

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/argentina-rising-violence-against-30-11-2012,43738.html>

Americas - Argentina

Worrying developments

Rising violence against journalists a cause for concern as climate polarizes

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Reporters Without Borders notes with concern and regret that there has been an upsurge in assaults on journalists and breaches of freedom of information in Argentina, in its provinces especially. This has occurred against the backdrop of growing polarization in the media in the run-up to 7 December, the deadline for the Clarín media group, which is in dispute with the federal government, to appeal against the country's new law on Audiovisual Communication Services (SCA). Reporters Without Borders, which supports the law in principle, will return to the issue before that date.

"At the end of last year, Argentina had a pretty good track record in freedom of information and journalists' safety compared with many other countries in the region," the press freedom organization said. "However, safety has deteriorated this year, particularly in the provinces, thanks to the failure of the public authorities to take action against all-too-frequent [assaults](#) carried out by local elected officials.

"Such impunity must end, as must attacks on journalists from national news organizations who are associated with the editorial line taken by their employers as a result of growing polarization. It is the responsibility of those on all sides of the political spectrum and the justice authorities to work together on behalf of constitutional freedoms, including the freedom to report the news and hold peaceful debate."

In the city of Bariloche in Rio Negro province, just as the station *Radio Horizonte* (AM 94.5) was about to start a news broadcast at 9 a.m. on 23 November, the journalist **Marcelo Parra** saw three people enter the studio. They were a court official, a lawyer and a police officer and had been sent by the city's mayor, Omar Goye.

"They arrived with a search warrant signed by judge Jorge Serra to carry out a precautionary seizure of our archives," Parra told Reporters Without Borders.

"They wanted to see if they could find anything prejudicial to Omar Goye that might enable them to launch legal proceedings against us."

The journalist received no prior notice from the judge. "It was a clear breach of freedom of information and meant to intimidate us because we had been critical of the mayor's administration. Such an unannounced search of a news organization is unheard of."

The three visitors spent two hours on the premises searching computer files for the original recordings of Parra's programmes, meanwhile preventing the station from broadcasting. The mayor made his intentions clear when he said later: "I have to silence them one way or another."

Goye, a member of the Front for Victory (FpV) party, has a reputation for clashing with the news media in Río Negro province. Three weeks earlier, he did the same thing to another station, *Radio KMFM*. On that occasion his representatives, armed with a warrant signed by Carlos Cuellar, visited the *Radio KMFM* studios twice, carrying out searches and seizing recordings of programmes by **Santiago Rey**, who also runs the online news portal *Agencia de Noticias de Bariloche (ANB)*.

Goye previously took legal action against *ANB* for “psychological distress” after the publication of an article criticizing the way the city council managed advertising billboards. Letters were also sent to *Mensajero Digital* and *El Cordillerano*, who had reprinted the article. The mayor recently lost an appeal against the province’s biggest newspaper, *Río Negro*, which published a story by the journalist **Daniel Marzal** on 16 June this year questioning his financial practices.

Station closes after threats on air

Three days earlier, on 20 November, the journalist **Javier Rivarola**, a commentator on the station *FM Radio 21* was insulted and threatened on air by the member of parliament and FpV leader Ruben Contreras. The politician telephoned the station in mid-programme and accused the journalist of “inciting violence” and accused him of being responsible for an act of vandalism carried out at his home by a group of neighbours angry at water shortages in the town.

The MP said: “You are all sons of whores. You are the son of a whore. This will not go on. What would you do if something happened at your house tomorrow? You just wait ...” The journalist reported the MP for making criminal threats. Contreras played down the incident and said he would make a public apology.

In the town of Aristobulo del Valle in the northeastern province of Misiones, **Daniel Polaczinski**, the owner of *Radio U* was forced to close the station and take time off from journalism after receiving threats from the chairman of the town council, Luis David Kochen. The journalist had reported a car accident involving the councillor, who appeared to be intoxicated. He got out of his car and threatened the other driver with a machete.

“Kochen has a reputation for violence,” Polaczinski told Reporters Without Borders. “But I started to come under pressure after I broadcast the story of a road rage incident in which he was involved. He went to hit a guy with a machete. We broadcast the story, then I started getting abusive and threatening text messages on my cell phone, although I didn’t think they were important.”

The threats intensified, and on 18 November the journalist received the following text: “You will be killed unless you drop the story about the accident.” Most of the messages were anonymous but were identified as coming from Kochen’s cell phone. Polaczinski immediately went to the police and lodged a complaint about the threats.

On the same day, Kochen visited him at his home. “He asked me to withdraw the complaint, which would damage him politically, but I didn’t do it,” Polaczinski added. An investigation is under way but meanwhile the journalist and father of two fears for his family and has closed the radio, which he has owned for six years.

These cases are the latest in a long list of recent attacks on journalists and media outlets. Also in Misiones province, the journalist **Mario Fedorischak** was assaulted by the local police on 10 November as he covered the arrival of a group of prisoners at a police station.

Fedorischak, who works as a photographer for the newspaper *Primera Edición* and as a commentator for the TV station *Misiones Cuatro*, was taking pictures from the top of a gate outside the police station when three police officers came over and pulled him down. He was dragged along the ground for about 15 metres then into the station where several officers beat him and tried to suffocate him. His life was threatened and he was forced to strip and hand over his photographic equipment. A complaint was made against Fedorischak for verbally assaulting a police officer and resisting arrest. For his part, he filed a complaint about his treatment at the hands of the officers.

Unfortunately such violence is not confined to this province. Attacks on journalists took place during a day of demonstrations against the President Cristina Kirchner’s government on 8 November, the most dramatic and shocking of which involved **Néstor Dib** from the TV station *Canal 5 Noticias (C5N)*, who was struck from behind while he was live on air:

His attacker, identified as Nicolás Ayuso, was immediately arrested by the police and sacked by his employer. The attack followed an altercation a few minutes earlier between a group of protesters and *C5N* staff.

Finally, Argentina still has one journalist in prison — **Néstor Pasquini** who was jailed six years ago in Cordoba province and has been the victim of all-out [judicial persecution](#). An open letter sent by Reporters Without Borders to the federal justice ministry has as yet had no response.
