

In Brazil, Media Still Lives as when the Generals Ruled the Country

Written by Newsroom

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Reporters Without Borders has recently released a report entitled "Brazil, the country of 30 Berlusconi" that examines all of the shortcomings of this South American giant's media landscape. It is based on fact-finding visits to Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Brasília in November 2012.

The journalists group concluded that the media topography of the country that is hosting the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics has barely changed in the three decades since the end of the 1964-85 military dictatorship.

As well as the ten or so major companies that dominate the national media and are mainly based in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil has many regional media that are weakened by their subordination to the centers of power in the country's individual states.

The editorial independence of both print and broadcast media is above all undermined by their heavy financial reliance on advertising by state governments and agencies.

The media's fragility encourages violence. Five Brazilian journalists and bloggers were murdered in connection with their work in 2012, making Brazil the world's fifth deadliest country for media personnel.

Two journalists who specialize in police and public security issues also had to flee abroad last year, while the campaign for the October 2012 municipal elections saw an increase in threats and physical attacks on media regarded as showcases of the politicians who own them.

This report also examines another obstacle to freedom of information – the increase in judicial proceedings accompanied by censorship orders targeting individual news outlets. The

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best-known is the leading daily O Estado de São Paulo, the subject of a censorship order for threatening the interests of former President José Sarney's family.

But the Brazilian Internet and blogosphere are also increasingly being targeted by court-ordered censorship, while netizens impatiently await the adoption of a new Internet law called the Marco Civil, which would guarantee Net neutrality.

A new media law has proved to be a divisive challenge ever since the press law introduced by the former military government in 1967 – under which recalcitrant journalists were jailed and both print and broadcast media were subject to prior censorship – was belatedly repealed in 2009, more than two decades after the adoption of the democratic constitution.

An obsolete electoral law still limits political news and information, while ill-suited broadcast frequency regulation makes many community radio stations illegal, all too often leaving them to be ignored, like the grass-roots civil society organizations to which they are linked.

Changing the legislation would require the consent of the many politicians with media interests they jealously protect.

The new laws awaited by Brazil's news providers are among the recommendations that Reporters Without Borders makes at the end of its report. The country has many strengths. Its diversity could become a model for other countries.

Radio Host Killed

Mafaldo Bezerra Goes, a local radio host, was gunned down in Jaguaribe, a town in the northeastern state of Ceará, on 22 February. Aged 61, he often covered crime and had been threatened.

Goes was the second journalist to be killed this year in Brazil, following Renato Machado, a

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radio journalist who was shot in Rio de Janeiro state on 8 January. Last year, there were five murders of journalists in Brazil that were demonstrably or clearly linked to the victims' work.

"The police investigating the Goes murder are assuming it was linked to his work because of the often sensitive information he reported on the air", Reporters Without Borders said. "In the absence of quick results, the federal authorities should take over the investigation under a mechanism envisaged after last year's particularly deadly toll on Brazilian media personnel."

Goes was on his way to the radio station where he worked, FM Rio Jaguaribe, when he was gunned down in cold blood by two men on a motorcycle with a false licence plate that was found shortly afterwards.

Police chief Vera Lúcia Granja immediately said he thought the murder was linked to the victim's work. Goes often reported crimes on the air, and did not hesitate to name suspects. The Iguatu Notícias website quoted a police source as saying he may have been killed on the orders of local drug trafficker currently in prison.

In a survey of the high price paid by radio journalists, Reporters Without Borders reported that a total of 18 had been killed worldwide since the start of 2012.

Murder Solved

Mauricio Sampaio, the former deputy chairman of the Atlético-Goiás football club, was arrested during the weekend on suspicion of hiring a hit man to murder sports journalist Valério Luiz de Oliveira in Goiânia, the capital of the central state Goiás, last July.

A reporter for Radio Jornal 820 AM, Luiz was one of a total of five journalists who were killed in connection with their work last year in Brazil. Aged 49, he was gunned down outside the station on 5 July.

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"Sampaio's arrest seems to support that theory that Luiz was killed as a reprisal for criticizing the Atlético-Goiás management on the air," Reporters Without Borders said. "While respecting the presumption of innocence, we welcome the progress in the police investigation.

"The grave security problems to which Brazilian journalists are exposed, especially at the local level, had an impact on Brazil's ranking in the latest Reporters Without Borders press freedom index. But the efforts it often makes to combat impunity distinguish it from other countries in the region."

Sampaio was arrested at his home on 2 February, a day after the arrest of three other men on suspicion of involvement in the murder. One was Marcos "Marquinhos" Vinicius, a butcher by trade, who immediately confessed to being the perpetrator, police said. The other two – a military policeman and a friend and business partner of Luiz – allegedly paid Vinicius 200,000 reais (74,000 euros) to do it.

Sampaio, who is due to give a statement to the judicial authorities today, has so far denied any role in Luiz' murder. Luis was very critical of Sampaio and both he and other members of the radio station's staff had been banned from visiting the football club.