake account/troll/bot	19	2.47%
National media	14	1.82%
Trade organization	10	1.30%
Social movement	9	1.17%
Private security	8	1.04%
Entrepreneur	6	0.78%
Community organization	5	0.65%
Armed group	4	0.52%

² Based in information provided by the Liberty of Expression and Gender Program

Judge/Magistrate	2	0.26%
Humans right defendants	1	0.13%
Political movement	1	0.13%

Source: CIMAC.

Throwing weapon

During this administration, stigmatization has become a weapon that the president wields against journalists. During the daily morning press conference, Obrador exposes opinions that disqualify those who are critical of his government or show data that contradict his information. For the academic and columnist Denise Dresser, this space has become “a place to destroy reputations”.

This report shows how Lopez Obrador’s stigmatizing speech provokes a chain of reaction on those who listen to him, who interpret his words as “an order to attack”, according to reporter Reyna Haydee Ramírez, who became focus of digital aggressions and faced blocking of information and was banned to access the National Palace after questioning the official versions.

These stigmatizing practices are not limited to the presidency. The Morena’s governor of Puebla, Miguel Barbosa Huerta, did not hesitate to throw a “don’t ask” at journalist Alba Espejel when he felt she was challenging his authority, and, in Cancun, during de 9N march in 2020, reporter Reyna Cecilia Solis was shot in a leg for accompanying protesters as part of her job. Because the abuse of power and criminalization of feminist protests can also lead to intimidation and repression, as shown in CIMAC’s research.

In states such as Oaxaca, the difficulties and risks of reporting are aggravated by a reality in which business interests, collusion between the different levels of government and criminal groups, and endemic evils such as corruption and cronyism are mixed. If to the violence of the country we add the stigmatizing discourse which generates a dangerous permissive environment for aggressions against journalists, one of the results is the constant fear of becoming a victim among journalists. “You have to be careful about what you are going to report”, says Zapotec reporter Diana López Manzo.

Discredit of their work is another consequence of the stigmatization faced by women journalists. Reporter Anotonia Ramírez Marcelino has suffered isolation and exclusion by the Guerrero government because, as the owner of an independent media outlet in the Nahua community of Ocotequila, she breaks the stereotypes of what a woman, a journalist and a member of a native community should be.

Every time a woman journalist is disqualified, harassed, assaulted or violated, the objective of those who seek, in Dresser’s words, “to eliminate the messenger so the message has no

transcendence” is fulfilled. When the stigmatizing discourse takes effect, not only the journalists lose -who live immersed in an environment of violence that has turned their profession into one of the most dangerous to practice in Mexico-, but also society, as they are unable to verify official information and are often the object of manipulation by the government or political or economic interests.

State’s unsolved issues

One of the instances available to the Mexican State to protect women communicators is the Protection Mechanism for Humans Rights Defenders and Journalists, created by the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (LPPDDHP in Spanish).

A decade after its creation, the Mechanism still lacks a protocol that allows the immediate reception of requests for incorporation, and the procedure does not contemplate disaggregating such requests by gender, which makes it impossible to know how many correspond to women. Currently, of the total 1,657 persons incorporated, 550 are journalists, of which 151 are women (27.5% of the total), according to information published by the Ministry of the Interior.

The protection measures provided by the Mechanism focus on the security of the beneficiaries, which is why this report underscores the need to recognize them as subjects of rights and not objects of protection, so that their needs are prioritized. Achieving this is related to the initiative to reform the LPPDDHP to create a National Protection System that provides institutional strength and protection guarantees to the sectors for which is intended, while at the same time addressing legal gaps, such as the fact that, as a federal regulation, it is nor blinding on the states and municipalities, and only provides for coordinating the applications of measures through agreements.

This reform, which content is still unknown, must have a women’s human rights approach, and any regulatory framework that is created must incorporate instruments to prevent, investigate, punish, redress and eradicate violence against women journalists, in order to ensure that they can carry their work in safe conditions.

The data collected shows that, during Lopez Obrador’s administration, there have been continuous attacks against women journalists for excessing their work and their right to freedom of expression. In light of this situation, CIMAC believes it is essential to take actions such as the following:

- That the State publicly recognize the work of women journalists as a pillar of the country’s democracy, that stigmatizing speeches cease in order to prevent and contribute to the end of attacks against them, and that it guarantees their right to communicate free from any type of violence.

- The State should promote training and specialization in women's rights for public servers responsible for protection of women journalists and ensure the right punishment for violence against them.
- It is necessary to carry out investigations that incorporate a gender-differentiated approach and that exhaust the lines and hypotheses linked to the work of women journalists, so that they lead to the capture, prosecution and punishment of those who exercise any kind of violence against them, from stigmatizing speeches to physical and lethal aggressions, with the aim of ensuring that these acts are not repeated with any other woman.

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