

Violence against the press and the public interest¹

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Abstract

This chapter argues that when members of the journalistic community, civic actors and transnational organisations perceive a grievance regarding journalists' safety (for instance, a violent killing or forced disappearance of a professional colleague), they may articulate a civic networking coalition aimed at raising awareness, attracting public support and influencing policy making. By using the Mexican case, which is widely considered the most dangerous place for journalists in the western hemisphere, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the ability of civic networking coalitions to act and, next, to investigate which elements need to be in place in order for them to succeed (for instance, legitimacy of the perceived grievance and solidarity, setting specific goals, and gaining international support).

Introduction

Over the years, transnational advocacy and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), activists, journalists and other civic allies have adopted a series of communication strategies in order to bring public attention to specific issues, impact public opinion and shape policy making. This repertoire of strategies could be seen as part of what has been called 'public interest-forming practices' (see Chapter 1 of this book), which are the way in which communication practices and campaigns interact with policy making and implementation, social development and social change. Nowhere has proven to be a more fertile ground for the use of public interest-forming practices than the field of human rights (Sikkink 1993). In part, this is because human rights are the basis for public interest work and civic advocacy (Putnam 1993). In recent years, we have seen an increasing adoption of public communication techniques by civic organisers in order to mobilise the public towards increasing awareness, political action and policy impact (Lugo-Ocando & Hernández-Toro 2015). In doing so, we argue, activists, NGOs and close allies have created civic networking coalitions, defined as a set of collective actors distinguished largely by a primary interest in defending human rights and by the use of public interest-forming practices (among others activities) in their public interactions.

Despite the increasing relevance of civic networking coalitions in the protection of the safety of journalists in Latin America (Waisbord 2013, p. 166; Relly & González de Bustamante 2017; Segura & Waisbord 2016), insufficient attention has been given to them in the academic literature. This chapter is an attempt to analytically investigate the relationship between civic networking coalitions and public interest communication, and an opportunity to explore how the aforementioned coalitions produce 'public interest-forming practices'. The key argument is that: when members of the journalistic community, civic actors and transnational

¹ In *Public Interest Communication: Critical Debates and Global Contexts*, London: Routledge (J. Johnston and M. Pieczka, Edits.).

organisations perceive a grievance² regarding journalists' safety (for instance, a violent killing or forced disappearance of a professional colleague), they could articulate a civic networking coalition aimed at raising awareness, attracting public support and influencing policy making. In that sense, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the ability of civic networking coalitions to act and, next, to investigate which elements need to be in place in order for them to succeed (for instance, the legitimacy of the perceived grievance and solidarity, setting specific goals, and gaining international support). Additionally, we are also interested in analysing the main public interest-forming practices that civic networking coalitions deploy in order to achieve their goals (such as campaigning, community-advocacy journalism, public demonstrations and media activism).

We aim to investigate this argument by examining two case studies of lobbying and campaigning that have taken place in Mexico. These two civic networking coalitions were articulated in order to resist and denounce anti-press violence. We offer a detailed account about how these two civic networking coalitions, in 2006 and 2010, adopted public interest-forming practices intended to create specific measures to increase the safety of reporters in the country. These two cases are: first, the creation of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Journalists; and second, the statutory mechanism to protect journalists and human rights defenders. The selection of these two case studies aims to illustrate the wide range of possible circumstances in which civic coalitions use public interest-forming practices to foster a more robust institutional framework for the protection of journalists in Mexico.

Our analysis is framed within the public security crisis which has impacted upon Mexican society since 2006, when the government launched a military strategy to weaken drug cartels, which have resulted in more than 110,000 people being murdered and 30,000 'disappeared' in cartel-related violence (Schedler, 2016, p.10509). This situation is commonly referred to in news media reports as 'Mexico's war on drugs'. Since the Mexican government launched this military strategy, more than 80 journalists have been killed and 25 have been forcibly 'disappeared' (presumed dead) in possible connection to their work (CNDH 2016).

This chapter is organised as follows: first we provide a theoretical foundation for our analytical framework. We then examine the safety of journalists within the Mexican context and present an examination of two civic networking coalitions, developed in response to the position of journalists in Mexico. Finally, we draw some conclusions about the relationship between these civic forming coalitions, journalism and public interest-forming practices.

Social movements and human rights campaigning

Campaigning and lobbying are considered to be the quintessential activities for which public relations (PR) is recognised as a professional discipline (Edwards 2016). This is because PR, as a political social practice, is based upon a series of communication and relational strategies that are used to inform and persuade audiences in order to allocate or re-allocate legitimacy and power. Consequently, power in the context of PR needs to be analysed as communicative action, since power is 'normative-symbolic' and belongs to those who can command the attention of the media (Etzioni 1964). In this sense, we agree with Castells (2007 p. 242) when he suggests "the media are not the holders of power, but they constitute by and large the space where power is decided".

For Castells, wherever power exists, there is always resistance. He calls this form of resistance 'counter-power', which is defined as "the capacity by social actors to challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalised in society" (Castells 2007, p. 248). According to

² According to SNOW (2013), grievances are the common feelings that agglomerate a social movement. This condition could be associated with feelings like dissatisfaction, fear, indignation, resentment, and moral shock.

Castells (2007), counter-power has been present in every civilisation; however, in contemporary hyper-connected and globalised societies, where traditional political institutions are in crisis, counter-power has taken the form of social movements³ or civic networks. With the rise of digital technologies and mass-self communication – which refers to “private senders and public or semi-public and private receivers” (Castells 2007 p. 246), social movements and civil networks have deployed a hybrid repertoire of both collective and connective actions in pursuing their goals. In this context, one of the primary goals for social movements and civil networks is the expansion of democratic expression and contestation of domination (Castells 2007). Among the family of social movements, Segura and Waisbord (2016, p. 3) have identified ‘media movements’ as “civic initiatives aimed at transforming media policies to promote pluralism in public communication”. They argue that media movements may have many goals, including: the regulation of official advertising in the press; strengthening public and community broadcasting; Internet regulation; and stopping violence against journalists. In this line of thinking, we argue that civic networking coalitions are a type of media movement, which focus on defending human rights, using public interest-forming practices, among other activities in their public interactions. In this context, a campaign is made up of a series of actions that allow civic networking coalitions to politically mobilise segments of the public and to set and direct the public agenda towards a specific goal. In the case of human rights activism and media advocacy, this is done in order to facilitate social change, promote collective action and influence policy formation (Segura & Waisbord 2016).

In order to advance their agendas, civic networking coalitions deploy campaigning strategies which include organised efforts that seek to inform stakeholders and community groups about decision-making processes, while allowing the necessary feedback for broad consultation and effective action. In many cases, these campaigns incorporate lobbying in order to create external (international) or internal (domestic) pressures towards political intervention (Rice & Atkin 1989). These might include a media presence, street protests and convincing legislators to make decisions that help address certain issues and political agendas. These campaigns need to convey a sense of legitimacy in order to be effective. The entity organising the campaign must convince its stakeholders that its actions and objectives are desirable and appropriate to the challenge. The campaigns equally need to establish the degree of urgency to which stakeholders’ claims call for immediate action. These are considered in terms of being time-sensitive, such that any delay in attending the claims made by the campaign can be deemed unacceptable by the public.

In what follows, we will explore human rights activism, social movements and civil coalitions in contemporary Mexico in order to provide a context to presenting and discussing our two case studies.

Background: Mexican political context

After Mexico concluded a long process of democratisation with elections in 2000, the country rapidly moved towards a bloody and chaotic war to weaken drug-trafficking organisations in 2006. That year, in the middle of a political crisis derived from allegations of electoral fraud (Meyer 2015), Mexican President Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) declared a formal military operation to weaken drug cartels just ten days after he took office (Meyer 2015). The so-called ‘Mexican war on drugs’ (as Calderón labelled his own militarisation policy) was declared with neither a parallel effort to re-build the judicial apparatus that had been historically corroded by corruption and inefficacy, nor with integral efforts to shield local police corporations (Enciso 2017; Schedler 2015). In 2012 the new government, led by Enrique Peña Nieto, decided to

³ Tarrow (2011, p. 5) has defined social movements as “collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities”.

continue the militarisation strategy, although in public he and his cabinet maintained silence on the issue (Schedler 2015, p. 15). In the ten years from 2006, more than 110,000 were killed in cartel-related violence, but the perpetrators of those crimes have gone unpunished (Schedler 2016, p. 1050). The number of cartel-related crimes – homicides, kidnappings and extortion – increased dramatically in this period, especially within subnational regions of the country (Hope 2015). Furthermore, with the military in the streets fighting openly against drug cartel cells, human rights violations by the military (or other state authorities such as local police groups) also boomed in the same period (Enciso 2017; Anaya 2014). Significantly, Mexican journalists – as witnesses to these events, and in many cases first responders to these atrocities (Osofsky et al. 2005) – did not escape this spiral of criminal violence (Brambila 2017a). Before we examine the impact on journalists at this time, we will devote some space to elucidating why violence against the press is a public interest issue.

Violence against journalists

We define anti-press violence as physical attacks, verbal intimidation and threats against news journalists and media outlets that arise as a result of their work (Brambila and Hughes, 2018). Although violence in society is relevant in its own right as a focus of analysis for social scientists, for us anti-press violence particularly matters because these actions limit journalistic professional practice, which is largely considered to be a *sine qua non* condition for news journalism to fulfil its professional values, including its democratic role (Löfgren & Örnebring 2016, p. 881; Brambila and Hughes, 2018). Furthermore, media scholars have proven that violence against the press has broad consequences, not only for the journalists and news media that directly receive such attacks, but also as a chilling effect on other colleagues and civil society in general, with such acts jeopardising access to valuable public information and limiting freedom of the press (Brambila and Hughes, 2018). Finally, anti-press violence constitutes a public interest issue, especially because it is widely considered a public health problem (Riddick et al. 2008).

Mexico's epidemic of anti-press violence

Although violence against the press was part of the repertoire of manipulation implemented by Mexico's public officials during the extensive authoritarian regime (especially at a local level), killing and forced disappearances of journalists did not constitute a regular means of coercion during Mexico's one-party rule (1928–2000). In fact, as in other one-party regimes, but contrary to brutal military dictatorships in South America, Mexican autocrats (mostly civilians) favoured clientelism and co-optation over violent means as the main form of press control (Lawson 2002). However, violence against the press did occur. Political historian Benjamin Smith documented around 200 violent attacks against local journalists and newspapers between 1940 and 1960, and around 20 journalists killed between 1944 and 1970 (Smith 2018). Furthermore, in 1984, the violent killing in Mexico City of the very influential journalist and political columnist for the national newspaper *Excelsior*, Manuel Buendía, was one of the more relevant crimes against the press during the one-party regime. Later, in the 1990s and 2000s, a dozen journalists were killed either for political purposes, or by public officials colluding with organised crime or drug traffickers, including Héctor Félix Miranda, co-founder of muckraking magazine *Zeta* in Tijuana, Baja California (Simon 1997). In fact, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, an independent press freedom advocacy organisation based in New York, during the last decade of the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) domination of the party arena and electoral system (from 1988 to 2000), 16 journalists were killed (Waisbord 2002). However, these numbers pale in comparison to the more than 100 journalists who have been killed in the country since 2000. According to the London-based international news safety

organisation Article 19 México, 26 journalists were killed during the first six years of the first federal government elected via democratic and free elections (2000–2006). From 2007 onwards, when Felipe Calderón declared the military strategy to weaken drug cartels, lethal attacks on the press increased even more. Since then, more than 80 journalists have been killed and there have been 25 disappearances (presumed dead), according to Article 19 México (2016). To these numbers, we can add a high level of intimidation tactics and acts of aggression suffered by journalists in this period. From 2010 to 2015, for every journalist killed per year, there were (on average) at least 35 acts of verbal intimidation and physical aggression against the press documented by Article 19 México (2016). It is possible that the real number is far higher than this. Further data from this non-profit organisation show that in the last decade the vast majority of victims were local beat journalists or investigative reporters working on common crime (called *nota roja*), corruption, organised crime, drugs and human rights violations in the country's interior. Finally, when it comes to the prosecution of crimes against the press, the Human Rights Commission (CNDH 2016, p. 47) reports that almost 90 per cent of crimes committed against journalists as a result of their jobs go unprosecuted. In cases related to the forced disappearance of journalists and attacks against media facilities, few of the perpetrators have faced any legal consequences (CNDH 2016, p. 48).

In an attempt to try to document and explain this violent wave of attacks against the Mexican press, both international and Latin American academic literature has embraced the so-called 'Mexican war on drugs' (Holland & Rios 2017). However, as academic research on the Mexican media system has suggested other structural factors at a subnational level have also played a role in fostering the conditions in which attacks against the press have risen – factors including many cases of violations of human rights by public security bodies, poor performance of democratic institutions, and rampant social inequality (Hughes et al. 2017a; Brambila 2017a and 2017b; Relly & González de Bustamante 2014).

When civic coalitions meet public interest

This section explores how civil society organisations, in conjunction with international and national news safety organisations and advocacy coalitions of journalists, deploy public interest-forming practices to raise awareness and demand justice on the issues of journalists' safety and impunity in crimes against the press in Mexico. In the process, we argue, these civic coalitions have also engaged in lobbying processes and institutional building that have resulted in a more robust legal and operational framework to guarantee the exercise of freedom of the press in the country. Although these efforts have not yet materialised in a structural change in the conditions that limits anti-press violence in the country – just between 2016 and 2017 as many as 16 journalists were violently killed in Mexico (Vázquez 2017) – these experiences illustrate how a group of civic coalitions have used 'public interest-forming practices' to advance their objectives and influence social engagement and public life.

We argue that among other strategies, civic coalitions use strategic communication and public relations techniques – including but not restricted to social mobilisation and advocacy journalism – to capture public attention, raise awareness and influence policy making. However, even when the civic coalitions deployed in these processes share some common elements, they also show important differences, especially in terms of composition, demands and resources. We will examine two cases in which different actors have created civic coalitions that successfully led to the building of institutional frameworks to implement their specific demands.

The first example focuses on the role played by independent journalists and media owners, national and international news safety organisations, as well as Latin American organisations of publishers and international bodies, brought together to raise awareness of the issue of

crimes against the press and demand the creation of a special prosecutor with the capacity to address federal courts in these cases. The special prosecutor, the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression, part of the Attorney General's Office, was established in 2006 by presidential mandate. The second example considers the communication and public relations strategies and lobbying tactics developed by national NGOs, independent groups of journalists and international bodies to push for the creation of a special law to protect journalists with the aim of establishing protocols for national and local authorities following attacks and aggression towards the press. The new *Law of Protection for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists* was approved by both chambers of Congress and passed into legislation in July 2012.

The following section will analyse how these two networked civic coalitions have deployed public interest-forming practices in order to create specific measures to increase the safety of reporters in the country, namely, the creation of the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Journalists (later changed to the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression), and the statutory mechanism to protect journalists and human rights defenders.

Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression

Mexican journalist Alfredo Jiménez Mota, a specialist in organised crime reporting for the legacy newspaper *El Imparcial*, went missing as he was about to meet with one of his sources on the night of 2 April 2005 in the city of Hermosillo, in the north-western state of Sonora. He has not been seen since. According to the Committee for the Protection of Journalists his abduction was linked to his reporting on drug-trafficking organisations operating in Sonora and the links between them and close allies among local authorities (Campbell & Salazar 2008). Mota's disappearance is emblematic of contemporary violence against the press and is regarded by journalists in Sonora as an example of what could happen to any colleague who investigates organised crime links in that state. In the days immediately following his disappearance, newspapers in Sonora (including *El Imparcial*) and the neighbouring state of Sinaloa (where Mota worked for newspapers *El Debate* and *Noroeste*) called for citizens' help in finding Mota (Baldenegro 2005). Despite the continued problem of a lack of professional solidarity, journalists from different media outlets held social protests in the state of Sonora demanding the return of their colleague (Article 19 México 2008, p. 16). Two weeks after his disappearance, on 18 April, around 500 people marched in silence in Hermosillo, the capital city of Sonora, to protest the lack of results in the case (García et al. 2005). Around the same time, a group of 60 local journalists from Sonora sent a letter to Mexican President Vicente Fox demanding justice for the missing journalist. On 19 April, in Hermosillo, Fox announced that he would use 'all State forces' to find Mota (Granados Chapa 2006).

In the days immediately following Mota's disappearance, the Inter American Press Association (IAPA), a transnational organisation of the more influential newspapers and media outlets in Latin America and Mexico, was very active in fostering different strategies to advance legal investigations (IAPA 2010). As Juan Fernando Healy, owner of *El Imparcial*, belonged to IAPA, the organisation designated a special group of journalists to investigate the case on 6 April 2005. Months later, as the judicial case showed no sign of substantial progress, the IAPA members held meetings with President Fox, congressmen, and members of the Supreme Court. On 14 April, the IAPA asked federal authorities to create a special prosecutor's office to investigate crimes against the press (IAPA 2010). On 30 August 2005, the IAPA held a "meeting of newspaper editors and publishers from Mexico's northern border" and national newspapers in Hermosillo (IAPA 2010). Attending the meeting were owners and representatives of some of the country's most influential newspapers, such as national

newspapers *El Universal* and *Milenio*, as well as local newspapers such as *El Diario de Yucatán* (from the southern state of Yucatan), magazine *Zeta* (from Baja California), *Noroeste* and *Debate* (from Sinaloa), *Norte* and *El Diario de Chihuahua* (from the northern state of Chihuahua), *El Mañana* (from Tamaulipas), and *El Siglo de Torreón* (from Coahuila) (IAPA 2010). This was a meeting without precedent in the recent history of the Mexican press. Following the meeting, the group published the so-called ‘*Declaración de Hermosillo*’ (Hermosillo Declaration), in which they demanded that the Mexican authorities clarify Jiménez Mota’s disappearance, as well as other brutal crimes against Mexican journalists. “This claim included, with all firmness, the Executive, Legislative and Judicial powers, with the purpose to coordinate all their powers to create greater guarantees for the freedom of expression’, stated the Declaration. After this, in December 2005, the Chamber of Deputies in conjunction with the Federal Attorney’s Office set up a working group to follow up attacks on journalists (Cambio 2005).

After the historical ‘*Declaración de Hermosillo*’, in January 2006, the IAPA, in conjunction with organisations like the International Federation of Journalists, held another meeting in Mexico, this time in the border city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, the city undergoing at that time the highest rates of lethal crimes against the press (mainly perpetrated by organised crime groups) (IAPA 2005). Following this meeting, the group set up the so-called ‘*Phoenix Project*’ (*Proyecto Fénix*), which created a special group of journalists to investigate the forced disappearance of Mota, a joint effort not seen before in the recent history of Mexican journalism. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation funded the campaign led by the IAPA, which aimed to put an end to the impunity in the crimes against journalists in Mexico and Latin America. Among other things, the campaign included the use of advertisements to bring impunity to the public’s attention (IAPA 2006). The campaign also included special training for journalists working in hazardous areas (IAPA 2006). Dario Fritz, an investigative reporter and former member of the Rory Peck Trust in Mexico, recalled that this initiative was revolutionary in the Mexican context: “there has never been anything like it (...) this was the first time that somebody did something like that here [in Mexico]” (Fritz 2015). Furthermore, the group also agreed to publish a map of risks to document cases and raise public awareness of the issue (IAPA 2006). Fritz also participated in this initiative. He recalled: “[we wanted to] look at the more emblematic cases; investigate them; make a map; and generate awareness and diffusion of all these cases’ (Fritz 2015). The *Map of Risks* was published in January 2006. The investigation in Mexico, led by investigative journalist María Idalia Gómez, documented testimonies from dozens of reporters, editors, publishers, photographers, cameramen and officials in 15 cities in six out of the 32 Mexican states (IAPA 2006).

One year after Mota went missing, in April 2006, a dozen Mexican newspapers simultaneously published “the first results of the Phoenix Project made up of a group of journalists from various news media in Mexico and sponsored” by the IAPA (2006). In that publication, journalists pointed out: “The most relevant fact of this story is that a year has passed since the reporter was kidnapped and the attorney general’s office has no information as to his whereabouts” (Watson 2006).

Finally, amidst continuing national and international pressure around the issue of violence against the press and impunity, on 15 February 2006 the Mexican government created the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Journalists, to examine cases concerning freedom of expression at the federal level. In July 2010, the office was replaced by the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression, which was granted powers to bring to federal court any crime against freedom of expression in the country. However, after more than ten years in existence, the results of the special prosecutors are lacking, and the Mota case has not been resolved (CNDH 2016). This case is not an exception

– as noted earlier, 25 journalists have disappeared since 2005 and are still missing. The perpetrators of these crimes have gone unpunished (CNDH 2016).

Special task force to protect journalists

Similar to the institutional creation of the Special Prosecutor's Office, the special protection mechanism for journalists, which is a statutory mechanism, was the product of a long process which included lobbying, contestation, and strategic communication and public relations tactics led by a heterogeneous civic coalition, which included human rights advocacy organisations and international bodies (Campa 2014, p. 21).

As noted earlier, since 2006, when the Mexican president announced the military strategy to weaken organised crime in Mexico, acts of aggression against journalists had reached unprecedented levels. From 76 acts of aggression against journalists documented by 2003, the number increased to 244 in 2009, according to the annual report published by Article 19 México (2011, p. 7). However, acts of aggression not only increased in number but also in their intensity and brutality. The London-based advocacy organisation reports that from 2006 to 2012, 57 journalists were violently killed as a result of their job (Article 19 México 2016). Furthermore, cases like Jiménez Mota's forced disappearance became more common. In the same period, 17 journalists went missing (mainly in subnational states like Tamaulipas, Michoacán and Veracruz). Also, in the same period, 43 media facilities (headquarters) were violently attacked, the majority of them in the northern states of Nuevo Leon, Coahuila and Tamaulipas (Article 19 México 2016).

In this context, a group of civil society organisations came together to draft a National Protection Mechanism to protect journalists and human rights defenders (Joloy 2013, p. 492). Like journalists, human rights defenders had been another vulnerable group increasingly targeted by aggression during this violent period (Joloy 2013). In February 2010, a group of organisations linked to the so-called Civil Society Space (Espacio de la Sociedad Civil) held meetings with representatives of international bodies and Mexican public officials on the issue of aggression against journalists and human rights advocates. The meeting was held in a special venue in Tlatelolco, Mexico City, just a few blocks from the famous square where the military and paramilitary groups massacred dozens of students on 2 October 1968. The meeting was sponsored by the Ministry of the Interior, the Human Rights Commission (CNDH), and the Mexican representative of the Offices of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Campa 2014, p. 22). Colombian experts who, years before, had designed similar mechanisms in Colombia, were also invited to the meeting (Joloy 2013, p. 492). This is relevant because according to an investigative journalist from the muckraking magazine *Proceso*, Homero Campa, "the idea to create a special mechanism for the protection of journalists was largely inspired by the Colombian experience" (Campa 2014, p. 22).

Days later, on 26 July 2010, three journalists were kidnapped in the city of Gómez Palacio in the state of Durango while covering a protest by inmates and relatives at a local prison. They were Jaime Canales Fernández from Grupo Multimedios, and Héctor Gordo Márquez and Alejandro Hernández Pacheco, head of information and camera operator, respectively, both from media outlet Televisa. The criminals forced media companies "to broadcast videos of interrogations carried out by alleged collaborators of a rival group" (Cepet 2010). Grupo Multimedios met the demands of the kidnappers. On 30 July, Mexican journalist Denise Mearker decided, together with Televisa and her production team, not to air her programme 'Punto de Partida' in protest at the kidnapping of one of its investigative team. This was one of the few public acts ever held by Televisa to protest against the attacks that their journalists and professional team had received due to their work.

This series of events marked the beginning of a round of public contestations and collective indignation led by a group of independent journalists. An investigative reporter, founder of the journalists' professional organisation *Periodistas de a Pie* (Journalists on Foot) and one of the many journalists behind this movement, Daniela Pastrana, recalled: "I think everything exploded with that event (...) We gathered together. We worked and made a Facebook page" (Pastrana 2014). They labelled the movement *Los Queremos Vivos* (We Want Them Alive), and generated a protest in Mexico City in which around 2,000 people participated, including independent journalists, citizens and students (Baltazar & Pastrana 2011), a show of solidarity never before seen around this issue. Similar mobilisations took place in another 14 cities throughout the country. According to Pastrana, one of the successes of these social mobilisations was that nobody took particular advantage of them: "what we decided from the beginning was to not allow logos, because we wanted to avoid any conflict among different organisations (...) I think that the great success of this demonstration was that every kind of journalist came together". In the long term, the Facebook page of *Los Queremos Vivos* became a space of digital denunciation of crimes and aggression against the press. Through this digital space journalists and civic organisations from all over the country continually share information on anti-press violence and have raised awareness of these issues with colleagues (Baltazar & Pastrana 2011).

Just a few days after these cycles of civil contestation, in August 2010, following campaigning by news safety organisation *Article 19 México*, alongside a collective of national and international organisations, two international figures on freedom of expression visited Mexico on a joint official visit: Frank la Rue, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Opinion and Expression, and Catalina Botero, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression for the Inter American Commission of Human Rights. In their respective meetings with Mexican authorities, they emphasised the necessity of implementing a special task force for the protection of journalists (Campa 2014, p. 22). During their time in Mexico, Botero and la Rue held meetings with several news advocacy organisations, academics and think-thanks (Reforma 2010). For many news safety organisations in the country, these visits opened a window of opportunity to bring attention to the issue of the special mechanism and increased pressure on the Mexican government. "We hope their visit will induce the State to provide the answers that have been constantly denied to victims and their relatives", said Darío Ramírez, chief representative of *Article 19 México*. In the public report made at the end of their joint visit, they suggested that the Mexican state "[e]stablish a special national mechanism to protect journalists" (United Nations 2010).

From that moment, policy making took two different, albeit related, roads (Campa 2014). On the one hand, the Mexican government (via the minister of the interior) signed an agreement of collaboration to implement a set of actions to protect journalists. Later they began public consultations about this issue with several NGOs. While this first round of consultations did not gain support from more important civil organisations in the country and abroad, in a parallel policy-making arena, a group of civil society organisations (numbering more than 200) started working on this issue in the Mexican Congress (Joloy 2013, p. 494). This group included international organisations like Amnesty International and Peace Brigades International, as well as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Mexico (Joloy 2013, p. 494). According to Daniel Joloy, the involvement of these international bodies "permitted the construction of a solid base of trust amongst civil society organizations themselves" (Joloy 2013, p. 496). In this context, Congressman Rubén Camarillo from the National Action Party (PAN) began public consultations to create a special mechanism for the protection of journalists. From November 2011 to March 2012 his office in the Senate organised approximately 20 public consultations with prominent NGOs, including *Espacio*

OSC, Cencos, Casa de los Derechos, Agustin Pro, and Comisión Mexicana Protección Derechos Humanos (Joloy 2013). In such meetings the organisations agreed to the creation of the special mechanism to protect journalists and discussed its legal design. As Campa (2014, p. 20) suggests in his academic work on this matter, “[c]ivil organisations and international bodies of human rights exercised direct pressure on Congress and the Mexican government”. After several weeks of consultation and intense lobbying, the Mexican government higher chamber (the Senate) approved the new legislation on 24 April. Two months later, Mexican President Calderón approved the Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists on 25 June 2012. However, as with the development of the Special Prosecutor’s Office, discussed previously, despite the creation of a special mechanism to protect journalists, after more than three years, the law has not yet resulted in a significant decrease in crimes against journalists. Among other things, critics suggest a lack of material and human resources, as well as a lack of confidence in federal authorities from journalists and human rights defenders (CNDH 2016).

Conclusion

In general terms the development of the two case studies discussed in this chapter show how media movements in the form of civic networking coalitions can successfully use public interest-forming practices, such as campaigning, community-advocacy journalism and media activism, both off- and online in order to disrupt the public space, set the agenda and enhance civic collaborative efforts. The two cases reviewed in this chapter exemplify the rich and diverse spectrum of public communication strategies that media movements can deploy in order to make their voices heard. Also, the two cases illustrate how, in times of conflict, civic networking coalitions are capable of making a real impact on the political process and on the public policy agenda in what might be described as public interest-forming practices.

Additionally, these two examples suggest that in a world that is becoming more connected and interdependent every day (Castells 2007), the role of international actors (from regional organisations to international advocacy groups and global bodies) can play a determining role in setting the media agenda and enhancing public awareness inside national states (Relly & González de Bustamante 2017). This is especially true in the Mexican case, where campaigns developed by civic networking coalitions have been seen as a counter-narrative to the official account deployed by the Mexican authorities through expensive international public image campaigns, developed to improve the country’s image abroad during the so-called ‘war on drugs’ (Brambila 2014).

The two civic networking coalitions examined here in their different ways suggest that networking interactions between national civil society organisations and international bodies and groups, as well as independent journalists and human rights advocacy groups, can deploy tactics that contribute towards enhancing solidarity within the network, bringing public attention to their own agendas and engaging in policy formation practices (Relly & González de Bustamante 2017; Segura & Waisbord 2016). However, as we suggested at the beginning of the chapter, it is worth considering that the two cases are framed in a specific historical situation and actually occurred in two related but different moments of Mexico’s epidemic of violence. On the one hand, the institution-building process of the Special Prosecutor’s Office happened at the beginning of this wave (between 2005 and 2006), when independent coalitions and advocacy networks of independent journalists and news safety organisations were scarce in the country. At that time, in order to foster a common agenda, the civic networking coalition was led by a regional association of publishers and owners (the IAPA) that took on one symbolic case – the forced disappearance of journalist Jiménez Mota – in order to form a common agenda. On the other hand, the approval of the Law for the Protection of Human

Rights Defenders and Journalists occurred in the middle of the country's epidemic of violence, between 2010 and 2011. At that time, national organisations and international bodies were more aware and indeed more organised around the broader issue of violence in the country. However, as we have shown, even when civil society awareness and civic density were improved, the civic networking coalition needed to go through a learning process of empathy and solidarity in order to present a common agenda and successfully impact on public policy. Additionally, the two examples illustrate how a civic networking coalition is made up of a heterogeneous variety of actors, suggesting that there is no one best way to create and boost a common public agenda. In the first example, the coalition was made up of different national and international organisations that advanced their specific agenda through different contestation cycles and lobbying tactics. On this point it is important to mention that the regional association of publishers and owners, IAPA, played a pivotal role from the beginning. However, joint efforts from different media owners (including close competitors in the media market), in order to mitigate acts of aggression against the press, have been scarce since then. This is especially important because in a comparative perspective, one of the key factors in increasing the awareness about the protection of journalists during the more violent years in Colombia, during the late 1980s and 1990s, was the public commitment and professional solidarity among some of the most emblematic journalistic figures and media owners in the country (Hughes et al. 2017b). In Mexico, however, this possibility seems less plausible, not only because the more relevant media companies have close relationships with Mexican political elites (Guerrero 2010), but also because Mexican journalists widely perceive a lack of support from many of their own organisations (Article 19 México 2016).

The second example suggests that civic network coalitions can be made up of a larger number of international and domestic civil society organisations that articulate their concerns in specific demands to Mexican authorities. One important element here is that the involvement of certain international actors with proven reputations in the process, like "Amnesty International (...) and the OHCHR permitted the construction of a solid base of trust amongst civil society organizations themselves" (Joloy 2013, p. 496). Additionally, it is important to note that institution-building did not end when particular demands materialised in certain institutions, but remain a continuous process in which established and new civic networking coalitions need to routinely maintain pressure in order to increase effectivity and mitigate remaining problems. In the end, we believe that civic networking coalitions can successfully engage in institution-building practices by advancing their own agendas with grass-roots lobbying techniques that engage different civil organisations groups including international bodies, as well as national organisations working directly with victims. Finally, we conclude that the Mexican experience has not yet materialised in qualitative improvements either in regard to the protection of journalists or in terms of the effectiveness of judicial prosecution of crimes against the press. The lack of results suggests that civil society mobilisation and international awareness are not enough to change structural and institutional conditions, such as weakness in rule of law enforcement, high levels of societal and criminal violence, widespread corruption and scandalous collusion between corrupt public officials and criminals that prevail inside the broken Mexican state. As such, public interest-forming practices alone, as illustrated in this chapter, are insufficient to effect meaningful change.

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