

## Examining the Practices That Mexican Journalists Employ to Reduce Risk in a Context of Violence

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Research on journalists working in contexts of risk has examined either war correspondents on temporary assignments or the psychological effects of covering traumatic events, usually after the events have ended. Although these studies are important, they fail to account for the growing importance of ongoing violence in insecure democracies and its possible consequences for national journalistic practice. We address these issues by examining journalists' risk-reduction practices in Mexico, including self-censorship, following company censorship policies, curtailing street reporting, and concealing sensitive information. Using logistic regressions, we tested occupational, organizational, normative, and contextual conditions as predictors of engagement in these practices. Findings reveal the pervasiveness of risk-reduction practices in Mexico and the complexity of conditions prompting their use, including conditions related to antipress violence, dangerous newsbeats, and the economic insecurity of media firms but also voicing greater support for assertive professional norms. The research sets a baseline for future comparative research that includes greater attention to subnational conditions, dangerous newsbeats, and how violence and uneven state capacity may undermine the economic conditions of media firms.

*Keywords: journalism practice, insecure democracies, violence, risk, Mexico*

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Press association reports and qualitative studies have denounced pervasive violence directed at Mexican journalists and media establishments over the past decade (Del Palacio, 2015; González de Bustamante & Relly, 2016; Lauría & O'Connor, 2010). The situation is not unique. A worldwide study by Cottle, Sambrook, and Mosdell (2016) found that most journalists killed on duty over the past 10 years were local reporters, even though research on journalists and risk has typically focused on foreign correspondents in war zones (Tumber, 2006). At the same time, democracy theorists have described a growing number of formally democratic states in which nonconflict violence is enduring and pervasive (Arias & Goldstein, 2011; von Holdt, 2014). Though journalists are often singled out as targets of aggression in these democracies (Dunham, Nelson, & Aghekyan, 2015; Waisbord, 2007), no empirical study to date has measured the effects of contextual and antipress violence on national journalistic practice or examined how violence interacts with other pressures on journalism. We begin to address this gap using a national survey of Mexican journalists ( $n = 377$ , margin of error  $\pm 5\%$ ). We asked the journalists whether, within the last five years, they had engaged in self-censorship, followed a company censorship policy, abandoned dangerous street reporting, or hidden information from suspicious people to reduce risk. We then subjected their yes/no responses to individual logistic regressions to identify which conditions alter the likelihood of engaging in each practice. By examining precautionary practices in Mexico, we provide baseline knowledge for those concerned with the quality of the public sphere and safety of journalists in Mexico and, we hope, in other democracies where enduring violence is an important problem.

### **Violence and Risk in Mexico**

Societal and antipress violence have surged in Mexico. The intentional homicide rate, which measures noncombat homicides, rose from 9.3 to 22.8 per 100,000 between 2006 and 2011 (World Bank, n.d.). Most of the increase can be attributed to a militarized drug war launched in 2006 and the ensuing fragmentation of criminal gangs. In addition, increased violence stems from a transition to democracy that failed to control local political bosses and security forces who gained discretionary powers when presidential power was curtailed (Schedler, 2014). While the homicide rate dropped to 15.7 per 100,000 in 2014, violence against journalists continued. Article 19 documented 92 potentially work-related journalist murders between 2000 and March 2016 and 23 disappearances between July 2003 and January 2016 (Article 19, n.d.; Article 19, n.d.; ). There were a record 339 violent attacks on journalists in 2015, including eight murders. Journalists face aggressions ranging from murders and disappearances to verbal intimidation, beatings, temporary detentions, and grenade attacks on media installations. Although criminal gangs have received more scholarly attention, the assassination of journalists in some parts of the country has been attributed to state security forces and local government officials. Few of these crimes are solved, despite federal investigative powers (Article 19, 2016) and acknowledgement that antipress violence is qualitatively different from general violence because of its chilling effect on news reporting and dissemination.

Threats and violence are only some of the pressures journalists face. Most media outlets are privately owned but financially dependent on advertising from government or a limited number of private-sector advertisers. Clientelism has institutionalized the use of news to personally benefit government officials and media owners in many places. Journalists typically earn low salaries, forcing them to work

multiple jobs (De León Vázquez, 2012; González Macías, 2013; Márquez-Ramírez, 2015; Relly & González de Bustamante, 2014). Journalists within state-owned media, on the other hand, are rarely protected from pressure to use news for political propaganda (Hughes & Lawson, 2004). Despite the complicated environment, many journalists support institutional norms promoting democratic accountability and a participatory citizenry (Hughes, 2006).

### **Journalists Working in Dangerous Conditions**

Empirical research on journalists operating in dangerous conditions has focused mostly on the journalists' personal health and well-being while on temporary assignment rather than on the changes they adopt in their practice to alleviate constant threat or risk (Brayne, 2007; Feinstein & Starr, 2015; Simpson & Coté, 2006; see also Smith, Newman, & Drevo, 2015, for a review). However, some literature examines war correspondents' challenges, risks, and practices in the field (Seib, 2006). Challenges and risks include threats and censorship as well as abduction, torture, and assassination (Tumber & Palmer, 2004; Tumber & Webster, 2006), whereas practices designed to lower risk include working in groups and with local journalists (Tumber, 2006; Tumber & Palmer, 2004). Some war journalists have also had to accept routine censorship in order to report on-site (Salama, 2012).

Most research on journalists working in dangerous conditions operates on the underlying assumption that traumatic events and their effects end when journalists exit the field. Emerging research from Mexico extends this research and finds that the psychological effects of covering prolonged violence can be severe. Mexican journalists who have been directly threatened, work on more newsbeats that cover traumatic events such as mass killings, or work in riskier parts of the country show more signs of psychopathology—depression symptoms, social dysfunction, and anxiety—than their Mexican colleagues who do not work under such conditions, and, in some cases, they exhibit these signs more than war correspondents do (Feinstein 2012, 2013; Flores Morales, Réyez Pérez & Reidl Martínez, 2012, 2014).

Qualitative studies have found that in areas where violence and risk are high, Mexican journalists make individual or collaborative decisions about what to self-censor, and they withdraw from dangerous street reporting and even hide information from suspicious people in their own newsrooms (Gutiérrez Leyton et al., 2014; Lauría & O'Connor, 2010; Lemini Camarillo, 2015). Many outlets in these areas also have established policies to censor coverage related to drug gangs and gang-related government corruption (Lauría & O'Connor, 2010; Relly & González de Bustamante, 2014).

### **Research Questions**

Given this evidence and the lack of systematic research on how national journalists in contexts of violence alter their practice to reduce risk, we ask the following research questions:

*RQ1: How widespread among journalists are practices designed to reduce risk, including self-censorship, company censorship, avoidance of street reporting, and concealment of sensitive information?*

*RQ2: Which conditions increase (or decrease) the likelihood that journalists will engage in such practices?*

### **Method**

We surveyed a national sample of working journalists in Mexico between January 24, 2013, and March 17, 2015, asking them a series of yes/no questions on their use of precautionary practices to reduce risk. We then ran logistic regressions to identify which conditions affected the likelihood of engaging in each practice. The population was defined as journalists exercising editorial responsibility within domestic news organizations (Johnstone, Slawski, & Bowman, 1976; Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes, & Wilhoit, 2009), including daily press, nondaily press, radio, television, and online media. Participants had to receive at least half their income from journalistic work.

### ***Sample Design and Characteristics***

There are no complete lists of journalists or news outlets in Mexico. Following Scholl (1996 and Quandt, Löffelholz, Weaver, Hanitzsch, and Altmeppen (2006), our research team created a comprehensive national list of news organizations by compiling and verifying information from federal, state-level, and private industry media directories, resulting in a database of more than 1,000 media outlets.<sup>2</sup> We selected a simple random sample of outlets, stratified by media type and by nine geocultural subregions. We then selected participants from the outlets to vary in their gender and level of authority, with everyone in the media outlet having a greater than zero possibility of being selected. We made contact with 668 journalists, of whom 378 were interviewed, giving the study a 57% response rate. To reduce potential bias, we did not contact journalists we knew previously or use snowball sampling. Therefore, once a media outlet was randomly sampled, a potential participant was identified through numerous public or outlet sources and then contacted through phone calls, e-mails, intermediaries, and social media profiles to elicit a yes/no response to the interview request. For those who agreed, follow-up contacts took place to schedule and eventually conduct the interview. Most of the interviewers were based in Mexico City. The interviewers sometimes found it difficult to contact potential participants due to participants' initial wariness of unsolicited phone calls given concerns about electronic surveillance or other risks, but usually participants' initial reluctance was due to their having limited time. Initial doubts were overcome through letters from the researchers' universities explaining the study and inviting the journalist to participate. As additional trust-building measures, potential participants were directed to the study's international website, and an award-winning journalist announced the beginning of the work through his widely read blog. These methods, along with limited human and financial resources, made data collection time-consuming and explains the two-year period of fieldwork.

Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1. The average age of respondents was 38 years, and 60% were younger than age 40. About 32% were women. Although this was not a criterion for selection, the percentage of female journalists is roughly equivalent to national workforce estimates from

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<sup>2</sup> This database was compiled by journalist Marco Lara Klahr and then expanded and vetted by the research team.

the National Institute of Statistics and Geography.<sup>3</sup> About 20% of respondents specialized in a single newsbeat. Almost 10% were senior managers with strategic authority, and about 32% were junior managers with operational authority. About 55% had at least 10 years of journalistic experience, and 83.5% worked on full-time contracts. Just under half (47%) earned up to twice the official minimum wage for journalists monthly, equivalent to U.S.\$1,225.49, adjusted for purchasing power. Most respondents (88%) worked in privately owned media; 8.5% worked in state media; and almost 4% worked in university media outlets.

**Table 1. Basic Characteristics of the Sample.**

Characteristic	Radio	TV	Daily press	Nondailies	Online	All
Female	38.0	33.3	26.2	13.3	44.4	31.8
Average age (in years)	39	35	39	38	35	38
Identifies as indigenous	14.2	2.8	8.5	16.7	0.0	10.7
Senior manager rank	14.1	8.3	4.7	6.7	11.1	9.6
Rank-and-file journalist	57.7	66.7	60.5	43.3	61.1	58.5
Specialist (single beat)	20.2	25.0	22.5	23.3	16.7	21.5
Low salary (up to twice the minimum wage)	47.5	30.6	51.2	50.0	41.2	47.0
Experience >10 years	61.3	45.7	55.8	46.7	33.3	55.5
Full-time contract	78.5	91.7	91.5	76.7	66.7	83.5
Outlet ownership (private)	71.8	100	100	100	100	87.8
Participants/media type	43.2	9.5	34.5	8.0	4.8	

Note. All data are shown as percentages except average age.  $N = 377$ . Margin of error  $\pm 5\%$ .

### Measures

Drawing on press freedom organization reports and qualitative studies, we asked respondents whether they had used any of the following practices in the last five years to diminish threat or risk: (1) "Self-censor potentially sensitive topics or information"; (2) "Submit to media organization policies of censorship of potentially sensitive topics or information"; (3) "Withdraw from a news scene, but continue reporting"; (4) "Hide information from untrustworthy colleagues or suspicious people in your newsroom."

<sup>3</sup> According to the latest National Institute of Statistics and Geography's intercensus report, 34.6% of the economically active population (12 years and older) is female (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2015). Although the study sought gender variation within media outlets, due to a lack of journalists' census from which to calculate gender samples, it was not a criterion of the study design.

Most predictor variables were based on items developed by an international research consortium for the Worlds of Journalism Study and were based on previous research.<sup>4</sup> They measured journalists' objective demographic, occupational, and workplace characteristics as well as their subjective perceptions of influences on work and of journalism's institutional roles in society (Hanitzsch et al., 2010; Weaver et al., 2009). Perceived influences on work and support for alternative roles for journalism were grouped into index variables using principal component analysis. Details about the creation of index variables can be found in the Appendix. We also asked whether participants had received work-related threats since 2000 and created variables for the percentage of the population in the state where the journalist worked that perceived the state as unsafe in 2013 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2013) and the number of attacks on the press in that state between 2007 and 2014 (Article 19, 2015). We also included the population size of the city where the journalist worked as an independent variable, because journalists in smaller cities do not have easy access to rights organizations and local politicians have been identified as a source of antipress violence (Article 19, 2016). Questions from the Worlds of Journalism Study were translated from English into Spanish and back-translated into English. Reports of direct threats and of engaging in risk-reduction practices were written in Spanish. All questions were piloted with working journalists.

### **Logistic Regression Analysis**

We examined reported changes in practice due to risk and threat using logistic regression analysis, a statistical procedure to predict a categorical outcome variable from a set of categorical and continuous independent variables. This form of analysis also identifies statistically significant individual predictors and produces coefficients that, once exponentiated, are interpreted as changes in the odds that an outcome will occur. We ran separate logistic regression models on each of the yes/no reports independently since the practices were not mutually exclusive. For each regression, the outcome variable was coded 1 for *yes*, the journalist had engaged in the behavior in the last five years as protection from risk or threat, or 0 for *no*, the journalist had not done so. Data were checked to ensure they met the assumptions of logistic regression and that problems of incomplete information indicated by very large standard deviations did not occur (Field, 2009). Variable-to-case ratios were above the cutoff of 15 cases per variable recommended by Babyak (2004).<sup>5</sup> We also used the Hosmer and Lemeshow test for fit to ensure there were no statistically significant differences between the actual behavior of the cases and the predictions of each reported model.

### **Findings**

#### ***How Prevalent?***

Table 2 reports the respective percentages of female, male, and total respondents who reported engaging in each precautionary practice over the past five years, and it reveals whether there were

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<sup>4</sup> More information is available at <http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Ratios were as follows: self-censorship (17.1), policy of censorship (17.1), hide information (17.9), abandon news scene (34.3).

significant differences between male and female journalists' adoption of the practices. More than three-quarters of female journalists (77%) and more than six of 10 male journalists (63%) reported having engaged in self-censorship as a protective measure. Adherence to company censorship policies for protection was also widespread, particularly among female journalists: 69% of women and 52% of men responded affirmatively to the query. The  $\chi^2$  tests for independence were significant—that is, more women than men reported engaging in both forms of censorship:  $c^2(1, N = 371) = 6.95, p = .008$  for self-censorship and  $c^2(1, N = 368) = 9.62, p = .002$  for company censorship policies. Refraining from street reporting was the next most prevalent measure (64% reported having done so), followed by hiding information from suspicious or untrustworthy people in the respondent's own newsroom (reported by 50% of the journalists). There were no statistically significant differences between the responses of men and women with regard to these practices.

**Table 2. Prevalence of Risk-Reduction Practices.**

	Women	Men	All
Self-censor <sup>a</sup>	76.7	62.9	67.4
Follow company censorship policy <sup>a</sup>	68.9	51.8	57.3
Withdraw from scene, but keep reporting	63.3	64.5	64.2
Hide information within newsroom	53.3	48.8	50.3

*Note.* The table displays percentages of affirmative responses to the question, "In the last five years, have you engaged in any of the following measures to protect yourself from possible attacks by criminals or mobs?"

<sup>a</sup> Pearson  $\chi^2$  test for differences between male and female journalists significant at the .01 level.

### **What Predicts Whether Journalists Will Engage in Risk-Reduction Practices?**

To answer this question, logistic regressions were performed separately on each report. Predictors were personal characteristics (age, gender, self-identification as indigenous), objective work-related aspects (salary level, coverage beat where applicable, and rank of organizational decision-making authority), outlet characteristics (media type, media ownership type), levels of support for conceptions of institutional roles (civic educator, propagandist, watchdog, analytic change agent), levels of perceived influences on work (political, economic, organizational, and reference groups), having received a direct work-related threat, and contextual measures related to risk (number of attacks on the press in the state where the journalist worked, percentage of the population perceiving the state as insecure, and population size of the city where the journalist worked).

*Self-Censorship*

Table 3 reports on the model for self-censorship, listing the regression coefficient, standard error, odds ratio, and the ratio's 95% confidence interval for each predictor. A test of the full model with all predictors was statistically significant at  $\chi^2(31, N = 328) = 115.80, p < .001$ , indicating that the predictors, as a set, significantly distinguished between journalists who had self-censored to protect themselves from threat or to reduce risk and those who had not. The power of the model was relatively strong, with a pseudo  $R^2 = .43$  (Nagelkerke), meaning that 43% of the variance was explained. Classification was relatively impressive, correctly predicting 90.9% of those who had self-censored and 55.8% of those who had not, giving an overall success rate of 80.6%.

**Table 3. Logistic Regression: Predictive Model of Self-Censorship.**

	<i>b</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	95% CI for odds ratio		
		Lower	Odds ratio	Upper
Intercept	3.148 (2.179)			
Age	-0.096 (0.023)***	0.868	0.909	0.952
Woman	0.294 (0.379)	0.638	1.342	2.822
Indigenous self-identification (yes)	-0.673 (0.564)	0.169	0.510	1.543
Contract type, ref. = full-time				
Part-time	-0.314 (0.514)	0.267	0.730	2.000
Freelance	0.006 (0.721)	0.245	1.006	4.133
Experience, ref. = >10 years				
Experience: <5 years	-1.265 (0.598)*	0.087	0.282	0.912
Experience: 5-10 years	-0.309 (0.479)	0.287	0.734	1.875
Categories of rank, ref. = senior manager				
Rank: junior manager	0.068 (0.669)	0.299	1.071	3.953
Rank: Rank-and-file	0.039 (0.692)	0.278	1.040	4.037
Salary level, ref. = lowest, up to twice the minimum wage				
Salary: middle, between two and eight times the minimum wage	0.709 (0.429)	0.877	2.033	4.712
Salary: high, more than eight times the minimum wage	-0.880 (0.985)	0.060	0.415	2.860
Type of medium,* ref. = daily press				
Medium: nondaily press	-0.638 (0.609)	0.160	0.529	1.741
Medium: online	-0.383 (0.730)	0.163	0.682	2.853
Medium: radio	0.831 (0.435)	0.979	2.296	5.385
Medium: TV	-0.658 (0.506)	0.192	0.518	1.396



Property ownership,** ref. = private				
Property: state	0.233 (0.682)	0.332	1.262	4.800
Property: university	-3.771 (1.290)**	0.002	0.023	0.289
Threatened due to work (yes)	0.838 (0.365)*	1.131	2.313	4.727
News beats, ref. = all others				
Beats: police, courts, or security	-0.376 (0.557)	0.231	0.687	2.045
Beats: general assignment, various beats	0.226 (0.357)	0.623	1.254	2.525
Influences: economic	0.462 (0.178)**	1.119	1.587	2.249
Influences: political	-0.107 (0.180)	0.632	0.899	1.279
Influences: organizational	-0.324 (0.195)	0.493	0.724	1.061
Influences: reference groups	-0.199 (0.185)	0.570	0.819	1.191
Roles: civic educator	-0.471 (0.297)	0.349	0.624	1.118
Roles: interpretive change agent	0.582 (0.296)*	1.003	1.790	3.195
Roles: propagandist	0.275 (0.226)	0.846	1.316	2.049
Roles: watchdog	-0.251 (0.238)	0.488	0.778	1.240
Number of press attacks in state	0.009 (0.000)*	1.000	1.009	1.017
% of population that perceives the state as insecure	0.023 (0.012)	0.999	1.024	1.048
Population of city where journalist works	0.000 (0.000)***	1.000	1.000	1.000

Note. Odds ratio =  $\exp(b)$ .  $R^2 = .43$  (Nagelkerke). Model  $c^2(31) = 115.80$ ,  $p < .001$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

According to the Wald  $\chi^2$  statistic, the following individual conditions predict a change in the odds of self-censorship. The statistically significant categorical predictor variables were as follows: working for a university-owned outlet compared with a privately owned outlet,  $b = -3.771$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 8.54$ ,  $p < .01$ ; having less than five years of experience compared with more than 10 years of experience,  $b = -1.265$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 4.47$ ,  $p < .05$ ; having been threatened because of work,  $b = 0.838$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 5.283$ ,  $p < .05$ ; expressing greater support for interpretive change agent roles,  $b = 0.582$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 3.88$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and perceiving greater economic influences on work,  $b = 0.462$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 6.719$ ,  $p < .05$ . The statistically significant continuous predictors were age ( $b = -0.096$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 16.666$ ,  $p < .001$ ); the number of press attacks in a state ( $b = 0.009$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 4.283$ ,  $p < .05$ ); and the population size of the city where the journalist worked ( $b = 0.00$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 14.633$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The odds ratios of the categorical variables show that, on average, a journalist who had been directly threatened as a result of his or her work was 130% more likely to report self-censorship than a journalist who had not been threatened. A journalist with one to five years of work experience was, on average, 72% less likely to report self-censorship than a journalist with more than 10 years of experience, and a journalist working in university media was 98% less likely than a journalist working in privately owned media to have reported self-censorship for protection. The continuous variables show that older journalists were less likely than younger journalists to report self-censorship: The odds of reporting self-

ensorship typically decreased by 9.1% for each additional year of age. For example, a 45-year-old journalist was, on average, 91% less likely to have self-censored than a 35-year-old and 182% less likely than a 25-year-old. Similarly, journalists working in larger cities were less likely to have reported self-censoring to reduce risk: The odds of reporting self-censorship typically decreased by 5% for each additional 100,000 people living in the city where the journalist worked. A journalist in a city of 1 million, therefore, was, on average, 50% less likely to have self-censored as a protective mechanism than a journalist working in a city of 100,000. Journalists working in states with higher numbers of antipress attacks were also more likely to have reported censoring themselves to reduce risks. For each 10 additional reported attacks, the odds of a journalist in that state reporting self-censorship typically increased by 9%. Therefore, a journalist working in a state with 100 recorded attacks on the press was, on average, 90% more likely to have reported using self-censorship to reduce risk than a journalist working in a state with no recorded attacks on the press.

Finally, greater perceived economic influences on work and support for norms encouraging interpretive journalism to promote social change were statistically significant individual predictors of self-censorship. Economic influences on work stem from the financial position of the media firm, including perceived influences from company profit expectations and advertisers. For each step increase on a 5-point scale measuring the perceived importance of economic influences on work—ranging from 5 (*extremely influential*) to 1 (*not influential*)—the odds of self-censorship typically increased by 59%. A journalist who perceived economic influences on his or her work as “extremely” important was thus, on average, 59% more likely to have self-censored than a journalist who perceived economic influences as only “very” important (a one-step difference) and 118% more likely to have done so than a journalist who perceived economic factors as only “somewhat” important (a two-step difference). Similarly, the odds of having self-censored typically increased by 79% for each additional step on the 5-point scale of support for roles associated with using interpretive journalism to promote social change. As explained in the Appendix, this role conception groups support for four possible normative roles: providing analysis about current affairs, influencing public opinion, fomenting social change, and promoting national development. Therefore, a journalist who believed these roles were extremely important was, on average, 79% more likely to self-censor than one who believed the roles were very important and 158% more likely than one who viewed those roles as somewhat important.

#### *Adherence to Company Censorship Policy*

Table 4 reports the logistic regression model for adhering to a company’s censorship policy to reduce risk, listing the regression coefficient, standard error, odds ratio, and the ratio’s 95% confidence interval for each predictor. A test of the model was statistically significant,  $c^2(31, N = 327) = 76.78, p < .001$ , indicating that the predictors, as a set, significantly differentiated between journalists who reported having abandoned a street scene to protect themselves from threat or reduce risk and those who had not. The power of the model was moderate, with a pseudo  $R^2 = .29$  (Nagelkerke)—that is, 29% of the variance was explained. Classification was acceptable, correctly predicting 83.9% of those who had adhered to a company censorship policy and 54.5% of those who had not, giving an overall success rate of 71.9%. According to the Wald  $\chi^2$  statistic, the following individual conditions significantly predict a change in the odds of following a company censorship policy to reduce risk or threat: age,  $b = -0.041$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) =$

4.257,  $p < .05$ ; city population size  $b = -0.000$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 6.037$ ,  $p < .05$ ; perceived economic influences,  $b = 0.301$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 4.063$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and perceived influences of reference groups,  $b = -0.318$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 4.284$ ,  $p < .05$ .

The odds ratios showed that, for each additional year in age, a journalist was, on average, 4% less likely to report having followed a company censorship policy as a means of protection from risk or threat. In other words, a 45-year-old journalist was 40% less likely to have followed a censorship policy than a 35-year-old and 80% less likely than a 25-year-old. With regard to city population size, for each 100,000 additional residents in the city where a journalist worked, the journalist was, on average, 2.4% less likely to have reported adhering to a company censorship policy. Therefore, a journalist in a city of 1 million was 24% less likely to report having followed a company censorship policy than a journalist in a city of 100,000. Regarding the perceptual variables, for each additional point on a 5-point scale of perceived economic influences on work, a journalist was, on average, 35% more likely to report having followed a company censorship policy. A journalist who perceived economic influences from the media firm as extremely important was, therefore, on average, 35% more likely to report following a censorship policy than one who perceived economic influences as very important and 70% more likely than one who perceived economic influences on work as somewhat important. By contrast, journalists who perceived reference groups of colleagues and personal relationships as more influential were less likely to have followed a company censorship policy: 27% less for each step on a 5-point scale. A journalist who perceived reference group influences on work as extremely important was thus 54% less likely to report having followed a company censorship policy to reduce risk or threat than one who perceived reference group influences on work as only somewhat important.

**Table 4. Logistic Regression: Predictive Model of Adherence to Company Censorship Policy.**

	$b$ (SE)	95% CI for odds ratio		
		Lower	Odds ratio	Upper
Intercept	2.785 (1.802)			
Age	-0.041 (0.020)*	0.924	0.960	0.998
Woman	0.493 (0.313)	0.885	1.637	3.025
Indigenous self-identification (yes)	-0.640 (0.496)	0.200	0.527	1.394
Contract type, ref. = full-time				
Part-time	-0.074 (0.431)	0.399	0.929	2.163
Freelance	-0.582 (0.607)	0.170	0.559	1.838
Categories of experience, ref. = >10 years				
Experience: <5 years	-0.487 (0.513)	0.225	0.614	1.68
Experience: 5–10 years	0.076 (0.385)	0.508	1.079	2.295
Categories of rank, ref. = senior manager				
Rank: junior manager	-0.272 (0.517)	0.276	0.762	2.100
Rank: rank-and-file	-0.356 (0.538)	0.244	0.700	2.009

Salary level, ref. = lowest, up to twice the minimum wage				
Salary: middle, between two and eight times the minimum wage	0.111 (0.328)	0.588	1.117	2.124
Salary: high, above eight times the minimum wage	-2.083 (1.230)	0.011	0.125	1.387
Type of medium, ref. = daily press				
Medium: nondaily press	-0.504 (0.564)	0.200	0.604	1.826
Medium: online	0.357 (0.710)	0.356	1.430	5.744
Medium: radio	-0.338 (0.384)	0.361	0.713	1.409
Medium: TV	-0.647 (0.465)	0.211	0.524	1.303
Property ownership, ref. = private				
Property: state	0.898 (0.568)	0.806	2.456	7.482
Property: university	-0.287 (0.905)	0.127	0.750	4.420
Threatened due to work (yes)	0.483 (0.304)	0.893	1.620	2.941
News beats, ref. = all others				
Beat: police, courts, or security	-0.397 (0.488)	0.258	0.672	1.749
Beat: general assignment, various beats	-0.098 (0.305)	0.499	0.907	1.648
Influences: economic	0.301 (0.149)*	1.008	1.351	1.810
Influences: political	0.182 (0.154)	0.887	1.200	1.623
Influences: organizational	-0.100 (0.163)	0.658	0.905	1.245
Influences: reference groups	-0.318 (0.153)*	0.539	0.728	0.983
Roles: civic educator	-0.282 (0.246)	0.466	0.754	1.223
Roles: interpretive change agent	0.137 (0.249)	0.705	1.147	1.867
Roles: propagandist	-0.078 (0.188)	0.640	0.925	1.337
Roles: watchdog	-0.079 (0.191)	0.635	0.924	1.343
Level of press attacks in state	0.000 (0.003)	0.994	1.000	1.006
% of population that perceives state as insecure	0.014 (0.010)	0.994	1.014	1.034
Population of city where journalist works	0.000 (0.000)*	1.000	1.000	1.000

Note. Odds ratio =  $\exp(b)$ .  $R^2 = .29$  (Nagelkerke). Model  $\chi^2(31) = 76.78$ ,  $p < .001$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### *Abandoning Street Reporting*

Table 5 reports the model for abandoning street reporting, listing the regression coefficient, standard error, odds ratio, and the ratio's 95% confidence interval for each predictor. A test of the model was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(15, N = 327) = 25.77$ ,  $p < .041$ , indicating that the predictors, as a set, significantly distinguished between journalists who had abandoned a street scene to protect themselves

from threat or to reduce risk and those who had not. The power of the model was weak, however, with a pseudo  $R^2 = .104$  (Nagelkerke)—that is, only 10.4% of the variance was explained.<sup>6</sup> Classification was uneven, correctly predicting 92.3% of those who had abandoned a street scene, but only 26.9% of those who had not, giving an overall success rate of 68.5%. According to the Wald  $\chi^2$  statistic, the only individual condition that significantly predicted a change in the odds of abandoning a news site as a means of self-protection was having been threatened due to work,  $b = 0.604$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 5.45$ ,  $p < .05$ . Keeping all other variables constant, a journalist who reported having received a work-related threat was, on average, 80% more likely to have abandoned a news site compared with one who had not.

**Table 5. Logistic Regression: Predictive Model of Abandoning a News Scene.**

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI for odds ratio		
			Lower	Odds ratio	Upper
Intercept	-0.036	0.899			
Age	-0.001	0.013	0.973	0.999	1.026
Female	0.059	0.277	0.617	1.061	1.824
Indigenous self-identification (yes)	-0.104	0.456	0.369	0.901	2.201
Categories of rank, ref. = rank-and-file					
Rank: senior manager	0.863	0.523	0.85	2.371	6.614
Rank: junior Manager	0.107	0.275	0.648	1.112	1.909
Type of medium, ref. = daily press					
Medium: nondaily press	-0.834	0.485	0.168	0.434	1.123
Medium: online	0.012	0.671	0.272	1.012	3.77
Medium: radio	-0.144	0.285	0.496	0.866	1.513
Medium: TV	0.462	0.450	0.658	1.588	3.831
Threatened due to work (yes)	0.604*	0.259	1.102	1.830	3.039
News beats, ref. = all others					
Beat: police, courts, or security	0.376	0.453	0.600	1.457	3.537
Rate of press attacks in state	0.018	0.015	0.988	1.018	1.049
% of population that perceives state as insecure	0.005	0.010	0.986	1.005	1.024
Population of city where journalist works	0.000	0.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
State capital or Federal District (yes)	-0.392	0.301	0.374	0.676	1.22

Note. Odds ratio =  $\exp(b)$ .  $R^2 = .10$  (Nagelkerke). Model  $c^2(15) = 25.77$ ,  $p < .05$ .

\* $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

<sup>6</sup> While models for other protective practices used up to 22 predictor variables based on identification of possible predictors in press freedom reports, we used only 11 variables in this model because including additional variables through stepwise regression made the model statistically insignificant.

*Concealing Information in the Newsroom*

Table 6 presents the model for hiding sensitive information from suspicious people or untrustworthy colleagues in the journalist's own newsroom to reduce risk or threat. A test of the full model, with all predictors, was statistically significant,  $c^2(29, N = 329) = 43.15, p < .05$ , indicating that the predictors, as a set, significantly distinguished between journalists who had hidden sensitive information to reduce risk and those who had not. The power of the model was weak, with a pseudo  $R^2 = .16$  (Nagelkerke)—that is, only 16% of the variance was explained. Classification was relatively poor, with 64.8% of those who had hidden information and 67.7% of those who had not correctly predicted, giving an overall success rate of 66.3%. According to the Wald  $\chi^2$  statistic, the only individual condition that significantly predicted a change in the odds of hiding sensitive information to reduce risk or threat was covering the police, courts, and public security newsbeats:  $b = 1.169$ , Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 5.82, p < .05$ . The odds ratio showed that journalists covering the police, courts, and public insecurity newsbeats were 222% more likely to report having hidden sensitive information from suspicious people or untrustworthy colleagues in their newsrooms compared with journalists covering all other beats except general assignment.

**Table 6. Logistic Regression: Hide Information in the Newsroom.**

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI for odds ratio		
			Lower	Odds ratio	Upper
Intercept	0.245	1.294			
Age	-0.017	0.014	0.957	0.984	1.011
Female	0.272	0.284	0.752	1.313	2.293
Indigenous self-identification (yes)	0.586	0.460	0.729	1.796	4.424
Contract type a					
Part-time	0.297	0.402	0.612	1.346	2.960
Freelance	0.127	0.562	0.378	1.136	3.414
Categories of rank, ref. = senior manager					
Rank: junior manager	-0.290	0.482	0.291	0.748	1.924
Rank: rank-and-file	-0.315	0.305	0.402	0.730	1.326
Salary level, ref. = lowest, up to twice the minimum wage					
Salary: middle, between two and eight times the minimum wage	-0.115	0.292	0.503	0.892	1.582
Salary: high, above eight times the minimum wage)	-0.218	0.851	0.152	0.804	4.262
Type of medium, ref. = daily press					
Medium: nondaily press	0.569	0.501	0.662	1.767	4.714
Medium: online	0.398	0.653	0.414	1.489	5.351

Medium: radio	-0.574	0.314	0.305	0.564	1.042
Medium: TV	-0.454	0.437	0.269	0.635	1.497
Property ownership, ref. = private					
Property: state	0.261	0.503	0.484	1.298	3.478
Property: university	-0.270	0.955	0.118	0.763	4.958
Threatened due to work (yes)	0.402	0.268	0.885	1.495	2.526
News beats, ref. = all others					
Beat: police, courts, or security	1.169*	0.485	1.245	3.222	8.335
Beat: general assignment, various beats	0.481	0.277	0.940	1.617	2.782
Influences: economic	0.252	0.137	0.984	1.287	1.684
Influences: political	-0.245	0.143	0.591	0.783	1.037
Influences: organizational	-0.122	0.149	0.660	0.885	1.187
Influences: reference groups	0.143	0.137	0.882	1.154	1.509
Roles: civic educator	0.182	0.223	0.775	1.200	1.857
Roles: interpretive change agent	-0.226	0.226	0.512	0.798	1.243
Roles: propagandist	-0.077	0.173	0.660	0.926	1.300
Roles: watchdog	0.093	0.178	0.774	1.097	1.555
Number of press attacks in state	-0.002	0.003	0.992	0.998	1.003
% of population that perceives state as insecure	0.008	0.009	0.990	1.008	1.027
Population of city where journalist works	0.000	0.000	1.000	1.000	1.000

Note. Odds ratio =  $\exp(b)$ .  $R^2 = .16$  (Nagelkerke). Model  $\chi^2(29) = 43.15$ ,  $p < .05$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Discussion

Our study finds that the adoption of precautionary measures is widespread among Mexican journalists. Those engaging in these practices are a small to substantial majority for each practice studied. This suggests that the conditions increasing journalists' tendency to employ protective measures have important consequences for journalists as people and as publicly oriented professionals. Extending research on war correspondents, the study also confirms the influence of direct threat and implicit risk on self-censorship and on organizational censorship. However, our findings also reveal the complexity of pressures on national journalists in dangerous contexts, because threats and prolonged risk of violence overlay cultural norms and structural conditions of media systems. Support for social change-oriented reporting, perception of higher economic pressures, isolation and constraint in smaller communities, and vulnerability of newsbeats bringing journalists into the proximity of violent actors were important predictors increasing the likelihood of engaging in precautionary practices that undermined a journalist's autonomy and public focus. In a context where advertising markets are weak and clientelism has a long tradition, economic influences on the firm increase the likelihood of self-censorship and adhering to company censorship policies above and beyond direct threat and risk of antipress violence. Working in

smaller cities, where isolation is greater and the rule of law weaker, also increases the likelihood of engaging in both forms of censorship. With experience and newsbeats held constant in regression analyses, a younger journalist may feel more exposed to censorship pressures than one who is older. On the other hand, when age and newsbeats are held constant, a journalist with only a few years of experience on the job has faced fewer opportunities to self-censor than one with many years of experience.

The study findings have important implications on two levels. For the study of journalistic practice in dangerous contexts, the findings lend empirical support to theoretical propositions and emerging empirical research suggesting that journalism studies must expand to focus on democracies facing severe challenges to political rights, democratic accountability, and capable governance; they should include measures of unevenness in the rule of law at the subnational level and dangerous newsbeats; and they should pay more attention to how violence compounds economic pressures on the media firm. New empirical research has identified the vulnerability of journalists in local media outlets and on certain newsbeats, especially in “insecure democracies” with uneven performance in the rule of law, accountability, and representativeness (Hughes et al., forthcoming), but more fine-grained measures and centered inquiry in comparative studies are needed.

This study also reveals the urgency of protecting journalists, even beyond their enormous personal tribulations, by showing how violent threat and continuing risk undermine journalism’s roles of influencing democratic accountability and forming public opinion. Self-censorship and company censorship policies have the most clear and direct relationships to threat and risk. However, the prevalence of concealing information and its links to security and criminal justice newsbeats are a particularly stark indicator of the limitations journalists face when covering these beats, among the most important in societies suffering from escalating criminal or police violence. The finding that having received a direct work-related threat was the only statistically significant individual predictor increasing the odds for abandoning dangerous news scenes is also worrisome. Some of Mexico’s most important recent reporting on human rights abuses allegedly involving the police and armed forces was based on news scene reporting. If journalists are unable to report directly from crime scenes and the streets because of threats, news is limited to secondhand accounts or official narratives from press releases. Investigative journalism is curtailed.

Finally, the study reveals that journalists who voiced greater support for the use of interpretive journalism to promote social change—by analyzing current affairs, influencing public opinion, promoting national development, and fomenting social change itself—were more likely to have engaged in self-censorship. This evidence suggests that violence and economic pressures are silencing some of the country’s most socially committed journalists. Again, this is bad news for democracy and society.

On a more positive note, the findings suggest that reference group solidarity helps prevent the establishment of company censorship policies. We cannot be sure, but it seems that personal relationships and collegial support enable journalists and news companies to find other ways to deal with risk, such as offering safety training, as González de Bustamante and Relly’s (2016) work suggests, or enacting companywide security measures and insurance policies, as anecdotal evidence suggests. These are



potentially important remedies for media managers and owners concerned with the preservation of public-interest journalism. Working in university-owned media also seemed to offer protection from censorship pressures. This may be due to greater editorial autonomy or because those media do not cover particularly dangerous subject areas.

### Conclusion

Research examining the effects of violence and traumatic events on correspondents in war zones only begins to shed light on how these conditions influence journalists in many national contexts where violence, threat, and risk are ongoing. Our study identifies the prevalence and predictors of four specific practices to reduce risk that undermine public interest journalism. It extends the findings of some earlier qualitative studies and provides a baseline for future comparative research in other democracies where local journalists have to contend with similar pressures (Cottle et al., 2006; Dunham et al., 2015). We also lend empirical support to two important theoretically based arguments from media and political studies of insecure democracies: Waisbord's (2007) argument that the economic weakness of media firms is associated with unraveling social control and government ineffectiveness and O'Donnell's (1993) seminal work identifying isolated "brown areas" in electoral democracies where citizenship rights—including press freedom and free expression—are precarious or even routinely undermined.

A more detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth pointing out that journalists in many democracies plagued by violence, including Mexico, voice greater support for institutional roles associated with democratic ideals than for commercial or progovernment stances (Hanitzsch, 2011). At the same time, the risks of reporting on some of these countries' most important issues are extreme. For many journalists, then, professional practice has clearly become an exercise in balancing personal and occupational risks with perceived duties to society.

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### **Appendix: Creation of Perceived Influences and Role Conceptions Index Variables**

Index variables measuring perceived influences on work were created through principal component analysis (PCA) on 17 items with Likert-type scale responses ranging from 5 (*extremely influential*) to 1 (*not influential*). The items grouped into six dimensions, explaining 57.30% of total variance.<sup>7</sup> Predictor variables for dimensions of perceived influences showing adequate internal consistency on work were created by summing the scores and dividing them by the number of items within the dimension to standardize the 5-point scales for easier interpretation.

The *political influences* dimension includes four items—the perceived influences of government officials, politicians, business owners, and censorship—and displayed good internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ).

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<sup>7</sup> Sampling adequacy was verified by Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) = 0.81. Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $\chi^2 = 2,904.671$ ,  $df = 325$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicated that the correlation between the items was sufficiently large for principal component analysis. Each extracted dimension had eigenvalues greater than 1. In all cases, factor loadings above 0.5 were retained. Varimax rotation was used.

The presence of business owners in this dimension is unsurprising given the fact that state and family-owned private businesses supply advertising to privately owned Mexican media organizations. This dimension explained 13.02% of the variance. The *organizational influences* dimension grouped four items—perceived influences from direct bosses, media owners, upper management, and the company’s editorial policy—displaying good internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ) and explaining 11.60% of the variance. The *economic influences* dimension included two items—perceived influences of company profit expectations and advertisers—and displayed adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ). The economic dimension explained 8.41% of the variance. A fourth dimension, *reference groups*, grouped two items: perceived influences of colleagues in other media and of friends, acquaintances, and family. This dimension displayed adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ) and explained 10.19% of the variance. The fifth dimension grouped two items: the influence of media laws and access to information. We named this dimension *professional influences*, following Reich and Hanitzch (2013), who grouped media laws and reporting conventions. We believe these items grouped because of reporters’ use of recently created access to information laws. However, we discarded this dimension because internal consistency was low ( $\alpha = 0.63$ ). Professional influences explained 6.94% of the variance in Mexico. We also discarded a sixth dimension, *perceived process influences*, from three items—time pressures, resources for investigation, and audience research—because it did not display adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.53$ ). Process influences explained 7.14% of the variance.

Role conception index variables were constructed from 15 items rated from 1 (*not important*) to 5 (*extremely important*). These items grouped on four dimensions explaining 58.82% of the variance.<sup>8</sup> Variables for dimensions of support for role conceptions showing adequate internal consistency were created by summing the scores and dividing them by the number of items within the dimension to standardize the 5-point scales. The first dimension grouped four prompts: let people express their views, tell stories about the world, educate their audiences, and promote tolerance and cultural diversity. We called this dimension *civic educator* because the first items evoke media as a public platform for the exchange of views and a way of learning about the world through journalistic storytelling, and the other two items advocate educational roles for journalism. This dimension displayed adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.71$ ) and explained 15.81% of the variance. The second dimension grouped four prompts: provide analysis about current affairs, influence public opinion, foment social change, and promote national development. We call this an *analytical change agent* role, since it combines interpretive journalism with action to improve society. The dimension presented adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ) and explained 14.71% of the variance. The third factor, which we call *propagandist*, grouped four items: convey a positive image of political leadership, support government policy, provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audiences, and provide entertainment. This role conceptualization describes journalism as uncritically promoting the state and generating profits for media companies. Internal consistency was relatively poor ( $\alpha = 0.67$  Mexico), perhaps due to the merger of government and business propaganda functions, but it meets the minimum criteria for exploratory research in the social

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<sup>8</sup> Sampling adequacy was verified by Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) = 0.80. Bartlett’s test of sphericity ( $\chi^2 = 1,511.642$ ,  $df = 105$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicated that the correlation between the items was sufficiently large for principal component analysis. Each extracted dimension had eigenvalues greater than 1. In all cases, factor loadings above 0.5 were retained. Varimax rotation was used.

sciences and reaches the internal consistency level of scales used in other published research on journalistic practice (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013; Skovsgaard, 2014). The dimension explained 14.43% of the variance. The fourth dimension, *watchdog*, included three items: monitor and scrutinize political leaders, monitor and scrutinize business, and set the political agenda. This well-known role exhibited adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.72$ ) and explained 13.87% of variance.