

## **The Three Spheres of Newsafety: Bottlenecks and Affordances of Investigative Collaborative Journalism in Latin America**

### **Abstract**

Latin America faces the prevalence of one of the highest levels of violence worldwide (Visconti, 2020), including its many typifications, such as political, criminal, domestic, and youth violence (Imbusch, Misse, and Carrión 2011). In many cases, elite actors and political forces contribute to promoting harassment, arbitrary detention, as well as physical attacks (Orgeret and Tayeebwa 2020). For news workers, the violence experienced by them represents a threat to the journalism practice itself, directly affecting the value of the free flow of information. Latin American countries have different levels of difficulty exercising media freedom, ranging from corruption and impunity to cyber surveillance and government violence (RSF 2019).

Attacks on journalists have been configured to a greater extent as attacks against the freedom of speech and access to information (Garcés Prettel and Arroyave Cabrera 2017; Orgeret and Tayeebwa 2020). The crisis of security journalists face in Latin America is represented in its violence rates, as the region has been the deadliest for journalists in recent years (CPJ 2022). Brazil and Mexico are often ranked among the countries where journalists' killings are primarily not investigated due to the political instability and weak institutions (CPJ 2019). In the press freedom ranking published by Reporters Without Borders (RWB), countries such as Brazil and Peru are ranked as having a 'Problematic Situation'.

Smaller news media organizations are more susceptible to the unattended consequences of reporting in risky conditions and contexts. Even under direct attack and risk to their safety, small-sized independent Latin American news outlets are bolstering original journalism by producing high-quality investigations that use data and collaboration in innovative ways to remain competitive in the constantly evolving ecosystem.

This study focuses on the examples of three small organizations in Latin America, namely The Intercept Brasil (TIB) in Brazil, IDL-Reporteros in Peru, and Centro de Periodismo Investigativo (CIP) in Puerto Rico, and three specific collaborative and data investigations for which these publishers' received awards and recognition (Mioli 2019). These watchdog organizations are the ones that are overburdened by the recent developments in political polarization, the rise of authoritarian governments, and the migration of the public debate to the Internet and social media platforms (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando 2014, Waisbord 2000). This is especially important for countries like Brazil and Peru that suffered from their politicians intertwined with the Odebrecht scandal (see Lagunes and Svejnar 2020).

Taking into consideration the experiences of three major journalistic investigations produced in the last decades in Latin America (Car Wash, TelegramGate, and Car Leaks), this research draws

an exploratory study about the strategies applied to secure information and data, safeguard the lives and wellbeing of professionals, and secure the organization itself. Drawing upon the watchdog reporting and informing the general concepts, this study employs a multi-method approach that combines case studies, document analysis, and in-depth interviews with leading actors in these three organizations. It poses the following research question: What measures do small-sized investigative news outlets adopt to increase safety and reduce threats journalists face?

We argue that three spheres of security—physical, legal, and digital—are intertwined in the safety strategies adopted by these small-sized news outlets to mitigate the risks their journalists face. Our argument is that different journalistic investigations and collaborative projects require different approaches to each of the spheres. For example, IDL Reporteros (Peru) encountered physical threats and responded to them by offering martial arts classes to journalists and investigating groups targeting the news outlets. Meanwhile, The Intercept (Brazil) mainly faced digital risks, such as organised threats on social media, and the organization opted for moving to a new facility, hiring security guards, and securing communication channels. Finally, Centro de Periodismo Investigativo – CPI (Puerto Rico) was challenged by legal risks, such as powerful actors trying to discredit their reporting. Their response was collaborating with law scholars for legally protecting journalists and creating an action called “media tour” to explain the story and the findings to the public to increase trust.

By examining the experiences of three small investigative news outlets, we look to what extent journalists and their organizations are addressing their security and the steps they are taking to secure themselves to produce quality investigative reporting. This study contributes towards a better understanding of the processes adopted by organizations to provide favorable conditions for investigative journalistic work. Moreover, it sheds light on the contributions of small sized organizations to the democracy of Latin America, a region facing political turbulence and high levels of criminality and corruption. In such a context, journalism practiced by small independent organizations plays a central role in strengthening democratic institutions.

**Keywords:** Newsafety, Investigative Journalism, Collaborative Journalism, Data Journalism, Latin America

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