

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/salvador-freedom-of-information-shrinks-04-06-2015,47967.html>

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Americas - Salvador

Poor marks

## Freedom of information shrinks during president's first year

4 June 2015

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Reporters Without Borders (RSF) condemns the restrictions that the authorities are imposing on journalists' access to information in Salvador, where President Salvador Sánchez Cerén has just completed his first year in office. Salvador is ranked 45th out of 180 countries in the 2015 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index, a fall of seven places from its position in the previous year's index.

The president's relations with the media have been distant and he has shown little interest in answering questions. He even displayed hostility on 15 April, when media that had just published violent crime figures for March [were accused by Sánchez of participating in a "psychological terror campaign" against his government](#).

That takes the cake in country where, according to the police, there were 481 murders in March (or an average of 16 a day), making it one of the deadliest months in a decade.

And media personnel are among those falling victim to the generalized violence. Reporters Without Borders has registered three murders of journalists in Salvador since Sánchez took office on 1 June 2014. So far it has not been possible to establish whether any of these murders was directly linked to the victim's journalistic work.

Journalists and media outlets that have investigated corruption, public finances or violence have been the targets of hostile comments, accusations and pressure from government officials.

They include the newspaper *La Página*, which was ordered by Tovías Armando Menjívar, the head of the Financial Investigation Unit in the prosecutor-general's office, at the start of May to take down a story about former President Francisco Flores and to stop publishing any more articles on the subject on pain of prosecution.

A few days later, [the prosecutor denied that any attempt was being made to suppress information](#).

When the Police Anti-Drug Division (DAN) detained **Oscar Martínez** of the *El Faro* newspaper for questioning in July 2014, they said they were "acting on orders from above" and wanted to know if he was the reporter covering organized crime for his newspaper and who his sources were. [Jorge Beltrán Luna](#), a journalist with *El Diario de Hoy*, was also arrested by DAN police officers when returning from doing a report in San Ignacio in November 2014.

The head of the Association of El Salvador Journalists (APES) [condemned Martínez's arrest and voiced concern about the spread of censorship](#).

"The authorities have a responsibility towards journalists and media outlets," said Claire San Filippo, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Americas desk. "They must set an example by displaying a respectful attitude towards reporters, or else they will encourage abuses against the media."

"We urge President Sánchez Cerén's government to adopt a more open attitude towards the media and to end practices that violate the 2012 Law on Access to Public Information (LAIP)."

The [Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression issued by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights \(IACHR\)](#) says: "Access to information held by the state is a fundamental right of every individual. States have the obligation to guarantee the full exercise of this right."

Three years after the [LAIP](#) took effect, it is clear that high-ranking officials are limiting transparency

and blocking the publication of information that could be compromising or problematic for them.

Many Salvadoran NGOs such as [Grupo Promotor](#) have condemned these abuses. Financial information such as the cost of state advertising or the cost of official visits is classified as confidential, with the result that the public is denied access for long periods.

Paragraphs 4, 11 and 13 of Article 10 of the LAIP nonetheless state that information about state spending is part of the information that should be made accessible to the Salvadoran public.

The fact that the president himself breaks the rules does not encourage senior officials to change their practices on the provision of information.

[Salvador is ranked 45th out of 180 countries in the press freedom index](#) that Reporters Without Borders published in February.

(Logo AFP)

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