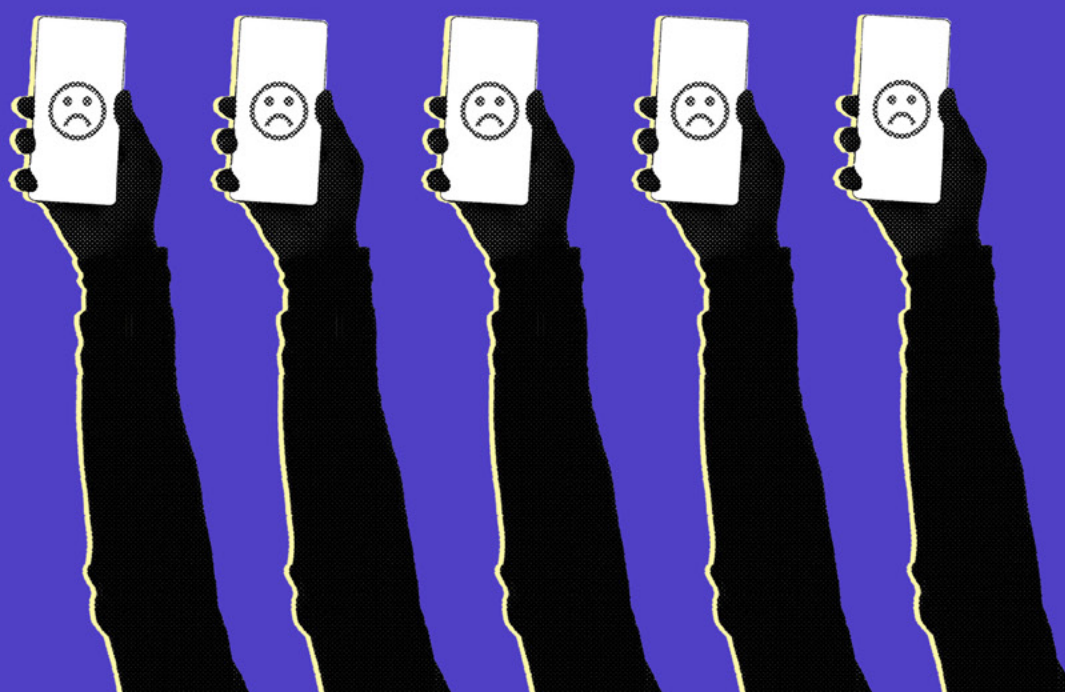


REPORT 2.0

Error 404:

Democracy not found



Record and study of the events that violated,
restricted, and criminalized freedom of
expression and access to information through
the Internet in Venezuela in 2021

2022

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REDESAYUDA REPORT

ERROR 404: DEMOCRACY NOT FOUND

Record and study of the events that violated, restricted, and criminalized freedom of ex-

pression and access to information through the Internet in Venezuela in 2021.

REDESAYUDA

The non-governmental organization RedesAyuda was founded in 2014 to contribute to creating, promoting, and consolidating free and independent human social networks (digital and analog) as an indispensable instrument for the advocacy and defense of human rights in a democratic society. Among its main areas of interest are: human rights, freedom of expression, media, Internet access, and the strengthening, preparation, and training of activists, journalists, leaders, and defenders in digital and information security.

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MOTIVATION FOR THE REPORT

The Human Rights Council of the United Nations (UN) established through resolution A/HRC/RES/47/16 in July 2021 that “the same rights that assist individuals offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, which everyone has the right to exercise without limitation of frontiers and by any means of his or her choice (...).” Based on the current context in Venezuela, in which traditional media are increasingly harassed, social networks have become the primary tool for Venezuelans to stay informed.

These circumstances have meant that access to information and free exercise of freedom of expression in these spaces are becoming more restricted due to the control and crim-

inalization of any release of information or opinion that may be uncomfortable for the Venezuelan regime.

This study proposes to analyze specific cases that occurred during the year 2021, such as events, actions, and policies in which the Venezuelan regime violated the Internet and freedom of expression in the digital space. It also seeks to demonstrate the systematic censorship of the Internet in Venezuela and the mechanisms used by the regime further to restrict the communication and organization spaces of citizens to perpetuate its communicational hegemony.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democracy and freedom of expression in Venezuela are practically non-existent, which makes the role of digital media and social networks fundamental elements to overcome the communicational hegemony and evade the censorship established by the Venezuelan regime. These are the only genuinely reliable windows of information, dissemination, and denunciation for Venezuelan society today.

Since 2007, the Venezuelan State has engaged in a relentless campaign of censorship against the traditional media in the country. The policy included the arbitrary decision from Hugo Chávez Frías, former president of Venezuela, not to renew the concession to the open television channel Radio Caracas Televisión (RCTV) in 2007 and the closure of Radio Caracas Radio (RCR) by CONATEL, with orders from the regime of Nicolás Maduro, in 2019.¹

Due to these actions and the rise of the Internet and social networks as communication and deliberation platforms, dozens of digi-

tal news media have been created. However, these have also been affected by censorship, blockades, and attacks perpetrated by the State, both physically and digitally, to control and silence public opinion and discussion and the dissemination of free thought. The regime has tried to prevent journalists, opposition politicians, activists, human rights defenders, personalities, and citizens in general from questioning and denouncing the actions of the Venezuelan regime freely and without fear of being subject to the application of judicial and extrajudicial measures carried out by bodies controlled and supervised by the State.

At RedesAyuda, we annually document, analyze and denounce digital events that threaten freedom of expression, the right to information, and access to the Internet; as well as analyze the country's context and the importance of the Internet to face the complex humanitarian emergency and the economic, social and political crisis as fundamental elements to understand the Venezuelan reality in greater depth.

1 Perdomo, W. (May 27th 2019). *Cierre de RCTV: el primer gran golpe a la libertad de expresión*. [Shutdown of RCTV: the first major blow to freedom of expression.] El Nacional. https://www.elnacional.com/entretenimiento/cierre-rctv-primer-gran-golpe-libertad-expresion_283606/

GLOSSARY

STATE AGENCIES

CANTV (Compañía Anónima Nacional Teléfonos de Venezuela - Teléfonos de Venezuela National Joint Stock Company): State-owned telecommunications company. Main Internet provider in Venezuela.

CONATEL (Comisión Nacional de Telecomunicaciones de Venezuela - National Telecommunications Commission of Venezuela): Venezuelan government agency that regulates, supervises and controls telecommunications in the country.

TSJ (Tribunal Supremo de Justicia - Supreme Court of Justice): Highest judicial body in the country.

CNE (Consejo Nacional Electoral- National Electoral Council): Governing body in national electoral matters.

AN (Asamblea Nacional – National Assembly): Body that exercises the Legislative Power in the country.

STATE SECURITY FORCES

PNB: Policía Nacional Bolivariana - National Bolivarian Police.

GNB: Guardia Nacional Bolivariana - National Bolivarian Guard.

SEBIN: Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional - Bolivarian National Intelligence Service.

DGCIM: Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar - General Office of Military Counterintelligence.

CICPC: Cuerpo de Investigaciones Científicas Penales y Criminalísticas - Scientific, Criminal, and Criminalistic Investigation Department.

FAES: Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales - Special Actions Forces.

CONAS: Comando Nacional Antiextorsión y Secuestro - National Anti-extortion and Kidnapping Command.

SIPEZ: Servicio de Investigación Penal del Estado Zulia - Zulia State Criminal Investigation Service.

MAIN SOURCES

VE Sin Filtro: Project of Venezuela Inteligente, a Venezuelan non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to the defense of digital rights. The project focuses on analyzing, documenting, denouncing, and teaching how to circumvent Internet blockades and censorship in Venezuela.

NetBlocks: NGO dedicated to the defense of digital rights, cybersecurity, and Internet governance globally. One of the organization's most important research areas focuses on analyzing, documenting, and denouncing online blockades and censorship, mapping Internet connectivity disruptions, and measuring their impact in countries with a high context of repression and censorship.

Espacio Público: Venezuelan NGO that promotes and defends freedom of expression, the right to information, and social responsibility in the media.

Instituto Prensa y Sociedad Venezuela (IPYS Venezuela): Venezuelan NGO promoting and defending the freedom of expression, the right to information, and social responsibility in the media.

Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Prensa (SNTP): Guild of pressworkers in Venezuela.

TERMS

Hacking: Activity that seeks to compromise a network, device, or digital account, usually seeking to steal information, attack, or gain control from it.

ISP: Internet access service provider.

IP: Internet Protocol. An IP address is a set of numbers that identifies a device so that it can communicate with other devices over a network.

TCP: Transmission control protocol. It ensures that data on the Internet can be delivered to its destination without errors and in the same order it was transmitted.

Server: Running application capable of handling requests from a client and returning a response accordingly.

TCP/IP block: Block type that prevents connection to the end server, either through the TCP protocol or by blocking the server's IP address.

VPN: Virtual private network. It is a network technology that allows connecting two or more devices securely through a virtual point-to-point connection. It enables evading most types of websites blocking by hiding the traffic from the ISP and the origin of the link to the end server.

Host: Server that offers a service.

Hosting: Server that provides a web storage service.

Domain: A unique name that identifies a sub-area of the Internet. Used to access web sites without the need to know the IP address where the sites are located.

DNS: Domain Name System. DNS servers are responsible for translating the domains associated with a website to the IP address on which it is hosted.

DNS block: A block type that occurs in a DNS server in which the server does not respond with the IP address associated with the requested domain.

DNS spoofing: A cyberattack in which a DNS server returns an incorrect response, in the form of an IP address, intending to redirect the user to a website other than the one they wanted to access, usually a malicious website.

Phishing: A cyberattack that seeks to deceive the victim by using social engineering techniques to manipulate them and steal information or make them perform an action that they would not usually do voluntarily.

DDoS: Distributed denial of service. A cyberattack in which a group of computers generates a large flow of information from various points to the same server to saturate it and make it temporarily inaccessible.

Hypertext: A system of data organization and presentation linking textual or graphic fragments to other fragments.

HTTP: Hypertext transfer protocol. A communication protocol that allows the transfer of information on the worldwide computer network.

HTTP block: It is a protocol-based lock, which prevents the transfer of hypertext content to a server.

HTTPS: Secure Hypertext Transfer Protocol. An application protocol based on HTTP, for

the safe transfer of hypertext data. A secure version of HTTP.

TLS: Transport layer security. It is a cryptographic protocol that encrypts a user's communication with a website. The HTTPS protocol uses it.

Handshake: Communication establishment. A term that refers to the negotiation established between a browser and a server to define the parameters of the channel they will use to communicate securely.

SNI: Server name indicator. Indicates the server's name to which the user is trying to connect before completing the handshake.

SNI filtering or HTTPS block: block type that prevents the HTTPS handshake and connection from being completed, containing the desired website or service from being accessed.

Bot: A computer program created to execute automatic tasks on the Internet.

Troll: Anonymous user who seeks to annoy other users through the Internet.

Fake news: Pseudo-journalistic content mainly distributed through social networks and other digital platforms to generate disinformation.

OONI Probe: Tool created by the Open Observatory of Network Interference (OONI) to detect censorship, surveillance, and manipulation of Internet traffic.

Zoombombing: To arbitrarily break into a Zoom videoconference platform to sabotage the meeting without the authorization of the room host or the participants.

IXP: Internet traffic exchange point. A physical infrastructure where different networks, including Internet providers, can connect to exchange local traffic.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has become a fundamental tool for the exercise of human rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and freedom of the press, allowing citizens to have a space to debate, express themselves and connect with other people on any topic, regardless of where in the world they are.

In 2021, the UN Human Rights Council made an update to the resolution for the promotion and protection of all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, including the right to development, in which they affirm that the rights that “assist individuals offline must also be protected online,” highlighting freedom of expression; condemns human rights violations on the Internet and “calls upon all States to ensure accountability and effective remedies in this regard, in accordance with their international obligations.”²

The Internet is expected to be an open and facilitating space for the exercise of human rights worldwide. Yet, in countries under authoritarian regimes, the Internet has become one of the main spaces for criminalizing freedom of expression, restricting access to information, and attacking journalists, activists, human rights defenders, political opponents, and citizens who are not part of the narratives of those who abuse power, in countries under authoritarian regimes. Unfortunately, Venezuela falls into this category.

Since 2016, the NGO *RedesAyuda* has carried out an annual report to document, denounce, and spread the repressive practices of Nicolás Maduro’s regime towards dissidence in the country in an attempt to control

what is said against its narratives by criminalizing and restricting the free exercise of human rights such as freedom of expression and access to information. In 2021, the continuity of cases in which these freedoms have been violated on the Internet was recorded, making visible how the regime continues to increase strict control over the Venezuelan digital environment.

Dissidence has faced increasingly frequent authoritarian actions, such as being victims of harassment and discrediting campaigns led by platforms with narratives strongly aligned to the regime of Nicolás Maduro, such as *Lechuguinos*, one of the portals dedicated to harassing and spreading disinformation about the media, journalists and human rights defenders; and *Globovisión*, which at the beginning of the year, published the same news with at least three different headlines, violating and discrediting the work of journalists from news media such as *EfectoCocuyo* and the journalist Luz Mely Reyes.

The regime has used the approval of pseudo laws to arrest, charge and deprive of liberty those who, for expressing themselves, informing and denouncing the conditions of essential public services, are issuing messages that instigate hatred. In that regard, during the year 2021, the discussion about the “Cyberspace Law” was brought up, which seeks to increase the control and surveillance over the Venezuelan digital space. On the other hand, media websites and those with content uncomfortable for the regime have been subject to blockages and cyber-attacks that restrict access to information.

2 United Nations (July 26th, 2021). Human Rights Council Resolution 47/16 “Promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet.” A/HRC/RES/47/16: <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/47/16>

The regime's censorship apparatus includes repressive measures such as arbitrary arrests, harassment, discursive attacks, blocking of websites by the primary Internet providers in Venezuela, creation, and financing of an army of accounts that help it disseminate its narrative, manipulation of informa-

tion and positioning of its propaganda on social media platforms. In 2021, 65 cases were registered, representing a 42% decrease compared to the cases documented in 2020 (127). However, this did not mean a reduction in the regime's repressive practices to censor and control the Venezuelan digital space.

CHAPTER I: **REPRESSIVE CONTEXT**

At the beginning of the year, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to aggravate the conditions of essential public services in Venezuela, the difficulties regarding fuel supply, and the negligence in the acquisition and implementation of an accessible vaccination schedule for all citizens who already had to deal with the high costs of hospitals, the precarious conditions of health centers and the lack of medical supplies to treat the disease in a country hit by the economic crisis.³

On Thursday, February 18th, Nicolás Maduro announced that the first doses of Sputnik V vaccine, purchased by the regime in a batch of 100,000 vaccines and for which it claimed to have paid US\$200 million, had begun to be administered.⁴ Although Dr. Glendy Rivero was the first to be vaccinated on nationwide Estate broadcast,⁵ the most vulnerable sectors, including health care workers and the elderly, would not be a priority. Instead, Maduro announced that “among the first to receive the immunization would be political officials such as mayors, governors, and deputies to the National Assembly, controlled by the ruling party.”⁶

By May 2021, the Minister of Health of the Venezuelan regime, Carlos Alvarado, announced that there would be 27 vaccination posts throughout the national territory at the beginning of April and that they would ac-

tivate 77 vaccination points in the country⁷ with which they expected to vaccinate between “600 and 1,000 people” daily. Likewise, he invited citizens to register in the Patria System, since in this process, the selection was random through this system, then those selected received a text message with the data of the health center where they would be vaccinated. This action conditioned Venezuelans to have access to vaccines.

On the other hand, the regime increasingly delayed an agreement to acquire vaccines through the COVAX initiative. In March 2021, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) reported that the first shipment of vaccines manufactured by the British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca would arrive; however, the Maduro regime prohibited their use in the country,⁸ even though they announced that Venezuela was going through the second wave of COVID-19 infection, with the P.1 variant.⁹ As a result, the first arrival of vaccines through the COVAX initiative in Venezuela was in September 2021.¹⁰

Amid the problematic access to vaccines, health sector representatives, activists, human rights defenders, and citizens embarked on protests¹¹ to call for better working conditions, medicines, and medical supplies. The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict recorded 6,560 protests in 2021, 1,240 of those

3 Núñez, A. (September 7th, 2020). “Es impagable”: el costo de hospitalizarse por coronavirus en Venezuela. [“It’s unaffordable”: the cost of being hospitalized for coronavirus in Venezuela.] <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/venezuela-venezuela-coronavirus-costos-impagable/6067746.html>

4 BBC. (February 19th, 2021). Vacuna contra el coronavirus: qué se sabe del inicio de la inmunización del covid-19 en Venezuela y por qué es polémica. [Coronavirus vaccine: what is known about the start of covid-19 immunization in Venezuela and why it is controversial.] <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-56120882>

5 Nicolás Maduro. [@nicolasmaduro]. (February 18th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/NicolasMaduro/status/1362508991641903109>

6 BBC. (February 19th, 2021). Vacuna contra el coronavirus: qué se sabe del inicio de la inmunización del covid-19 en Venezuela y por qué es polémica. [Coronavirus vaccine: what is known about the start of covid-19 immunization in Venezuela and why it is controversial.] <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-56120882>

7 Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Salud. (May 28th, 2021). Venezuela inicia II Fase del Plan Masivo de Vacunación contra la COVID-19. [Venezuela begins Phase II of the Mass Vaccination Plan against COVID-19.] <http://www.mpps.gob.ve/index.php/sala-de-prensa/notnac/1124-venezuela-inicia-ii-fase-del-plan-masivo-de-vacunacion-contra-la-covid-19>

8 Monitoreamos. (March 15th, 2021). Régimen de Maduro anunció que no autorizará la vacuna de AstraZeneca en Venezuela [Maduro’s regime announced it will not authorize AstraZeneca’s vaccine in Venezuela.] <https://monitoreamos.com/venezuela/regimen-de-maduro-anuncio-que-no-autorizara-la-vacuna-de-astrazeneca-en-venezuela>

9 BBC News Mundo. (March 26th, 2021). Coronavirus en Venezuela | “Los hospitales están abarrotados”: la preocupación por la llegada del “peor momento de la pandemia” [Coronavirus in Venezuela | “Hospitals are overcrowded”: concern about the arrival of the “worst moment of the pandemic.”] <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-56516746>

10 Organización Panamericana de la Salud. (September 7th, 2021). Venezuela recibe primer envío de vacunas contra la COVID-19 a través del Mecanismo COVAX [Venezuela receives first shipment of COVID-19 vaccine through COVAX initiative] <https://www.paho.org/es/noticias/7-9-2021-venezuela-recibe-primer-envio-vacunas-contra-covid-19-traves-mecanismo-covax>

11 El Diario. (April 17th, 2021). Imágenes que dejó la protesta de miembros del sector salud exigiendo la vacunación en Venezuela [Images from the protest by members of the health sector demanding vaccination in Venezuela] <https://eldiario.com/2021/04/17/las-imagenes-protesta-por-vacunas-en-venezuela/>

registered were to demand the right to health and 698 to demand vaccination campaigns.¹²

However, as part of its censorship policy, the Maduro's administration used repressive practices to try to silence those who demanded better conditions in the health sector. An example of this was the arbitrary detention of nurse Ada Macuare, who was also charged with incitement to hatred and terrorism for demanding medical supplies, medicines, and biosecurity equipment.¹³ In addition, the organization *Médicos Unidos Venezuela* denounced that up to September, they had counted 625 threats by the authorities of Nicolás Maduro's regime "to health personnel for attending protest demonstrations."¹⁴

Another event, reflecting the constant violations by the State security forces, took place in March 2021 in Apure state. On Sunday, March 21st, the director of the NGO *FundaRedes*, Javier Tarazona, informed the beginning of a new armed confrontation between guerrilla groups in several sectors of La Victoria, Apure state, bordering Colombia.^{15 16} The conflict involved FARC dissidents and the Venezuelan Army. On March 23rd, *FundaRedes* reported that a SENIAT building and the GNB headquarters in La Victoria were attacked with explosives.¹⁷

In the face of this new armed conflict, citizens living in these areas were the most affected. The NGO *Provea* published a video

in which an 86-year-old woman denounced how "the National Police"¹⁸ arbitrarily broke into her home and beat one of her grandchildren visiting her from Maturín. Meanwhile, journalist Junior Parra condemned the alleged murder of a family by FAES officers¹⁹ in El Ripial, Apure state, on his Twitter account. According to Parra, "weapons and grenades were strategically placed for the photos and to justify their deaths."²⁰

The Colombian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Claudia Blum, on Wednesday, April 14th, denounced before the UN "the displacement of 5,737 people of Venezuelan nationality" to Arauquita, Colombia, since the beginning of these clashes on March 21st, 2021.²¹

On the other hand, journalists and activists were also victims of the repressive practices of Nicolás Maduro's regime for reporting and denouncing irregular situations in the affected areas. Such was the case of the arbitrary detention of journalists Luis Gonzalo Pérez and Rafael Hernández, and *FundaRedes* activists Juan Carlos Salazar and Diógenes Tirado, detained for 24 hours while trying to cover the armed conflict in Apure state.²²

Due to the reports, denunciations, and investigative work from *FundaRedes*, activists of the organization were victims of threats and arbitrary detentions. On April 8th, 2021, Javier Tarazona denounced that the organization was again an "object of harassment and crim-

12 Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social. (2021). *Venezuela anual 2021*. <https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/oc/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/INFORMEOVCS-ANUAL2021.pdf>

13 Pellicani, G. (July 28th, 2021). *Ada Macuare: la enfermera señalada de terrorismo que ayuda a comunidades*. [Ada Macuare: the nurse accused of terrorism who helps communities.]

<https://elpitazo.net/oriente/ada-macuare-la-enfermera-senalada-de-terrorismo-que-ayuda-a-comunidades/>

14 Centro de Comunicación Nacional. (October 11th, 2021). *Sector salud ha recibido 625 amenazas por asistir a jornadas de protesta por sus DDHH*. [The health sector has received 625 threats for participating in human rights protests.] <https://presidenciave.com/regiones/sector-salud-ha-recibido-625-amenazas-por-asistir-a-jornadas-de-protesta-por-sus-ddhh/>

15 FundaRedes. [@fundaredes]. (March 21st, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/FundaREDES/status/1373776423748562944>

16 FundaRedes. [@fundaredes]. (March 21st, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/FundaREDES/status/1373791879855235077>

17 FundaRedes. [@fundaredes]. (March 24th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/javiertarazona/status/1374749655985176577>

18 Provea. [@fundaredes]. (March 24th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/Provea/status/1374711363562577928>

19 Infobae. (March 26th, 2021). *Denuncian asesinatos, abusos y detenciones arbitrarias tras la llegada de las FAES a la zona de conflicto en la frontera de Colombia y Venezuela*. [Reports of murders, abuses, and arbitrary detentions following the arrival of the FAES in the conflict zone on the Colombian-Venezuelan border.] <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2021/03/26/denuncian-asesinatos-abusos-y-detenciones-arbitrarias-tras-la-llegada-de-las-faes-a-la-zona-de-conflicto-en-la-frontera-de-colombia-y-venezuela/>

20 Junior Parra. [@juniorparra19]. (March 26th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/JuniorParra19/status/1375290682634555392>

21 Tal Cual. (April 14th, 2021). *Colombia informó a la ONU que más de 5.000 personas fueron desplazadas desde Venezuela*. [Colombia informed the UN that more than 5,000 people were displaced from Venezuela.] <https://talcualdigital.com/colombia-informo-a-la-onu-que-mas-de-5-000-personas-fueron-desplazadas-desde-venezuela/>

22 Tal Cual. (April 1st, 2021). *Liberados periodistas y activistas de FundaRedes tras más de 24 horas detenidos en Apure* [FundaRedes journalists and activists released after more than 24 hours of detention in Apure.] <https://talcualdigital.com/denuncian-desaparicion-de-periodistas-detenido-mientras-cubrian-conflicto-en-apure/>

inalization” by Diosdado Cabello.²³ More than two months later, on July 3rd, SEBIN officials detained Javier Tarazona, Rafael Tarazona and Omar de Dios García, activists of *FundaRedes*.

The activists went to the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Falcón state to denounce the harassment they were victims of as state security officers were showing up at the hotel where they were staying. After being received at the Superior Prosecutor’s Office, they were informed of an arrest warrant against Javier Tarazona and taken to the SEBIN headquarters in Punto Fijo.

On July 3rd, the activists were presented, arrested, charged with “treason, terrorism, and incitement to hatred,”²⁴ and transferred to the SEBIN headquarters in El Helicoide, Caracas. On October 26th, 117 days after the arbitrary detention, Omar García and Rafael Tarazona were released with a precautionary measure of presentation every eight days. On December 31st, 2021, Javier Tarazona completed 182 days of arbitrary arrest in El Helicoide.²⁵

lyzed public transportation in the affected areas, mainly Cota 905, and caused the forced displacement of citizens in this sector.

According to *Diario Tal Cual*, these clashes began when members of the gang of alias “El Koki” shot at El Helicoide and wounded at least two officers as a response from the criminals after one of their members (“Loco Leo”) ended up injured in a shootout with the police.²⁶

On July 10th, Carmen Meléndez, Minister of Interior, Justice, and Peace of the Venezuelan regime, offered a balance of the operation by state security officials: “22 criminals were killed during the operation,”²⁷ She assured that only 12 were identified. However, the Monitor de Víctimas initiative reported on July 13th that of the deaths announced by representatives of the regime, “only 4 were presumed members of the Koki gang” and assured that “other 15 victims had no relation with the mega-gang and died in extrajudicial executions or when hit by stray bullets.”²⁸

CLASHES BETWEEN CRIMINAL GANGS AND STATE SECURITY FORCES

Popular areas in Venezuela are dominated by the presence of criminal gangs that keep their inhabitants in fear. The clashes that began on July 7th between Special Action Forces and the criminal band led by Carlos Luis Revete, alias “El Koki”; Carlos Calderón Martínez, alias “El Vampi”; and Galvis Ochoa Ruíz, alias “El Galvis,” figure as an example. These confrontations kept businesses closed for days, para-

NEGOTIATING TABLE IN MEXICO: THE OPPOSITION AND THE RULING PARTY

On August 13th, 2021, Mexico welcomed the delegations of the regime of Nicolás Maduro and the Unitary Platform for the inaugural act of the negotiation process, which was to be mediated by Norway. That same day, both parties signed a document on the points of the negotiation agenda, which included po-

23 Javier Tarazona. [@javiertarazona]. (April 8th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/javiertarazona/status/1380025233684496384>

24 Acceso a la Justicia. (July 2nd, 2021). *Cronología del caso de la ONG Fundaredes*. [Chronology of the Fundaredes NGO case.] <https://accesoala-justicia.org/cronologia-del-caso-de-la-ong-fundaredes/>

25 Provea. [@_provea]. (December 31st, 2021). Twitter https://twitter.com/_Provea/status/1476999109185875973

26 Amaya, V. (July 15th, 2021). *Diez preguntas aún sin respuesta oficial sobre el operativo en la Cota 905*. [Ten questions still unanswered about the operation at Cota 905.] <https://talcualdigital.com/diez-preguntas-aun-sin-respuesta-oficial-sobre-el-operativo-en-la-cota-905/>

27 Runrunes. (July 10th, 2021). *Gobierno ofreció balance del operativo policial en la Cota 905*. [Government offered balance of the police operation at Cota 905.] <https://runrun.es/noticias/448349/gobierno-ofrecio-balance-del-operativo-policial-en-la-cota-905/>

28 Runrunes. (July 13th, 2021). *#MonitorDeVictimas | 23 muertos en tiroteos de la Cota 905 han sido identificados*. [MonitorDeVictimas 23 killed in Cota 905 shootings have been identified.] <https://runrun.es/monitor-de-victimas/448602/monitordevictimas-23-muertos-en-tiroteos-de-la-cota-905-han-sido-identificados/>

litical rights, electoral guarantees, lifting of sanctions, and restoration of active rights.²⁹ After that, the following meetings were held between the ruling party and the opposition:

August 14th and 15th: After the opening ceremony, according to the Norwegian representation, both parties held “constructive meetings.” On August 15th, Norway issued a joint statement on the negotiation process.³⁰

September 3rd to 6th: The first round of negotiations. The participation of Freddy Guevara, after the departure of Carlos Vecchio from the negotiating table, at the request of the regime of Nicolás Maduro, is noteworthy. On September 6th, Norway published the joint statement on this first round of negotiations.³¹

September 24th to 27th: The second round of negotiations between the regime of Nicolás Maduro and the Unitary Platform had to begin on September 24th; however, representatives of the ruling party did not attend.³² That same day, Delcy Rodríguez accused the U.S. ambassador, James Story, of giving “orders to the colonized and puppet opposition of Venezuela on what to do at the Dialogue Table.”³³

On September 25th, the second round of negotiations began, with the incorporation of Nicolás Maduro Guerra. The delegation of Nicolás Maduro arrived in Mexico, displaying posters of Alex Saab.³⁴ Journalist Osmar Hernández reported that the statements from the Prime Minister of Norway in the framework of the United Nations “caused discomfort in the delegation of @Nicolas-

Maduro” for which reason they concluded the round. Norway published the joint statement on this round of negotiations.³⁵

October 17th to 20th: Although the Norwegian representation indicated that the new round of negotiations between the regime and the opposition would take place between October 17th and 20th, it did not take place after Jorge Rodríguez announced that the regime’s delegation would not participate in the dialogue process as a form of protest against the extradition of Alex Saab to the United States.³⁶

ALEX SAAB: DETENTION, EXTRADITION AND CHAVISTA PROPAGANDA

In July 2019, the U.S. Department of Justice, Southern District of Florida, informed that two Colombian businessmen (Alex Nain Saab Moran and Alvaro Pulido Vargas) were indicted for “their alleged role in laundering the proceeds of violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.” Said accusations connected with a scheme “to pay bribes and take advantage of the exchange rate”³⁷ controlled by the Maduro regime. The statement expressed that they were formally charged with eight counts, one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, and seven counts of money laundering.

On July 25th, 2019, the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the U.S. Treasury Department sanctioned Alex Nain Saab Moran and pointed him out as “a speculator who

29 Hurtado, J. (August 14th, 2021). *El Gobierno de Venezuela y la oposición inician un nuevo diálogo en México.* [The Venezuelan government and the opposition begin a new dialogue in Mexico.] <https://www.france24.com/es/am%C3%A9rica-latina/20210814-venezuela-nicolas-maduro-oposicion-inician-dialogos-mexico>

30 Norway MFA. [@norwaymfa]. (August 15th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/NorwayMFA/status/1427012164087390214>

31 Norway MFA. [@norwaymfa]. (September 6th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/NorwayMFA/status/1435070875003465732>

32 Osmar Hernández. [@osmarhcn]. (September 24th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/osmarhcn/status/1441582826516742146>

33 Delcy Rodríguez. [@delcyrodriguez]. (September 24th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/delcyrodriguez/status/1441537871622639616>

34 Osmar Hernández. [@osmarhcn]. (September 25th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/osmarhcn/status/1441822022485565440>

35 Embajada de Noruega [@noruegameca]. (September 27th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/NoruegaMexCA/status/1442638480367104005>

36 Osmar Hernández. [@osmarhcn]. (October 16th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/osmarhcn/status/1449516673434857479>

37 Departamento de Justicia de Estados Unidos. (July 25th, 2021). *Two Colombian Businessmen Charged with Money Laundering in connection with Venezuela Bribery Scheme.* <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdfl/pr/two-colombian-businessmen-charged-money-laundering-connection-venezuela-bribery-scheme>

orchestrates a vast network of corruption” supported by the regime in Venezuela.³⁸ On September 4th, 2020, the Colombian Prosecutor’s Office pointed out Alex Saab as Maduro’s figurehead and charged him with the alleged crimes of money laundering, illicit enrichment, and fraud, among others.³⁹

In Venezuela since 2018, the investigative media *ArmandoInfo* mentioned Alex Saab in a series of reports,⁴⁰ which showed his relationship with the regime of Nicolas Maduro in a corruption scheme related to the CLAP bags in Venezuela. However, the investigations of this media caused discomfort among representatives of the regime and its allies.

At the beginning of 2018, Alex Saab filed a lawsuit⁴¹ against four journalists of *ArmandoInfo* (Alfredo Meza, Ewald Scharfenberg, Joseph Poliszuk, and Roberto Deniz), for which they decided to go into exile. But these would not be the only reprisals against *ArmandoInfo*. In August 2018, ISPs Movistar, Digitel, and CANTV blocked access to the website of the news portal.⁴² In September of that same year, journalist Roberto Deniz received a notification from CONATEL prohibiting the four journalists from publishing content in digital media in which they mentioned Saab.⁴³

On June 12th, 2020, Nicole Navas, spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Justice, confirmed the capture of Alex Saab in Cape Verde. He was arrested when a private plane he was traveling landed in Cape Verde to refuel.⁴⁴ From that moment on, Saab faced an extradition request to the United States, which was made on October 16th, 2021.

Since the arrest of Alex Saab, the regime in Venezuela has carried out an extensive campaign to demand his release, including convening a demonstration in the Plaza Bolívar in Caracas,⁴⁵ days after his extradition, displaying a poster on Libertador Avenue in Caracas that reads “freedom for diplomat Alex Saab, kidnapped by the government of Cape Verde;”⁴⁶ painting phrases demanding his release on the walls of Venezuelan streets,⁴⁷ and making a series broadcast on YouTube about Saab’s story⁴⁸ and disseminating Chavista propaganda in his favor through social networks.

In early 2021, the social network Twitter suspended 1,500 accounts “for manipulating the hashtag #FreeAlexSaab.” Twitter’s action responded to an investigation by BuzzFeed and the Digital Africa Research Lab (DARL). According to BuzzFeed, this campaign on behalf of Alex Saab in Nigeria was “due to a broadly influential operation with connections to employees of a Nigerian PR firm and a UK-

38 U.S. Department of the Treasury. (July 25th, 2021). *Treasury Disrupts Corruption Network Stealing From Venezuela’s Food Distribution Program*, CLAP. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm741>

39 DW. (September 5th, 2020). *Álex Saab acusado en Colombia por lavado de activos y exportaciones falsas. [Álex Saab charged in Colombia for money laundering and false exports.]* <https://www.dw.com/es/%C3%A1lex-saab-acusado-en-colombia-por-lavado-de-activos-y-exportaciones-falsas/a-54823388>

40 ArmandoInfo (2015-2021) *El caso de Alex Saab [The case of Alex Saab]* <https://armando.info/series/el-caso-de-alex-saab/>

41 Coscojuela, X. (February 5th, 2018). *Demanda contra periodistas de Armando.info los lleva al exilio por investigar los CLAP. [Lawsuit against Armando.info journalists leads them to exile for investigating CLAP.]* <https://talcualdigital.com/alex-saab-demanda-a-periodistas-del-portal-armando-info-por-investigacion-sobre-los-clap/>

42 Rodríguez, R. (August 15th, 2018). *Armando.info sufre bloqueos por http desde operadores privados y Cantv. [Armando.info is being blocked by http from private operators and Cantv.]* <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/armando-info-sufre-bloqueos-por-http-desde-operadores-privados-y-cantv/>

43 Espacio Público. (September 11th, 2018). *Prohíben a Armando.info publicar sobre Alex Nain Saab. [Armando.info is banned from publishing about Alex Nain Saab.]* <https://espaciopublico.org/prohiben-a-armando-info-publicar-sobre-alex-nain-saab/#.W5gnYVVKiUk>

44 Martínez, D. (October 16th, 2021). *El largo camino judicial hacia extradición de Saab a EEUU en claves. [The long judicial road to Saab’s extradition to the U.S. in key points.]* <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/claves-trayecto-captura-saab-extradicion-eeuu/>

45 800 noticias. (October 17th, 2021). *Caracas | Chavismo se concentra en la plaza Bolívar: «Alex aguanta el pueblo se levanta» [Caracas | Chavismo rallies in Bolívar Square: «Alex endures, the people stand up.»]* <https://800noticias.com/caracas-chavismo-se-concentra-en-la-plaza-bolivar-alex-aguanta-el-pueblo-se-levanta>

46 Orozco, B. (31 de enero de 2021). *COLMO DEL CHAVISMO: pegan afiche en Caracas para exigir libertad de Alex Saab. [CHAVISMO’S COLIME: Posters are pasted in Caracas to demand freedom for Alex Saab.]* <https://impactovenezuela.com/colmo-del-chavismo-pegan-afiche-en-caracas-para-exigir-libertad-de-alex-saab/>

47 El Nacional. (February 23rd, 2021). *Chavistas pintan murales en Caracas para pedir la liberación de Alex Saab. [Chavistas paint murals in Caracas to demand the release of Alex Saab.]* <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/chavistas-pintan-murales-en-caracas-para-pedir-la-liberacion-de-alex-saab/>

48 Alex Saab. (June 18th, 2021). *Alex Saab - La Serie. Capítulo 1 [Alex Saab - The Series. Chapter 1].* YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZe8qkQrTY>

based non-profit organization.”⁴⁹ According to this study, the campaign paid highly influential people in Nigeria to tweet in favor of Saab while he was detained in Cape Verde.

In addition, the ProBox Digital Observatory released research studying the behavior of the campaign carried out on Twitter in favor of Alex Saab from January to October 17th, 2021. ProBox detected 134 trends totaling 3,521,712 tweets, of which 53.75% were “possible automated or fake accounts.”⁵⁰ September was the month with more trends related to Saab, registering a total of 34 trends accumulating 92% of the messages issued in favor of the Colombian businessman. However, between October 1st and 17th, 2021, 22 trends were positioned with at least 920,205 tweets.

For a broader view of how the regime has used social networks to wage campaigns in favor of Alex Saab that promoted disinformation, the fact-checking organization *Cazadores de Fake News* published the report “*Bitácora de la operación de influencia a favor de Alex Saab en redes sociales* [Logbook of Alex Saab’s influence operation in social networks.]”⁵¹ The study chronologically gathers the threads of tweets, reports, observations, and disproved information on campaigns in favor of Saab in the digital space.

However, the regime in Venezuela not only makes use of social networks to undertake campaigns in favor of Alex Saab, but they have also developed a series of strategies to guarantee the positioning of their narratives on these platforms. For example, the investigation by *Cazadores de Fake News* “*Sin RT no hay paraíso: ¿cómo funciona la maquinaria de propaganda en Twitter de Nicolás Maduro?*

[No RT, no paradise: how does Nicolás Maduro’s Twitter propaganda machine work?]

⁵² evidences how an army of accounts managed by real people and receive weekly bonuses through the Carnet de La Patria position daily trends with Chavista propaganda.

Regarding the bonus payments through the Patria System, since 2018, the regime promoted this practice, in which they granted weekly approximately US\$0.3 to those who helped to position Chavista propaganda tags on the social network Twitter. To be part, users had to create a Twitter account and then register it on the Sistema Patria website, where they would find a “Social Networks” section to enter their username and then synchronize their account with the “Twitter Patria” application.

Once the users synchronized their Twitter account with the “Twitter Patria” application, users had to publish at least 1,000 tweets per week to be eligible for prizes divided into: “gold medal” (2,800 and 3,000 tweets per week), “silver medal,” and “bronze medal” (2,000 and 1,400 messages in seven days). However, in March 2021, Maduro’s administration announced the suspension of the awarding of these bonuses.⁵³

The investigation of *Cazadores de Fake News*, “*Los trolls que defienden a las FAES en Twitter* [Trolls defending FAES on Twitter],” revealed other examples of how the regime uses social networks to position Chavista propaganda.⁵⁴ They showed how a total of 85 Twitter accounts issued multiple responses in defense of FAES’ actions in two specific publications: a tweet from *El Pitazo* on the article “Vargas Police kills FAES officer implicated in the death of

49 Silverman, C. (April 9th 2021). *Why Do A Bunch Of Nigerian Twitter Influencers Want This Alleged Money Launderer To Go Free? They’re Being Paid.* <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/nigerian-twitter-campaign-alex-saab>

50 ProBox. (October 2021). *Alex Saab: el mártir según tendencias manipuladas en Twitterzuela.* [Alex Saab: the martyr according to manipulated trends on Twitterzuela.] <https://proboxve.org/publicacion/alex-saab-el-martir-segun-tendencias-manipuladas-en-twitterzuela>

51 Cazadores de Fake News. (October 19th, 2021). *Bitácora de la operación de influencia a favor de Alex Saab en redes sociales.* [Logbook of Alex Saab’s influence operation in social networks.] <https://www.cazadoresdefakenews.info/bitacora-operacion-alex-saab-redes-sociales/>

52 Cazadores de Fake News. (February 13th, 2021). *Sin RT no hay paraíso: ¿cómo funciona la maquinaria de propaganda en Twitter de Nicolás Maduro?* [No RT, no paradise: how does Nicolás Maduro’s Twitter propaganda machine work?] <https://www.cazadoresdefakenews.info/sin-rt-no-hay-paraíso-maquinaría-de-propaganda-en-twitter-de-nicolás-maduro/>

53 El Diario. (March 2nd, 2021). *Suspenden bonos para tuiteros de la patria: ¿cuánto ganan los usuarios por posicionar etiquetas?* [Homeland tweeters’ bonuses suspended: how much do users earn for positioning hashtags?] <https://eldiario.com/2021/03/02/suspenden-bonos-tuiteros-patria/>

54 Cazadores de Fake News. (March 10th, 2021). *Los trolls que defienden a las FAES en Twitter.* [Trolls defending FAES on Twitter.] <https://www.cazadoresdefakenews.info/trolls-defienden-faes/>

Policaracas”⁵⁵ and a tweet from *Provea* denouncing that the FAES “are the most lethal police force in extrajudicial executions registered in Venezuela during 2020.”⁵⁶

On the other hand, the control exercised by Nicolás Maduro’s regime over digital platforms to position its narratives is not only limited to the Venezuelan digital environment. A study by the Digital Forensic Research Laboratory (DFR-Lab) called “Digital Autocracy Maduro’s control of the Venezuelan information environment”,⁵⁷ analyzes the tactics used by the regime to promote “influence in the country and abroad” and how countries allied to the ruling party (Russia, Cuba, and Iran) try to influence Venezuela.

A study conducted by the U.S. National Intelligence Council, “Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections”⁵⁸, reveals how the regime in Cuba had strategic digital participation “to influence the vote of the Latino community” in the United States. ABC International exposed that this report also includes the regime in Venezuela; however, they assured that “they lack the necessary technological capabilities to accomplish such a mission.”⁵⁹

This study would not be the only one to mention Cuba and Venezuela as countries with authoritarian regimes focused on generating digital strategies to censor dissidence. For example, investigative reports by the Cuban organization *YucaByte*⁶⁰ and the news media *ArmandoInfo*,⁶¹ show the similarities in the repressive practices of both regimes to monitor, control, and censor in

the digital space, especially journalists and human rights defenders.

“¿Por qué el chavismo tolera al portal de “fakenews” más infame de Venezuela? [Why Chavismo tolerates the most infamous fake news portal in Venezuela]” is the title of the investigative report by *Cazadores de Fake News* about the portal *Lechuguinos*⁶² whose content is aligned with and in favor of the narratives of the regime in Venezuela. This platform has spread fake news and is one of the main Twitter accounts dedicated to leading campaigns of harassment, smear, and discursive aggressions against organizations and individuals, especially journalists, opposition politicians, and human rights defenders, who are uncomfortable to the regime of Nicolás Maduro.

On the other hand, during 2021, the regime of Nicolás Maduro, making arbitrary use of his stay in power and taking advantage of the rise of the “MeToo” movement in Venezuela through the social network Twitter, harassed and initiated investigations against journalists Victor Amaya and César Batiz. On Thursday, April 29th, the Public Prosecutor’s Office, through the Attorney General appointed by the regime, Tarek William Saab, issued a criminal investigation against both journalists “for public denunciations o [sic] women victims of PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE and SEXUAL HARASSMENT.”⁶³

The Attorney General issued this order after an account on the social network Twitter (@Reportera15) published a series of tweets accusing Victor Amaya and César Batiz of “being abusers.” However, according to IPYS

55 El Pitazo. [@elpitazotv]. (March 6th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/ElPitazoTV/status/1368259177194401793>

56 Provea. [@_provea]. (March 9th, 2021). Twitter https://twitter.com/_Provea/status/1369280467460063236

57 Suárez, D., and Ponce, E. (March 2021). *DIGITAL AUTOCRACY* Maduro’s control of the Venezuelan information environment. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/DigitalAutocracyVEN-FINAL.pdf>

58 National Intelligence Council. (March 10th, 2021). *Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections*. <https://docs.radiotelevisionmarti.com/escu/2021/03/17/ad40748a-6538-4738-9b1a-2a4c97f3a575.pdf>

59 Alandete, D. (March 17th, 2021). *La inteligencia de EE.UU. acusa a Cuba de perjudicar a Trump en las elecciones*. [U.S. intelligence accuses Cuba of harming Trump in the election.] https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-inteligencia-eeuu-acusa-cuba-perjudicar-trump-elecciones-202103162305_noticia.htm

60 Padrón, C., and Marcano, P. (March 24th, 2021). *Cuba o Venezuela: a ver quién censura más en internet*. [Cuba or Venezuela: let’s see who censors more on the Internet.] <https://www.yucabyte.org/2021/03/24/venezuela-censura-internet/>

61 Padrón, C., and Marcano, P. (March 24th, 2021). <https://armando.info/la-emulacion-socialista-tambien-sirve-para-la-censura/>

62 Cazadores de Fake News. (October 10th, 2021). ¿Por qué el chavismo tolera al portal de “fakenews” más infame de Venezuela? [Why Chavismo tolerates the most infamous fake news portal in Venezuela.] <https://www.cazadoresdefakenews.info/lechuguinos-chavismo-tolera-fake-news-venezuela/>

63 Tarek William Saab. [@tarekwiliamsaab]. (April 29th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/TarekWilliamSaab/status/1387945921929940996>

Venezuela, “none of the publications tell any story of harassment.”⁶⁴

The tweets also mentioned several journalists who are part of *El Pitazo*’s staff and accused them of being “accomplices” for not denouncing the “events or crimes.” However, the team of workers of that news media issued a statement rejecting the anonymous accusation “without specific details of the complaint (...) against our colleague, journalist César Batiz, director of *El Pitazo*.”⁶⁵ In turn, Batiz demanded that the authorities should investigate the facts reported against him following the rule of law.⁶⁶

The abuse of power by the regime of Nicolás Maduro, making use of the Public Prosecutor’s Office to harass dissidents, also harmed broadcasters Jean Mary Camacho and Alex Goncalves. On March 30th, Tarek William Saab announced that the Public Prosecutor’s Office issued arrest warrants against both of them⁶⁷ due to their comments on their podcast *Nos Reiremos de Esto* about host Dave Capella.

Also, in September, Tarek William Saab appointed Prosecutor 94 to request an arrest warrant and indictment against journalist Fernando Petrocelli⁶⁸ after he wrote a misogynistic message on Twitter about Antonela Rocuzzo, wife of Argentine soccer player Lionel Messi.

PROJECTS AND LEGISLATIONS TO REGULATE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN VENEZUELA

As part of its harassing campaign against freedom of expression in the Venezuelan digital space, the regime has created and promoted “legal frameworks” that allow them to continue regulating, controlling, and criminalizing dissidence in the country. In March 2021, the National Assembly of Nicolás Maduro’s regime presented a proposal to evaluate and discuss more than 30 laws during this year.

Among these laws, the RESORTEME law, to which they would evaluate adding “a chapter for the regulation of social networks,”⁶⁹ Among these laws, the RESORTEME law, to which they would evaluate adding “a chapter for the regulation of social networks,” and the “Law of Cyberspace and the Defense of Venezuelan Cyberspace,” whose preliminary draft was disseminated at the end of 2018 and rejected by various NGOs because it “justifies and further expands the government’s powers to control and monitor the use of the internet without institutional counterweights,”^{70 71} stood out.

At the end of March 2021, the Minister of Communications and Information of the Maduro administration, Freddy Nández, informed that

64 IPYS Venezuela. (May 4th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Ministerio Público inició investigación contra Director de El Pitazo sin testimonios ni pruebas.* [AlertaIPYSve | Public Prosecutor’s Office started investigation against the Director of El Pitazo without testimonies or evidence.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipys-ve-ministerio-publico-inicio-investigacion-contra-director-de-el-pitazo-sin-testimonios-ni-pruebas/>

65 El Pitazo. (April 30th, 2021). *Comunicado: Los trabajadores de El Pitazo rechazamos los señalamientos contra César Batiz.* [Press release: The workers of El Pitazo reject the accusations against César Batiz.] <https://elpitazo.net/gran-caracas/comunicado-los-trabajadores-de-el-pitazo-rechazamos-las-acusaciones-contra-cesar-batiz/>

66 El Pitazo. [@elpitazotv]. (May 3rd, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/ElPitazoTV/status/1389245630112018440>

67 IPYS Venezuela. (April 7th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | MP dictó orden de aprehensión contra Jean Mary Curró y Alex Goncalves.* [Alerta IPYSve | PPO issued arrest warrant against Jean Mary Curró and Alex Goncalves.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-mp-dicto-orden-de-aprehension-contra-jean-mary-curro-y-alex-goncalves/>

68 IPYS Venezuela. (September 3rd, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Ministerio Público ordenó la detención del periodista Fernando Petrocelli* [Alerta IPYSve | Public Prosecutor’s Office ordered the arrest of journalist Fernando Petrocelli.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-ministerio-publico-ordeno-la-detencion-del-periodista-fernando-petrocelli/>

69 Gabriel Bastidas. [@gbastidas]. (March 2nd, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/Gbastidas/status/1366932485117014016>

70 RedesAyuda. (January 18th, 2019). *Frente al anteproyecto de Ley Constitucional del Ciberespacio de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela.* [Regarding the draft bill of the Constitutional Law of Cyberspace of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.] <https://redesayuda.org/2019/01/18/frente-al-anteproyecto-de-ley-constitucional-del-ciberespacio-de-la-republica-bolivariana-de-venezuela/>

71 El Diario. (March 16th, 2021). *Parlamento chavista busca fortalecer la censura en las redes sociales con la Ley Resorteme y la Ley del Ciberespacio.* [Chavista Parliament seeks to strengthen censorship in social networks with the Resorteme Law and the Cyberspace Law.] <https://eldiario.com/2021/03/16/parlamento-chavista-censura-redes-sociales-ley-resorteme/>

he would meet with the National Assembly of the regime to present a bill “to regulate social networks in Venezuela.”⁷² On April 8th, Juan Carlos Alemán, President of the Permanent Commission of Popular Power and Communication of Nicolás Maduro’s National Assembly, informed that he met with the team of the Ministry of Communications and Information and the team of CONATEL, in which they were “reviewing the Law of Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Electronic Media and the Law of Cyberspace.”⁷³

This would not be the first time that Ñáñez reported carrying out actions to regulate social networks. On October 25th, 2021, he proposed creating a team to monitor social networks during the electoral campaign (that started on October 28th)⁷⁴ in preparation for the regional elections in Venezuela on November 21st, 2021, to renew the executive and legislative positions of the 23 entities and 335 municipalities of the country.⁷⁵ The initiative *VE Sin Filtro* reported that more than 40 domains of media websites were blocked during the electoral campaign for these elections.⁷⁶

CONATEL is an agency that the regime has used to censor, control, and monitor traditional and digital media. In addition, it has been accused of ordering ISPs in Venezuela to block informative web pages.⁷⁷ However, in April 2021, CONATEL informed that they reactivated a scheme for implementing and deploying IXP in Venezuela,⁷⁸ which would allow national ISPs to exchange local network traffic at a lower cost and higher speed. This plan was discussed in 2020 when this agency

met almost secretly with 10 of the leading ISPs in the country.

Although implementing an IXP offers excellent benefits, specialists in the matter have warned that, given CONATEL’s history in conjunction with the regime to control traditional and digital media, this project would mean more censorship. David Aragort, digital security trainer at *RedesAyuda*, explained that “the possible benefits of building an IXP result overshadowed when compared to the risk it may represent for freedom of expression.”⁷⁹

CELLEBRITE IN VENEZUELA

Cellebrite is an Israeli company dedicated to selling technological tools that allow the extraction of information from electronic devices. This technology generates significant debate, especially in countries with non-democratic regimes such as Venezuela, as it is often used against political opponents, journalists, and human rights activists.

In 2015, the CICPC published images of Cellebrite’s UFED Touch Ultimate devices for the first time on its website,⁸⁰ which the security agency allegedly acquired. Then, in 2017, Cellebrite devices were shown in exhibitions of the State security forces, and in 2019 in the 42nd edition of the CICPC magazine, Cellebrite devices are

72 Efecto Cocuyo. (March 30th, 2021). *Minci anuncia que presentará proyecto de ley para regular las redes sociales.* [Minci announces that it will present a bill to regulate social networks.] <https://efectococuyo.com/politica/minci-anuncia-que-presentara-proyecto-de-ley-para-regular-las-redes-sociales/>

73 El Pitazo. (@elpitazotv). (March 6th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/aleman72psuv/status/1379847846594220042>

74 VTV. (October 27th, 2021). *CNE y MippCI afinan detalles para cumplimiento de normativa electoral de cara a megaelecciones 21N.* [CNE and MippCI fine-tune details for compliance with electoral regulations for the 21N mega-elections.] <https://www.vtv.gob.ve/cne-minci-afinan-det-alles-cumplimiento-normativa-electoral/>

75 Lozano, D. (November 22nd, 2021). *El chavismo se queda con 20 de las 23 gobernaciones con una abstención del 58%.* [Chavismo wins 20 out of 23 governorships with an abstention rate of 58%.] <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2021/11/22/619af88121efa0bf6f8b45ad.html>

76 *VE Sin Filtro*. (November 25th, 2021). *Elecciones bajo censura: sin acceso a los medios independientes en #internetVE.* [Elections under censorship: no access to independent media on #internetVE.] <https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021-bloqueos-elecciones/>

77 Tal Cual. (June 18th 2019). *Así ordena Conatel el bloqueo a medios venezolanos.* [This is how Conatel orders the blocking of Venezuelan media.] <https://talcualdigital.com/asi-ordena-conatel-el-bloqueo-a-medios-venezolanos/>

78 Prensa Conatel. (April 7th, 2021). *Implementación del IXP para el bienestar del pueblo venezolano.* [Implementation of the IXP for the welfare of the Venezuelan people.] <http://www.conatel.gob.ve/implementacion-del-ixp-para-el-bienestar-del-pueblo-venezolano/>

79 Julian, C. (April 27th, 2021). *¿Qué es un IXP y cómo puede propiciar la censura de Internet en Venezuela?* [What is an IXP and how can it facilitate Internet censorship in Venezuela?] <https://eldiario.com/2021/04/27/ixp-censura-internet-en-venezuela/>

80 Haarets. (Image File) <https://img.haarets.co.il/img/1.9144875/3879371658.jpg>

mentioned as one of the computer forensic tools used by this organism.

On November 14th, 2019, Nicolás Maduro announced that he had approved more than 12.5 million euros “to strengthen the CICPC.” Of which 51,300 euros were destined to acquire “UFED Touch2” equipment from Cellebrite.⁸¹ It is essential to mention that organizations such as *Provea* documented 3,034 people extrajudicially killed during 2020, with the CICPC being responsible for 735 of these cases.

After the regime announced its intention to acquire this technology, more than 30 national and international NGOs spoke out to reject this fact and asked to prevent the sale.⁸² Cellebrite has stated that it has not worked with Venezuela for several years and that it would not change its policy towards the country as long as the regime remains in power,⁸³ but the company has refused to disclose the date on which it stopped working with the Venezuelan regime.

In Cellebrite’s terms of use agreement, the company reserves the right to disable its devices remotely, and they state that they can disable their technology even without the buyer’s consent if the company believes their technology is being used in violation of laws. If this is true, devices used by the Venezuelan, Hong Kong, and Belarusian regimes could be remotely disabled.

On October 29th, 2021, a video was published in which members of the DGCIM acknowledged using Cellebrite UFED devices,⁸⁴ meaning that the CICPC would no longer be

the only Venezuelan agency in possession of this technology.

However, Cellebrite would not be the only company allied to Chavismo for the acquisition of sophisticated cyber espionage technologies and practices. In April 2021, journalist Ibéyise Pacheco published a report⁸⁵ on how CANTV’s headquarters was conditioned “in a secret project” managed by Chinese and few officials. Pacheco assured that from this space, “a firewall secretly called Falcon is controlled,”⁸⁶ which has been dedicated to hacking the platforms created by the administration of Juan Guaidó, or web pages informative or uncomfortable to the regime.

ATTACKS ON NGOS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In April 2021, Official Gazette No. 42,098 was published, which established that the National Office against Organized Crime and Financing of Terrorism⁸⁷ would be the governing body in charge of “designing, planning, structuring, formulating and executing the public policies and strategies of the State against organized crime and financing of terrorism (...).”

According to the NGO *Acceso a la Justicia*, the NGOs would be obliged to register in the Integrated System of Non-Governmental Organizations, and only those registered “would be recognized as legal by the National Government”⁸⁸ and therefore could receive the contributions from abroad according to the

81 VTV. (November 14th, 2019). *Jefe de Estado aprueba más de 12 millones de euros o su equivalente en petros para modernización del CICPC.* [Head of State approves more than 12 million euros or its equivalent in petros for modernization of the CICPC.] <https://www.vtv.gob.ve/millones-euros-petros-modernizacion-cicpc/>

82 VE Sin Filtro. (November 15th, 2019). *Urgente: Impidan ventas de Cellebrite a Venezuela.* [Urgent: Stop Cellebrite sales to Venezuela.] https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/paren_ventas_cellebrite_venezuela/

83 Yaron, O. (September 10th, 2020). *Despite Sanctions, Israeli Firm Cellebrite Sold Phone-hacking Tech to Venezuela.* <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/tech-news/.premium-despite-sanctions-israeli-firm-sold-phone-hacking-tech-to-venezuela-1.9144879>

84 [@grankoarteagagk]. (October 29th, 2021). Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CVnyOASpCAF/>

85 Pacheco, I. (April 7th, 2021). *El espionaje no es un cuento chino.* [Espionage is not a tall tale.] <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/opinion/el-espionaje-no-es-un-cuento-chino-n4220258>

86 Ibéyise Pacheco. [@ibepacheco]. (April 8th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/ibepacheco/status/1380184469022314500>

87 Official Gazette N° 42,098. (March 30th, 2021). <https://www.ojdt.com.ve/archivos/gacetas/2021-04/42098.pdf>

88 Acceso a la Justicia. (May 6th, 2021). *Siete preguntas sobre el proyecto de Ley de Cooperación Internacional.* [Seven questions about the International Cooperation Bill.] <https://accesoalajusticia.org/siete-preguntas-sobre-proyecto-ley-de-cooperacion-internacional/>

terms of Nicolás Maduro's regime. Likewise, the NGO expressed that this new maneuver of the regime "seeks to control the sources of financing received by NGOs from abroad, with the possible intention of hindering (...) international assistance and other activities carried out by these associative entities in Venezuela."

RAFAEL UZCÁTEGUI

On January 13th, 2021, Diosdado Cabello, vice-president of the PSUV, expressed in his program *Con El Mazo Dando* that an investigation should be opened against the coordinator of the NGO Provea, Rafael Uzcátegui: "I ask Ameliach that this gentleman demonstrates in court that the PSUV has received a penny from these people (...) That a complaint be opened, and this gentleman demonstrates that we received that money," he expressed. This threat comes after Uzcátegui highlighted in a tweet that the PSUV benefited from funds from the British government.⁸⁹

AZUL POSITIVO

On January 12th, 2021, officials of the DGCIM showed up at the headquarters of the organization *Azul Positivo*, in Zulia state, alleging that they were carrying out "an administrative investigation," which after six hours resulted in the seizure of work equipment and the arbitrary detention of five of its members, without being allowed to speak with their lawyers or relatives.⁹⁰ On January 14th, the 4th Control Court of Zulia State ordered the imprisonment of the NGO workers and charged them with "crimes of fraudulent handling of analogous instruments, association to commit a crime, and

money laundering."⁹¹ After almost 30 days of arbitrary detention, they were released under a precautionary measure of presentation every 30 days.

ATTACKS ON MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS

VPI TV

The media outlet *VPI TV* reported in a press release on January 8th, 2021, that an operation of CONATEL and SENIAT personnel showed up at its headquarters located in Alta Florida, and Los Dos Caminos, Caracas, to inspect the facilities, interrogate its personnel and request operational and administrative information. "They even requested passwords for the transmission processes and reviewed e-mails (...),"⁹² the press release stated. Since the officials seized valuable and fundamental equipment for the media and its journalistic work, they announced that they had to cease operations in Venezuela momentarily.

DIARIO PANORAMA

On January 8th, 2021, SENIAT closed for five days the headquarters of Panorama newspaper in Maracaibo, Zulia state, under the argument of "non-compliance with formal duties of the tax laws" by the news media. In a press release, the newspaper denounced that this action "does not encompass the exercise of the right and duty to inform, which is a fundamental right protected by the National Constitution (CRBV)."⁹³

89 Rafael Uzcátegui. [@fanzinero]. (January 9th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/fanzinero/status/1347904223544016896>

90 Acceso a la Justicia. (January 14th, 2021). *Cronología del caso de la ONG Azul Positivo. [Timeline of the Azul Positivo NGO case.]* <https://accesoalajusticia.org/cronologia-del-caso-de-la-ong-azul-positivo/>

91 Espacio Público. [@espaciopublico]. (January 14th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/espaciopublico/status/1349883055108972544>

92 VPI TV. [@vpitv]. (January 8th, 2021). Twitter <https://twitter.com/VPITV/status/1347667989026529281>

93 Espacio Público. (January 8th, 2021). *SENIAT clausuró por cinco días las sedes del diario Panorama. [SENIAT closed for five days the offices of the newspaper Panorama.]* <https://espaciopublico.org/seniat-clausuro-por-cinco-dias-las-sede-del-diario-panorama/>

EFECTO COCUYO

On February 10th, 2021, Diosdado Cabello, during his program *Con El Mazo Dando*, suggested to the Public Prosecutor's Office to open an investigation process against the news media *Efecto Cocuyo*,⁹⁴ for a tweet in which they quoted a report on “the alleged presence of former leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) with military clothing and weapons in Venezuelan territory.”⁹⁵

EL NACIONAL

In 2015, Diosdado Cabello filed a lawsuit against the media outlets *El Nacional*, *Diario Tal Cual*, and *La Patilla* after they published an article by ABC that accused Cabello of being linked to drug trafficking.

Subsequently, in 2018, the TSJ of the regime forced *El Nacional* to pay the amount of 1,000 million bolivars as compensation, issuing a final judgment and declaring the claim for “moral damage” issued by the vice-president of the PSUV to be admissible.

However, it was not until April 16th, 2021, that the TSJ ordered the judicial indexation of the amount established in 2018, for which *El Nacional* had to pay more than US\$13 million to Diosdado Cabello.⁹⁶ Because of this situation, Cabello threatened the news media with foreclosure of their assets if they did not pay in cash. “If you do not pay in cash, we have to foreclose the assets to compensate the damages because I have morals,”⁹⁷ he said in his *Con El Mazo Dando* program. On May 14th, the regime seized the headquarters of *El Nacional*.

94 Con El Mazo Dando. (January 9th, 2021). YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ae2DnQWxi7Y>

95 Efecto Cocuyo. (February 11th, 2021). *Diosdado Cabello sugiere al Ministerio Público abrir averiguación contra Efecto Cocuyo.* [Diosdado Cabello suggests the Public Prosecutor's Office to open an investigation against Efecto Cocuyo.] <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/diosdado-cabello-sugiere-al-ministerio-publico-abrir-averiguacion-contra-efecto-cocuyo/>

96 El Nacional. (April 16th, 2021). *El régimen ordena a El Nacional pago de aproximadamente 13 millones de dólares por indemnización a Diosdado Cabello por daño moral.* [The regime orders El Nacional to pay approximately US\$13 million in compensation to Diosdado Cabello for moral damages.] <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/el-regimen-ordena-a-el-nacional-pago-de-aproximadamente-13-millones-de-dolares-por-indemnizacion-a-diosdado-cabello-por-dano-moral/>

97 Infobae. (April 22nd, 2021). *Diosdado Cabello amenazó con ejecutar los bienes del diario El Nacional si no le paga la millonaria indemnización impuesta por la justicia chavista.* [Diosdado Cabello threatened to foreclose on the assets of the newspaper El Nacional if it does not pay the million-dollar indemnity imposed by the Chavista justice system.] <https://www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2021/04/22/diosdado-cabello-amenazo-con-ejecutar-los-bienes-del-diario-el-nacional-si-no-le-paga-la-millonaria-indemnizacion-impuesta-por-la-justicia-chavista/>

EVENTS TABLE

2021		
MONTH	DATE	CASE
JANUARY	Monday 4th	The coordinator of the political party ProCiudadanos, Leocenis García, harassed and insulted several journalists on the social network Twitter.
	Tuesday 5th	José Brito insulted journalist Odell López Escote on the social network Instagram.
	Thursday 7th	José Brito accused journalist and broadcaster Gabriela Gonzalez of being “biased and bribed.”
	Friday 8th	Cyber-attack on the media outlet Tal Cual. Campaign of defamation, harassment and discrediting of Efecto Cocuyo’s journalistic work.
	Thursday 19th	The Venezuelan Aviation’s Twitter account criminalized the media’s informative work.
	Friday 28th	Journalist Obeysser Prada was harassed and threatened on the social network Twitter and through messages on WhatsApp.
FEBRUARY	Monday 1st	Journalist Roberto Deniz was harassed on the social network Twitter.
	Saturday 6th	Blocking of the InsghtCrime website.
	Tuesday 9th	Request for removal of content from the website of the investigative media ArmandolInfo.
	Tuesday 16th	CICPC arbitrarily detained citizen Jhonatan Palacios for publishing a photo on social networks.
	Monday 22nd	Power outage affected Internet connectivity
	Wednesday 24th	Hacking of StopVIH’s Twitter account.
	Thursday 25th	SEBIN officials harassed journalist Luisa Suarez for a Facebook post in which she denounced the lack of contraceptives.
	Sunday 28th	CICPC arbitrarily detained José Pérez after he posted a video on TikTok.
MARCH	Monday 8th	Journalist Roberto Deniz was insulted and harassed on the social network Twitter.
	Thursday 11th	William Castillo verbally assaulted human rights defender Marino Alvarado.
	Monday 15th	Several accounts on Twitter linked to the Maduro administration attacked journalist Roberto Deniz with insults and false accusations. Journalist Rayber Alvarado denounced having received threats through phone calls and text messages.
	Tuesday 16th	Hacking of the Ministry of Education website. Marianela Balbi and IPYS Venezuela were discursively attacked by Lechuguinos.
	Wednesday 17th	The SNTP and ReporteYa were discursively harassed by the platform Lechuguinos.
	Thursday 18th	Several accounts supportive of Nicolás Maduro’s regime started a series of attacks against the newspaper EL Nacional.
	Wednesday 24th	Closure of the YouTube channel of the news media El Pitazo

2021		
MONTH	DATE	CASE
MARCH	Saturday 27th	Journalist Roberto Deniz was attacked again on the social network Twitter.
	Monday 29th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Wednesday 31st	Blocking of websites with adult content, PornHub, YouPorn, Xvideos, Xhamster, BravoTube, and Tube8.
APRIL	Thursday 8th	Blocking of the website of the NGO Acceso a La Justicia. Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Wednesday 14th	María Fernanda Pérez, coordinator of the pro-government portal Ciudad Maracay, harassed journalist Gregoria Díaz.
	Thursday 22nd	Luis Morales, was interrogated by SEBIN officials for a video posted on Tik Tok.
	Monday 26th	Apure state police arbitrarily detained Francis Bolívar after he posted a video on social networks.
MAY	Tuesday 4th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Sunday 9th	Blocking of the SoundCloud platform website.
	Tuesday 25th	Blocking of the TeleSur Libre website.
	Saturday 29th	Blocking of the website of the news media La Patilla.
JUNE		Blocking of two alternative domains of Caraota Digital.
	Thursday 3rd	Monagas state police arbitrarily detained writer Rafael Rattia and charged him with “incitement to hatred.”
	Thursday 8th	Hacking attempts to CiudadGuayanaFB digital accounts.
	Sunday 13th	Journalist Ariana Agreda was the victim of a series of attacks by accounts on the social network Twitter. Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Friday 25th	DDoS attack on the website of Punto de Corte news media.
	Tuesday 29th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
JULY	Monday 5th	Hacking of journalist Juan Barreto’s Instagram account.
	Monday 12th	Journalist Karla Salcedo was singled out as “Koki’s widow.”
	Wednesday 14th	Hacking of journalist Karla Salcedo’s Instagram account.
	Wednesday 21st	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
AGOSTO	Monday 2nd	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Wednesday 4th	Ana Álvarez was dismissed from her position for a video uploaded to social networks in which she denounces the actions of Nicolás Maduro’s administration.
	Saturday 7th	Hacking of journalist Rosalí Hernández’s Instagram account.
	Friday 13th	Journalist Ibéyise Pacheco was attacked on Twitter by pro-government politician Antonio “El Potro” Álvarez.
	Sunday 15th	Hacking of the Facebook account of the news media VPI TV.
	Wednesday 18th	Digital attack on the website of the Civil Association CONVITE.
	Thursday 19th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Tuesday 24th	Digital attack on the website of the news media Qué Pasa En Venezuela.

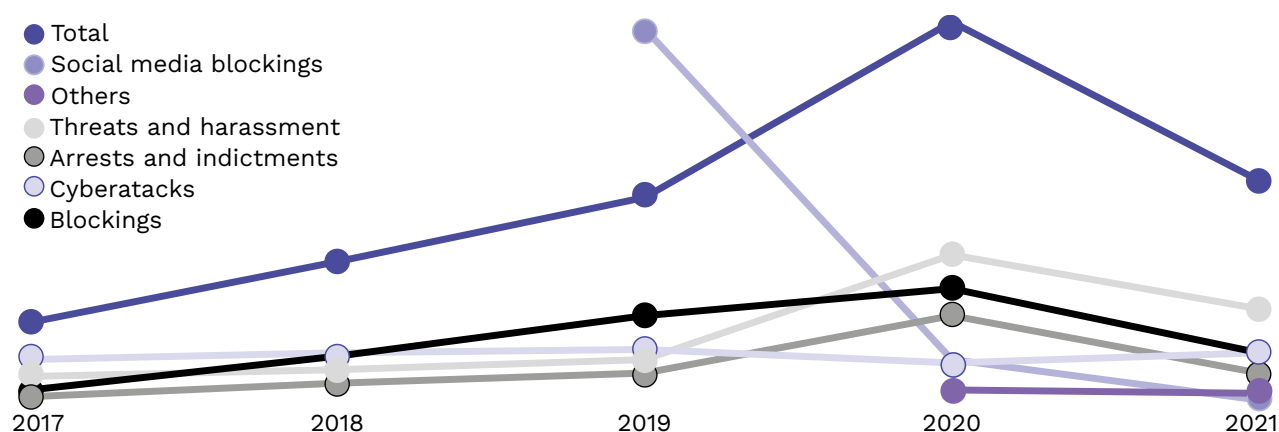
2021		
MONTH	DATE	CASE
SEPTEMBER	Wednesday 8th	CICPC officers raided the homes of humorists Napoléon Rivero and Reuben Morales in Caracas. Both of them were accused of “incitement to hatred.”
	Friday 10th	Journalists Roberto Deniz, Carla Angola, and the news media ArmandoInfo and EVTV Miami were verbally attacked by Pedro Carvajalino and Mario Silva.
	Sunday 12th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Monday 20th	Journalist Roberto Deniz, IPYS Venezuela and the SNTP were discursively attacked on digital platforms.
	Tuesday 21st	A false conversation between journalists Roberto Deniz and Amy Torres was published.
OCTUBRE	Monday 4th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Sunday 10th	A fake conversation between ArmandoInfo journalists Roberto Deniz and Ewald Scharfenberg was published.
	Thursday 14th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Friday 15th	An arrest warrant was issued for journalist Roberto Deniz. Unidentified officials raided the Caracas residence of journalist Roberto Deniz’s parents. Pedro Carvajalino published two videos dedicated to discrediting and discursively attacking journalist Roberto Deniz on his Twitter account.
	Tuesday 19th	Blocking of Hugo “El Pollo” Carvajal’s website.
NOVEMBER	Tuesday 2nd	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Thursday 4th	The Supreme Court of Justice of the Nicolás Maduro’s regime, sentenced former congressman Leandro Domínguez to pay the amount of 50 thousand Petros for alleged “moral damages.”
	Tuesday 9th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Wednesday 10th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Thursday 11th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Sunday 14th	Blocking of the Venezuela Zona Gris website.
DECEMBER	Friday 10th	Several pro-government accounts on Twitter started a new campaign against journalist Roberto Deniz. Power outage affected Internet connectivity.
	Saturday 11th	Digital attack against Runrunes news media.
	Tuesday 14th	Power outage affected Internet connectivity.

**The cases and digital events recorded in the table above are public domain; this is the sum of the data on all those digital events that violate and affect the freedom of expression of Venezuelans on the Internet.*

CHAPTER II:
**CASES OF VIOLATIONS
AND CRIMINALIZATION
OF FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION ON
THE INTERNET**

Aiming to strengthen control over dissidence on digital platforms further, the administration of Nicolás Maduro continues to make arbitrary use of its stay in power, applying questionable techniques such as tactical website blockades, cyber-attacks, arbitrary arrests, indictments, and threats and harassment. The result encompasses the limit, restriction, and control of the information spread in the Venezuelan digital ecosystem, which goes against the free exercise of human rights on the Internet.

On the other hand, journalists, opposition politicians, human rights advocates, and citizens, in general, have been victims of abusive actions ranging from being the target of harassment campaigns, insults, and threats on social networks, to being victims of arbitrary detentions, judicial proceedings, indictments and deprivation of liberty, for voicing their opinions, informing and expressing themselves. The year 2021 registered a total of 65 cases.



	Blockings*	Cyberattacks	Arrests and indictments	Threats and harassment	Others	Social media blockings	Total
2017	3	12	1	7			23
2018	13	14	5	9			41
2019	25	15	8	12		110	60
2020	33	11	25	43	3	12	112
2021	14	14	8	27	2		65
Aumento vs. 2020	-58%	27%	-68%	-37%	-33%	-100%	-42%

*The record of blocking cases presented below represents the new blockings identified during 2021. However, it is critical to mention that at least 68 domains corresponding to 59 websites were affected by blockages this year,⁹⁸ including active blockages from previous years.

98 VE Sin Filtro. (April 6th, 2022). *#Informe2021: Derechos digitales, censura y conectividad en Venezuela.* [Report2021: Digital rights, censorship and connectivity in Venezuela.] https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021_informe_anual/

CASES: WEBSITE BLOCKAGES

INSIGHT CRIME (Saturday, February 6th):

Access to the website of *InSight Crime*, a media outlet dedicated to investigating organized crime and corruption in Latin America, was blocked by Venezuela's primary Internet provider, CANTV. According to *VE Sin Filtro*, the state-owned company applied an *HTTP* and *HTTPS*⁹⁹ block after the media outlet published a report on the homicide rate in Latin America, in which Venezuela ranked as the second most violent country.¹⁰⁰

PORNHUB, YOUTUBE, XVIDEOS, XHAMSTER, BRAVOTUBE AND TUBE8 (Wednesday, March 31st):

The websites of six video platforms with adult content (*PornHub*, *YouPorn*, *Xvideos*, *XHamster*, *BravoTube*, and *Tube8*), were blocked not only by the state-owned Internet provider CANTV, but also by private ISPs such as Movistar, Digitel, NetUno, Supercable, and Inter, blocked access to at least one of the websites mentioned above.

According to *VE Sin Filtro*, the restriction by CANTV was an *HTTP* blocking, which began on Tuesday, March 2nd; Movistar, Digitel, Inter, and NetUno applied a *DNS* blocking as of Tuesday, March 9th, and Supercable began the blocking on Monday, March 29th.¹⁰¹

ACCESO A LA JUSTICIA (Thursday, April 8th):

The state-owned ISP CANTV applied an *HTTP/HTTPS* blocking,¹⁰² to the NGO *Acceso a la Justicia* website, dedicated to monitoring the administration of justice and the rule of law in Venezuela, as well as the defense of rights such as democracy and freedom.

SOUNDCLOUD (Sunday, May 9th):

VE Sin Filtro reported that private ISPs Supercable, NetUno, Movistar, and Digitel, applied a *DNS* block to the website of *Soundcloud*,¹⁰³ a music streaming service.

TELESUR LIBRE (Tuesday, May 25th):

The primary Internet providers in Venezuela, CANTV, Movistar, Digitel, Supercable, and NetUno, blocked access to *TeleSur Libre*, a communication platform promoted by the interim government in Venezuela. According to *VE Sin Filtro*, CANTV applied an *HTTP/HTTPS* block, and Movistar, Digitel, Supercable, and NetUno implemented a *DNS* block.¹⁰⁴

In early 2020, the interim President, Juan Guaidó, informed a town hall of citizens and deputies that he would make announcements to recover the signal of *TeleSur*,¹⁰⁵ a Latin American multi-state channel based in Caracas, Venezuela. The channel was founded in 2005 under the Ministry of People's Power for Communication and Information jurisdiction during Hugo Chávez's presidency and is currently owned by the regimes of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

99 *VE Sin Filtro*. [@vesinfiltro]. (February 9th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1359233969481474050>

100 Asmann, P., and Jones, K. (January 29th, 2021). *Balance de InSight Crime de los homicidios en 2020*. [*InSight Crime balance of homicides in 2020*.] <https://es.insightcrime.org/noticias/analisis/balance-insight-crime-homicidios-2020/>

101 *VE Sin Filtro*. (March 30th, 2021). *Bloquean nuevamente sitios web pornográficos en Venezuela*. [*Pornographic websites blocked again in Venezuela*.] <https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021-03-26-bloqueo-sitios-adultos/>

102 *VE Sin Filtro*. (April 8th, 2021). *Bloquean la página web de ONG Acceso a la justicia en CANTV*. [*Acceso a la Justicia NGO website blocked at CANTV*.] https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021-04-08_bloqueo_acceso_justicia/

103 *VE Sin Filtro*. (June 4th, 2021). *Arrecia la censura digital contra la prensa en Venezuela*. [*Digital censorship against the press is intensifying in Venezuela*.] https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021-06-04_censura_digital/

104 *VE Sin Filtro*. (May 26th, 2021). *Bloqueada la página web del medio de comunicación TeleSur Libre horas después de su inauguración*. [*Website of TeleSur Libre media blocked hours after its inauguration*.] https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021-05-26_bloqueo_telesur_libre/

105 Infobae. (January 11th, 2020). *Juan Guaidó prometió recuperar la cadena Telesur*. [*Juan Guaidó promised to recover the Telesur network*.] <https://www.infobae.com/americas/venezuela/2020/01/11/juan-guaido-prometio-recuperar-la-cadena-telesur/>

On January 12th, 2020, Juan Guaidó reported creating the Presidential Commission for the Restructuring of *Telesur* to “recover the signal from the dictatorship and put it at the service of democracy in the region.”¹⁰⁶ On April 17th, Guaidó thanked the work of lawyer Leopoldo Castillo and journalist Larissa Patiño and asked Roberto Marrero, former chief of Juan Guaidó’s office and former secretary of the National Assembly elected in 2015, and Eduardo Sapene, Venezuelan journalist and broadcaster, to continue coordinating efforts to “move forward with this work of TeleSur.”¹⁰⁷

Finally, on Monday, May 24th, Guaidó reported on the launch of *TeleSur Libre*, “a project that seeks to overcome censorship, combat fake news and propaganda that undermines the democracy generated by the dictatorship.”¹⁰⁸

LA PATILLA (Saturday, May 29th):

VE Sin Filtro reported that the Internet providers Digitel, Movistar, Inter, and Supercable, applied a DNS block to the website of the news media *La Patilla*¹⁰⁹ on Saturday, May 29th. Meanwhile, the ISP NetUno applied the same type of blocking on June 1st. In addition, *VE Sin Filtro* recalled that the state-owned provider CANTV has been blocking access to *La Patilla*’s website intermittently for the last few years.

CARAOTA DIGITAL (June):

The private ISPs Inter, Supercable, NetUno, Movistar, and Digitel applied a DNS block

to the alternative domain of the media outlet *Caraota Digital* (<https://caraotadigital.news>),¹¹⁰ while Inter, Supercable, NetUno, and Movistar also applied a DNS block to another of the domains created by the media outlet (<http://caraotadigital.xyz/>) due to the censorship of its main domain (<https://caraotadigital.net/>). *VE Sin Filtro* reported that these restrictions were applied at the beginning of June. However, they did not provide an exact date.

HUGO CARVAJAL (Tuesday, October 19th):

According to *VE Sin Filtro*, the leading Internet provider in Venezuela, CANTV, applied an HTTP/HTTPS blocking by SNI filtering to the website of Hugo “El Pollo” Carvajal (<https://hugocarvajal.com/>), while the private ISPs Movistar and Digitel, applied a blocking by DNS.¹¹¹ Carvajal is the former director of the DGCIM and was arrested in Spain on April 12th, 2019, accused by the New York prosecution of conspiracy to commit narcoterrorism, among other charges.¹¹²

In the “Judicial Issues” section of the website, there is a quote from Carvajal, in which he states: “This prosecution triggered an endless number of judicial events that continue to occur. The media have so deformed them that they are barely understandable. Here, you will find them explained simply and chronologically organized. This is a summary of the judicial issues I am facing.”¹¹³

106 Centro de Comunicación Nacional. (January 12th, 2020). *Presidente (e) Guaidó anuncia creación de la Comisión Presidencial para la reestructuración de Telesur.* [President (I) Guaidó announces the creation of the Presidential Commission for the restructuring of Telesur.] <https://presidencia.com/presidencia/presidente-e-guaido-anuncia-creacion-de-la-comision-presidencial-para-la-reestructuracion-de-telesur/>

107 Juan Guaidó. [@jguaido]. (April 17th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/jguaido/status/1383561864932577283>

108 Juan Guaidó. [@jguaido]. (May 25th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/jguaido/status/1397171954730344450>

109 *VE Sin Filtro*. (November 14th, 2021). *Arrecia la censura digital contra la prensa en Venezuela.* [Digital censorship against the press is intensifying in Venezuela.] https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021-06-04_censura_digital

110 *VE Sin Filtro*. (November 14th, 2021). *Arrecia la censura digital contra la prensa en Venezuela.* [Digital censorship against the press is intensifying in Venezuela.] https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021-06-04_censura_digital

111 *VE Sin Filtro*. (October 20th, 2021). *Bloquean página web de Hugo ‘El Pollo’ Carvajal pocos días después de su re-lanzamiento.* [Hugo ‘El Pollo’ Carvajal’s web page is blocked a few days after its re-launching.] https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021-10-19_bloqueo_hugo_carvajal/

112 CNN Español. (October 20th, 2021). *Hugo ‘Pollo’ Carvajal: lo que debes saber del hombre de confianza de Hugo Chávez.* [Hugo ‘Pollo’ Carvajal: what you should know about Hugo Chávez’s trusted man.] <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2021/10/20/hugo-carvajal-perfil-orix/>

113 WayBack Machine. (October 19th, 2021). *Temas Judiciales.* [Judicial Matters] <https://web.archive.org/web/20211019024301/https://hugocarvajal.com/temas-judiciales/>

VENEZUELA ZONA GRIS (Sunday, November 14th):

The website created by journalist Ibéyise Pacheco *Venezuela Zona Gris* (<https://venezuela-zonagris.com/>) was blocked after its launching on Thursday, November 11th, by ISPs CANTV, Inter, NetUno, Movistar, and Digitel.¹¹⁴ CANTV, Inter, NetUno, Movistar, and Digitel applied a blocking by *HTTP/HTTPS*, *SNI* filtering, and *DNS*, while Inter, NetUno, Movistar, and Digitel applied a blocking by *DNS*.

Venezuela Zona Gris is an investigative piece in which journalist Ibéyise Pacheco describes how criminal gangs in Venezuela have increased their power and presence under the support of civilian and military authorities of Nicolás Maduro's regime. It is necessary to have a *VPN* activated to access the research report from the Internet providers mentioned above.

CASES: CYBERATTACKS

TAL CUAL DIGITAL (Friday, January 8th):

The website of the media outlet *Diario Tal Cual* was the victim of a digital attack from four o'clock in the afternoon until after seven o'clock at night.¹¹⁵ The media reported the situation through its social networks, in which they stated that due to the attack, there were difficulties when accessing the information uploaded to its platform and confirmed the impossibility of updating its news grid. This attack occurred on the same day that the regime of Nicolás Maduro raided and confiscated equipment from *VPI TV*.

After 72 hours, the media reported a new cyber-attack recorded around 7:00 p.m. on

Monday, January 11th. However, this time the security protocols of *Diario Tal Cual* prevented the page from collapsing, and they were able to continue updating their news bulletin.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, on Saturday, March 13th, the Company reported on its Twitter account that it had suffered another cyber-attack¹¹⁷ on its news website, which caused difficulties for users when accessing its platform and slowed down the loading of new content.

STOPVIH (Wednesday, February 24th):

NGO *StopVIH*'s Twitter account got hacked, as reported in a press release in which they explained that not only did they lose access to their account, but they had also changed the name and password to "put it to another use." However, *StopVIH* informed that "thanks to the pertinent and timely negotiations with the company and other allies,"¹¹⁸ they were able to recover access to the account and the more than 51 thousand followers.

StopVIH is an NGO focused on educating and raising awareness among children, adolescents, and adults on how to prevent HIV and promote and defend the human rights of people living with HIV.

MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN (Tuesday, March 16th):

The web page of the Ministry of Popular Power for Education in Venezuela had its web page hacked. Users denounced that when entering the platform, an image appeared on a black background with the messages "the

114 VE Sin Filtro. (November 14th, 2021). *Bloquean web de 'Venezuela Zona Gris', el nuevo trabajo de investigación de la periodista Ibéyise Pacheco.* [Venezuela Zona Gris', the new investigative work of journalist Ibéyise Pacheco, gets blocked.] https://vesinfiltro.com/noticias/2021-11-14_bloqueo_venezuela_zona_gris/

115 Tal Cual. (January 8th, 2021). *Página web de TalCual se recupera tras ataque cibernético.* [TalCual website recovers after cyber attack.] <https://talcualdigital.com/pagina-web-de-talcual-regreso-a-la-normalidad-tras-ataque-cibernetico/>

116 Tal Cual. (January 11th, 2021). *El portal de TalCual registró un nuevo ataque cibernético este #11Ene.* [TalCual's portal registered a new cyber attack this #11Jan.] <https://talcualdigital.com/el-portal-de-talcual-registro-un-nuevo-ataque-cibernetico-este-11ene>

117 Tal Cual. [DiarioTalCual]. (March 13th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/DiarioTalCual/status/1370866395798470659>

118 StopVIH. (March 2nd, 2021). *Recuperada cuenta de StopVIH en twitter luego de ser hackeada.* [StopVIH twitter account recovered after being hacked.] <https://www.stopvih.org/noticias/recuperada-cuenta-de-stopvih-en-twitter-luego-de-ser-hackeada/>

tunisian [sic] code pain” and “there is no safe system.”¹¹⁹ Likewise, when entering the name of the Ministry of Education in web search engines, the page appeared with the name “hacker from tunisia [sic].”

On Thursday, March 18th, the website was still unavailable, and to date, the regime of Nicolás Maduro has not offered any statement on what happened. Likewise, *VE Sin Filtro* reported that “the server (of the website) was probably disconnected in response to the computer attack, which claims to be a hacker from Tunisia.”¹²⁰

CIUDADGUAYANAFB (Tuesday, June 8th):

The director of the media outlet *CiudadGuayanaFB*, Jesús Miguel Hernández, informed that the accounts on the social networks Facebook and Twitter and the instant messaging services Telegram and WhatsApp received several hacking attempts on Tuesday, June 8th, and Wednesday, June 9th. In an interview for *Espacio Público*, Hernández explained that the attack was massive “at first, to our Telegram channel. Then, we realized that they had entered and obtained our access code;”¹²¹ however, the hackers could not gain access because they had two-step verification activated.

On the other hand, Hernández told *Espacio Público* that they tried to do the same on their Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp accounts, although they could not gain access. “They went one by one. The only accesses that were not attacked were YouTube and Signal. This is not the first time it has happened; this situation has been happening, but not as strong as now,” he explained.

PUNTO DE CORTE (Friday, June 25th):

The media outlet *Punto de Corte* informed that its web page was down due to a DDoS attack, which restricted users’ access to the information on its platform. In a press release, the media outlet stated that “these actions are a new attack on freedom of the press in Venezuela”¹²² and invited its users to follow the information content from its social networks.

JUAN BARRETO (Friday, July 5th):

The Instagram account of photojournalist Juan Barreto got hacked on Monday morning, July 5th. In statements to *Espacio Público*, the journalist reported that he received a message from the social network indicating that he had made a publication; however, Barreto assured that he was not the one who uploaded the publication to the platform. “A foreign number sent me a message asking me for money to be able to recover it; I did not answer them, I blocked the number, and I will wait for Instagram to get back to me,”¹²³ Barreto explained.

KARLA SALCEDO (Wednesday, July 14th):

The journalist and director of *Impacto Venezuela*, Karla Salcedo Flores, reported that her Instagram account got hacked after receiving a message indicating that she would lose her account. Furthermore, in an interview with *Espacio Público*, she denounced this fact and several attacks of which some members of the *Impacto Venezuela* staff were victims.¹²⁴

In addition, Salcedo Flores blamed the regime of Nicolás Maduro for the digital attack on her account, expressing that “they

119 López Dorante, C. (March 18th, 2021). *Página web del Ministerio de Educación permanece hackeada*. [Ministry of Education website remains hacked.] El Pitazo. <https://elpitazo.net/tecnologia/pagina-web-del-ministerio-de-educacion-permanece-hackeada/>

120 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (March 18th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1372679236385972224>

121 Espacio Público. (June 10th, 2021). *Atacan a las plataformas digitales de la cuenta de infocidadanía CiudadGuayanaFB*. [Attack on the digital platforms of CiudadGuayanaFB’s infocitizenship account.] <https://espaciopublico.org/atacan-a-las-plataformas-digitales-de-la-cuenta-de-infocidadania-ciudadguayanafb/>

122 Punto de Corte. [@punto_decorte]. (June 26th, 2021). Twitter. https://twitter.com/Punto_deCorte/status/1408871405052104707

123 Espacio Público. (July 6th, 2021). *Hackean cuenta en Instagram de reportero gráfico*. [Photojournalist’s Instagram account hacked.] <https://espaciopublico.org/hackean-cuenta-en-instagram-de-reportero-grafico/>

124 Espacio Público. (July 15th, 2021). *Hackean cuenta en Instagram de la periodista Karla Salcedo Flores*. [Journalist Karla Salcedo Flores’ Instagram account gets hacked.] <https://espaciopublico.org/hackean-cuenta-en-instagram-de-la-periodista-karla-salcedo-flores/>

know that we use our platforms to denounce abuses.” On Tuesday, August 10th, the journalist reported that she managed to regain access to her Instagram account.¹²⁵

ROSALÍ HERNÁNDEZ (Saturday, August 7th):

Independent journalist Rosalí Hernández reported that her Instagram got hacked and blocked;¹²⁶ she stated that days before the digital attack, she had received threats for a report she published concerning the clashes and acts of violence that took place in Cota 905. “From the first time I published it, several weird accounts started to follow me, and I started to receive messages that I should be more careful, that if I was in Venezuela or not, that if I am not afraid to publish those reports, that why I did not delete that information before they made me delete it,” stated Hernandez in an interview conducted by *Espacio Público*.¹²⁷

VPI TV (Sunday, August 15th):

The media outlet *VPI TV* reported that its Facebook account had gotten hacked.¹²⁸ In statements to IPYS Venezuela, the director of the news media Leonardo Trechi, stated that, although they managed to recover the account, Facebook restricted some functions because “one of the first things he (the hacker) did was to upload an image with a writing in Arabic, which was immediately penalized by Facebook.”¹²⁹ According to the information provided by IPYS Venezuela, the restrictions prevented the media from connecting the Instagram profile with Facebook and not being able to use the business tools, so they did not have access to metrics and statistics.

CONVITE (Wednesday, August 18th):

The Civil Association CONVITE reported on Twitter that its website was the victim of a digital attack and suspended for security reasons. In an interview conducted by *Espacio Público*, Luis Francisco Cabezas, director of CONVITE, explained that “500 messages per minute began to be sent from our account. Our suppliers told us that this was the result of an attack and for server security reasons, the best thing to do was to suspend the page.”¹³⁰

QUÉ PASA EN VENEZUELA (Tuesday, August 24th):

The news media *Qué Pasa En Venezuela* reported on its social networks that its website was the victim of a cyber-attack “which resulted in the blocking of the web,”¹³¹ preventing its users from accessing the information content. Carolina Isava, director of the news media, stated to *Espacio Público* that the provider’s registry showed that the attack got carried out from Altagracia de Orituco, Guárico state, Venezuela. “The hosting sent us a report of more than 16 entries in the same address, so the page is automatically blocked, but it has not been possible to unblock it once it was blocked. That is why we know it is an attack with intent”¹³² said Isava.

RUNRUNES (Saturday, December 11th):

The news media *Runrunes* reported through its account on Instagram that its website suffered a cyber-attack that prevented them from updating the informative content on the platform and users could access it. “In

125 Karla Salcedo. [@karlasalcedoflores]. (August 10th, 2021). Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CSan9b1D3Qj/>

126 Ro Hernández Marcano. [@rohernandezm]. (August 7th, 2021). Twitter. https://twitter.com/rohernandezm_/status/1424052023775875078

127 Espacio Público. (August 7th, 2021). *Hackean y bloquean cuenta en Instagram a la reportera Rosalí Hernández*. [Reporter Rosalí Hernández’ Instagram account hacked and blocked.] <https://espaciopublico.org/hackean-y-bloquean-cuenta-en-instagram-a-la-reportera-rosali-hernandez/>

128 VPI TV. [@vpitv]. (August 15th, de 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/VPITV/status/1427067897474691081?s=20>

129 IPYS Venezuela. (December 17th, 2021). *Balance IPYSve | Medio año de limitaciones informativas*. [Balance IPYSve | Half a year of informative limitations.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/balance-ipysve-medio-ano-de-limitaciones-informativas/>

130 Espacio Público. (August 19th, 2021). *Atacan página web de la Asociación Civil Convite*. [Convite Civil Association’s web page is attacked.] <https://espaciopublico.org/atacan-pagina-web-de-la-asociacion-civil-convite/>

131 Qué Pasa en Venezuela. [@qpev]. (August 24th, 2021). Twitter. https://twitter.com/QPEV_/status/1430201316316520450?s=20

132 Espacio Público. (August 24th, 2021). *Atacan sitio web del portal Qué pasa en Venezuela*. [Qué pasa en Venezuela’s website is attacked.] <https://espaciopublico.org/atacan-sitio-web-del-portal-que-pasa-en-venezuela/>

addition to all the difficulties suffered by the exercise of journalism in Venezuela, we must add the blockades to independent news portals and the continuous attacks they suffer to prevent information dissemination,”¹³³ they stated in the press release.

CASES: ARRESTS AND INDICTMENTS

JHONATAN PALACIOS (Tuesday, February 16th):

CICPC officers arbitrarily detained citizen Jhonatan Palacios after he published on his social networks a photo showing Tarek William Saab, Attorney General of Nicolás Maduro’s regime, in the company of a capuchin monkey, according to information provided by *La Nación Web*.¹³⁴

Palacios was detained overnight in San Antonio, Táchira state, and called to testify at the headquarters of the state security corps. On the other hand, the media *La Prensa Táchira* reported that the arbitrary detention of Palacios was due to “non-compliance with the Law Against Hate.”¹³⁵

JOSÉ PÉREZ (Sunday, February 2nd):

After publishing a video on TikTok where he questioned the privileges of Omar Enrique’s daughter and the singer’s relationship with the regime in Venezuela, José Pérez was arbitrarily detained by CICPC officers. According to *Espacio Público*, Pérez was contacted by telephone by María Buitrago, the singer’s wife, who threatened him that “he will be stained in red.”¹³⁶

Even though the young man removed the video from his social networks, he was detained by a CICPC commission commanded by Alberto Dugarte, head of computer crimes of the police force. The officers told him that he had to accompany them for interrogation and record his statements, so the officers took him to CICPC headquarters in Higuerote, Miranda state. Hours later, they transferred him to the main headquarters in Caracas.

On March 2nd, he was imprisoned after being presented at the 42nd Control Court of the Metropolitan Area of Caracas. He was charged with the crime of incitement to hatred and disclosure of personal data. The previous day, Pérez had already had a trial before the Second Court of Caracas, where he was charged with slander and defamation. Therefore, on Friday, March 19th, he was released from prison under precautionary measures that prevented him from speaking about his case, leaving the country, and complying with a regime of presentation every 15 days.¹³⁷

MILAGROS MATA GIL AND JUAN MANUEL MUÑOZ (Wednesday, March 31st):

Writer and journalist Milagros Mata Gil was arbitrarily detained along with poet Juan Manuel Muñoz by CONAS officials on Wednesday afternoon, March 31st, in El Tigre, Anzoátegui state. Mata Gil informed about the situation on her Facebook account: “warning to my friends: a commission of ConasFaes [sic] is looking for me. Five armed men. They said they would return at 4 pm as I was not there. As I have not done anything, I have no idea what this is about. Just for your information. They arrested Juan Manuel Muñoz (Moriche).”¹³⁸

133 Espacio Público. (December 13th 2021). *Runrunes es víctima de un ataque a su página web*. [Runrunes is the victim of an attack on its website.] <https://espaciopublico.org/runrunes-es-victima-de-un-ataque-a-su-pagina-web/>

134 Diario La Nación. [@lanacionweb]. (February 18th, 2021). Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLb6oF-LLQW/>

135 La Prensa Táchira. (February 18th, 2021). *DETENIDO DIRECTOR DE FUNDABOLÍVAR POR PUBLICAR UNA FOTO EN RRSS*. [DIRECTOR OF FUNDABOLIVAR ARRESTED FOR PUBLISHING A PHOTO ON SOCIAL MEDIA.] <https://laprensatachira.com/nota/16711/2021/02/detenido-director-de-fundabolivar-por-publicar-una-foto-en-rrss>

136 Espacio Público. (March 11th, 2021). *Cicpc detuvo a Tiktok por criticar a hija de un oficialista*. [Cicpc arrested Tiktok for criticizing the daughter of a government official.] <http://espaciopublico.org/cicpc-detuvo-a-tik-toker-por-criticar-a-hija-de-un-oficialista/>

137 Espacio Público. [@ongespaciopublico]. (March 20th, 2021). Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMpdsVFny18/>

138 Letralia Tierra de Letras. (March 31st, 2021). *Escritora venezolana Milagros Mata Gil denuncia haber sido detenida*. [Venezuelan writer Milagros Mata Gil denounces her arrest.] <https://letralia.com/noticias/2021/03/31/escritora-venezolana-milagros-mata-gil-denuncia-haber-sido-detenida/>

Hours later, the journalist reported on the same social network that officials from Anzoátegui security forces would leave them in custody after presenting themselves voluntarily at the police headquarters, “they will leave Moriche and me in custody tonight, and tomorrow they will present us in court. For incitement to hatred and by order of Tarek Saab.” On Thursday, April 1st, Jorge Márquez, defense lawyer of Milagros Mata Gil and Juan Manuel Muñoz, informed that they were accused of incitement to hatred in the presentation hearing.

These arbitrary detentions occurred due to the dissemination of an opinion article¹³⁹ in a WhatsApp group administered by Muñoz and on the journalist’s Facebook account, “he spoke about the wedding of the Arab community held in the Urbaneja municipality of Anzoátegui state, and where he mentions that the prosecutor Tarek William Saab was present,”¹⁴⁰ said Márquez. Eventually, both were released from prison under a 30-day presentation regime, they were forbidden to leave the state, and their cell phones were temporarily seized.

Subsequently, on Monday, May 3rd, Milagros Mata Gil told her experience to *La Gran Aldea* media outlet, even though the regime had prevented her from speaking about her case. The journalist claims to have been “detained by a personal vendetta from Tarek Saab”¹⁴¹ in the article.

On Wednesday, June 16th, the Venezuelan PEN Center reported on its Twitter account that the journalist was attacked with a knife “a guy tried to stab me. He caused me a 12 cm wound in my arm. There were two of

them. On a motorcycle. The power was out and everything was dark. Yadira, my neighbor, gave me first aid. I am fine.”¹⁴²

LUIS MORALES (Thursday, April 22nd):

After publishing a satirical video on TikTok about the “side effects” that people could develop after a vaccine of Chinese origin to prevent the spread of COVID-19, Luis Morales was detained and interrogated by SEBIN officials and dismissed from his job at the State Railroad Institute (IFE). Additionally, in an interview with *El Pitazo*, Morales informed that there was a request for his arrest, of which he did not know, “although I was scared and I was thinking of my two children, I always kept my cool and answered everything they asked me.”¹⁴³

After staying three hours at the SEBIN headquarters, he deleted his TikTok account following the officers’ recommendation. Finally, he assured that what happened affected him not only because he lost his job: “It is the love I have for the railroad system. My great dream was always to see a railroad throughout the whole country. I dreamed that the railroad would connect us with other parts of the world.”

FRANCIS BOLÍVAR (Monday, April 26th):

Police officers of Apure state arbitrarily detained Francis Bolívar, secretary-general of the political party Primero Justicia, in the San Fernando district. According to the news media *El Pitazo*, the arrest occurred after Francis Bolívar published a

139 Efecto Cocuyo. (April 1st, 2021). *Lo que se sabe sobre la detención de los escritores Milagros Mata Gil y Juan Muñoz.* [What is known about the arrest of writers Milagros Mata Gil and Juan Muñoz.] <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/lo-que-se-sabe-sobre-la-detencion-de-los-escritores-milagros-mata-y-juan-munoz/>

140 IPYS Venezuela. (April 1st, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Excarcelados con medidas cautelares periodista y poeta en Anzoátegui.* [AlertaIPYSve | Journalist and poet in Anzoátegui released with precautionary measures.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-excarcelados-con-medidas-cautelares-periodista-y-poeta-en-anzoategui/>

141 Socorro, M. (May 3rd, 2021). *“Fui detenida por una venganza personal de Tarek Saab.”* [“I was detained by a personal vendetta from Tarek Saab.”] *La Gran Aldea.* <https://www.lagranaldea.com/2021/05/03/fui-detenido-por-una-venganza-personal-de-tarek-saab/>

142 Pellicani, G. (June 18th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Abogado de escritora Milagros Mata Gil denunció que intentan silenciarla.* [AlertaIPYSve | Lawyer of writer Milagros Mata Gil denounced that they are trying to silence her. IPYS Venezuela.] IPYS Venezuela. <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-abogado-de-escritora-milagros-mata-gil-denuncio-que-intentan-silenciarla/>

143 Battistelli, R. (May 2nd, 2021). *Tiktok cuenta qué pasó tras publicar video sobre la vacuna china.* [Tiktok tells what happened after publishing a video about the Chinese vaccine.] *El Pitazo.* <https://elpitazo.net/entrevistas/tiktok-cuenta-que-paso-tras-publicar-video-sobre-la-vacuna-china/>

video¹⁴⁴ on social networks,¹⁴⁵ denouncing the failures in the supply of gasoline within the state. Bolívar was released on Tuesday, April 27th.

RAFAEL RATTIA (Thursday, June 3rd):

A commission of the Monagas State Police arbitrarily detained the writer Rafael Rattia in Maturín. According to the media, *El Pitazo*, police officers raided his house in La Flor-esta and took boxes of books, a laptop, cellular phones, and equipment for downloading digital books.¹⁴⁶

Subsequently, on Saturday, June 5th, the NGO Provea reported that Rattia was being presented in court¹⁴⁷ two days after being detained at the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Directorate of the Monagas State Police for allegedly writing an opinion article¹⁴⁸ on the death of Aristóbulo Iztúriz, who was People's Power Minister for Education. As a result, the writer Rafael Rattia was charged with "instigation to hatred" and eventually released from prison under a 30 days presentation regime and prohibition to leave the country.¹⁴⁹

NAPOLÉON RIVERO AND REUBEN MORALES (Wednesday, September 8th):

CICPC officers raided the homes in Caracas of humorists Napoleón Rivero and Reuben Morales¹⁵⁰ and accused them of "incitement

to hatred" and "computer crimes." According to *Espacio Público*, the officers took two laptops and a desktop computer from Morales' home.¹⁵¹

The two comedians are out of the country and are part of the cast featuring on a YouTube show (<https://www.youtube.com/c/KurdaKconducta/videos>) called *KurdaKconducta*, in which they parody several representatives of Nicolás Maduro's regime.

LEANDRO DOMINGUEZ (Thursday, November 4th):

The Supreme Court of Justice of the regime of Nicolás Maduro sentenced the former deputy Leandro Domínguez to pay the sum of 50 thousand Petros for alleged "moral damage"¹⁵² to the former governor of Carabobo state for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), Francisco Ameliach.

Sentence N°RH.000583 fines Dominguez almost US\$3 million. This decision resulted in a lawsuit made by Ameliach, after Dominguez accused him (in 2018) on Twitter of committing corruption offenses during his administration as governor (2013-2017).¹⁵³

Domínguez assured that this sentence violates his human rights "what is wrong with this gentleman? How can he think of it? Fifty thousand Petros, besides, my human rights are being violated because I am

144 El Pitazo. [@elpitazotv]. (April 26th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ElPitazoTV/status/1386662048067723264>

145 Díaz, M. (April 26th, 2021). *PoliApure detiene a secretario de Primero Justicia por denunciar fallas de gasolina*. [PoliApure detains secretary of Primero Justicia for denouncing gasoline failures.] El Pitazo. <https://elpitazo.net/los-llanos/poliapure-detiene-a-secretario-de-primero-justicia-por-denunciar-fallas-de-gasolina/>

146 Añez, J. (June 4th, 2021). *Monagas | Policía detiene a escritor por supuesto artículo en contra de Aristóbulo Iztúriz*. [Monagas | Police detain writer for alleged article against Aristóbulo Iztúriz.] El Pitazo. <https://elpitazo.net/oriente/monagas-policia-detiene-a-escritor-por-supuesto-articulo-en-contra-de-aristobulo-izturiz/>

147 Provea. [@_provea]. (June 5th, 2021). Twitter. https://twitter.com/_Provea/status/1401291489381134347

148 Rattia, F. (May 4th, 2021). *El maestro millonario*. [The millionaire teacher.] El Nacional. <https://www.elnacional.com/opinion/el-maestro-millonario/>

149 Añez, J. (June 6th, 2021). *Escritor Rafael Rattia fue imputado por instigación al odio en Maturín*. [Writer Rafael Rattia was charged with incitement to hatred in Maturín.] El Pitazo. <https://elpitazo.net/oriente/escritor-rafael-rattia-fue-imputado-por-instigacion-al-odio-en-maturin/>

150 KurdaKconducta. [@kurdakconductave]. (September 8th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/kurdakconductave/status/1435794592746594314>

151 Espacio Público. (September 9th, 2021). *Allanan las viviendas de los humoristas Napoleón Rivero y Reubén Morales*. [The homes of humorists Napoleón Rivero and Reubén Morales raided.] <https://espaciopublico.org/allanan-las-viviendas-de-los-humoristas-napoleon-rivero-y-reuben-morales/>

152 Rojas, B. (November 3rd, 2021). *TSJ condenó a exdiputado Leandro Domínguez a pagar 50 mil petros a exgobernador Ameliach, por haberlo difamado*. [TSJ sentenced former deputy Leandro Domínguez to pay 50 thousand petros to former governor Ameliach, for having defamed him.]

El Carabobeño. <https://www.el-carabobeno.com/tsj-condeno-a-exdiputado-leandro-dominguez-a-pagar-50-mil-petros-a-exgobernador-ameliach-por-haberlo-difamado/>

153 Leandro Dominguez. [@ldominguezbaez]. (June 5th, 2018). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ldominguezbaez/status/1003961933442240513>

just finding out about this sentence, but I would love a confrontation because I do have evidence.”¹⁵⁴

CASES: HARASSMENT AND THREATS

VICTOR AMAYA, JOHAN ÁLVAREZ, NICMER EVANS, WANDOR DUMONT AND MARCOS MORIN (Monday, January 4th)

The coordinator of the political party *Pro-Ciudadanos*, Leocenis García, harassed and insulted several journalists who reacted to a tweet in which he called the press in Venezuela “garbage.”¹⁵⁵ Among the various responses, García called the journalists “loser,” “self-conscious,” “fool,” and “failure.”^{156 157 158 159 160} he also responded with threats to journalist Marcos Morin: *“and by the way, how much I bet you that where you see me, you run? You have always been the same bullied coward in school. As soon as I see you, I will make you run. Promised.”*¹⁶¹

ODELL LÓPEZ ESCOTE (Tuesday, January 5th):

Venezuelan journalist Odell López denounced that the deputy for the National Assembly of Nicolás Maduro’s regime, José Brito, wrote to him through Instagram direct messages¹⁶² to insult him after López ques-

tioned Brito’s statements, in which he tried to offend press workers in Venezuela under a homophobic discourse, in which he assured that he calls journalists “homosexuals” to “make them shudder.”¹⁶³

GABRIELA GONZÁLEZ (Thursday, January 7):

José Brito described journalist and broadcaster Gabriela González as “biased and bribed”¹⁶⁴ after she referred to Brito “as one of the deputies who traveled to Europe to make representations in favor of Alex Saab (...)”¹⁶⁵ when reporting that the regime of Nicolás Maduro had appointed him as president of the Special Commission of Investigation of actions and vice-president of the Comptroller Commission of the pro-Chávez National Assembly.¹⁶⁶

LUZ MELY REYES, EFECTO COCUYO, EL PITAZO, CARAOTA DIGITAL, RADIO FE Y ALEGRÍA, SNTP AND TRANSPARENCIA VENEZUELA (Tuesday, January 8th):

After the British media *Declassified UK* published an article regarding the international cooperation provided by the United Kingdom,¹⁶⁷ a series of media outlets, among them: *Globovisión*, *Contexto Diario*, *El Universal*, and *Misión Verdad*, started a discrediting campaign against the media *Efecto Cocuyo*.

Globovisión broadcast the same article with various titles criminalizing the journalistic

154 Espacio Público. (November 4th, 2021). *TSJ sentencia a Leandro Domínguez por acusar de corrupción a Francisco Ameliach*. [TSJ sentences Leandro Domínguez for accusing Francisco Ameliach of corruption.] <https://espaciopublico.org/tsj-sentencia-a-leandro-dominguez-por-acusar-de-corrupcion-a-francisco-ameliach/>

155 Leocenis García. [@leocenisoficial]. (January 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/LeocenisOficial/status/1346058763279724545>

156 Leocenis García. [@leocenisoficial]. (January 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/LeocenisOficial/status/1346062419278372864>

157 Leocenis García. [@leocenisoficial]. (January 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/LeocenisOficial/status/1346066414189350913>

158 Leocenis García. [@leocenisoficial]. (January 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/LeocenisOficial/status/1346126642553516035>

159 Leocenis García. [@leocenisoficial]. (January 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/LeocenisOficial/status/134609090800537600>

160 Leocenis García. [@leocenisoficial]. (January 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/LeocenisOficial/status/1346090575091666944>

161 Leocenis García. [@leocenisoficial]. (January 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/LeocenisOficial/status/1346096753351733249>

162 Odell López Escote. [@odelopez]. (January 5th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/OdeLopez/status/1346558028733009920>

163 Monitoreamos. [@monitoreamos]. (January 5th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/monitoreamos/status/1346431448883064832>

164 José Brito. [@josebritove]. (January 7th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/JoseBritoVe/status/1347241271711166464>

165 Gabriela Gonzalez. [@gabygabygg]. (January 7th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/GabyGabyGG/status/1347224873240842240>

166 El Nacional. (January 7th, 2021). *José Brito presidirá comisión para investigar a los diputados de la AN electa en 2015*. [José Brito will chair commission to investigate the deputies of the NA elected in 2015.] <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/jose-brito-presidira-comision-para-investigar-a-los-diputados-de-la-an-electa-en-2015/>

167 Misión Verdad. (January 7th, 2021). *Reino Unido financia a medios y ONG antigubernamentales en Venezuela*. [United Kingdom finances anti-government media and NGOs in Venezuela.] <https://misionverdad.com/venezuela/reino-unido-financia-medios-y-ong-antigubernamentales-en-venezuela>

work of *Efecto Cocuyo* and journalist Luz Mely Reyes, and other media outlets and non-governmental organizations in Venezuela, including *El Pitazo*, *Caraota Digital*, *Radio Fe y Alegría*, the SNTF, and *Transparencia Venezuela*. Among the headlines with the information released by *Globovisión* were:

Official document from the United Kingdom where *Efecto Cocuyo* receives a million dollars.¹⁶⁸

Efecto Cocuyo, *Caraota Digital*, *El Pitazo* among the media financed to overthrow Maduro's government.¹⁶⁹

United Kingdom accepts to finance a Fourth-Generation war against Venezuela.¹⁷⁰

Given this campaign of accusations, *Efecto Cocuyo* issued a statement in which they expressed that the attacks against them, through campaigns of “discredit, defamation, manipulation, distortion, intimidation, and harassment, by high officials of the Venezuelan government, reaffirms a pattern of persecution and criminalization of journalistic work.”¹⁷¹

EFFECTO COCUYO, RADIO FE Y ALEGRÍA, AND SNTF VENEZUELA (Tuesday, January 19th):

The Twitter account of the Venezuelan Air Force, a component of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, released a video in which they criminalized the informative work of

media outlets such as *Efecto Cocuyo*, *Radio Fe y Alegría*, and the National Union of Press Workers (SNTF). “In the war against #Venezuela, they appeal to the use of media outlets that, in reality, they are just screens at the service of foreign interests. An example of this is @EfectoCocuyo,”¹⁷² they stated in the video's tweet.

OBEYSER PRADA (Friday, January 28th):

Journalist Obeysser Prada was harassed and threatened on Twitter and through WhatsApp messages after denouncing an irregular event that took place in San Cristóbal, Táchira state, in which Tamani Bernal,¹⁷³ son of Freddy Bernal, deputy to the National Assembly of Nicolás Maduro's regime, was allegedly involved, together with other FAES officials.¹⁷⁴ Among the messages sent to Prada, some included threats about hacking his social networks “remove the photos published in your account where you expose our Secretary-General linked to the son of an official who does not appear in that photo, or we will hack your social networks and cell phone.”¹⁷⁵

On Friday, May 28th, the journalist reported that through officials of the Public Prosecutor's Office, he learned that since February 11th, there was a lawsuit against him. A citizen named Benítez Briceño accused him of “instigating hatred and public scorn for the reporter's tweets where photos appear of the group that Bernal's son would lead, in possession of service firearms, FAES uniforms and containers alluding to

168 Globovisión. (January 6th, 2021). Documento oficial del Reino Unido donde *Efecto Cocuyo* recibe un millón de dólares. [Official document from the United Kingdom where *Efecto Cocuyo* receives one million dollars.] <https://www.globovision.com/article/gobierno-de-reino-unido-medios>

169 Globovisión. (January 8th, 2021). *Efecto Cocuyo*, *Caraota Digital*, *El Pitazo* entre los medios financiados para derrocar gobierno de Maduro. [Efecto Cocuyo, Caraota Digital, El Pitazo among the media financed to overthrow Maduro's government.] <https://www.globovision.com/article/efecto-cocuyo-caraota-digital-el-pitazo-entre-los-medios-financiados-para-derrocar-gobierno-de-maduro>

170 IPYS Venezuela. (January 20th, 2021). Alerta IPYSve | Medios de comunicación son objeto de campaña de agravios. [Alerta IPYSve | Media are the target of a campaign of grievances.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-medios-de-comunicacion-son-objeto-de-campana-de-agravios/>

171 *Efecto Cocuyo*. (January 12th, 2021). Comunicado de *Efecto Cocuyo* ante los ataques contra el derecho a informar. [Efecto Cocuyo's press release in response to the attacks against the right to inform.] <https://efectococuyo.com/la-humanidad/comunicado-de-efecto-cocuyo-ante-los-ataques-contra-el-derecho-a-informar/>

172 Aviación Militar. [@ambfanb]. (January 19th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/AmbFanb/status/1351556773962936320>

173 Obeysser Prada. [@obeysserprada]. (January 27th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ObeysserPrada/status/1354481091814555648>

174 El Nacional. (January 26th, 2021). Denuncian que el hijo de Freddy Bernal amenazó con dos granadas y armas largas en un local de comida en Táchira. [Freddy Bernal's son reportedly threatened a food store in Táchira with two grenades and long guns.] <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/denuncian-que-el-hijo-de-freddy-bernal-amenazo-con-dos-granadas-y-armas-largas-en-un-local-de-comida-en-tachira/>

175 IPYS Venezuela. (February 12th, 2021). Alerta IPYSve | Periodista fue amenazado luego de publicar denuncias contra hijo de Freddy Bernal en Táchira. [Alerta IPYSve | Journalist was threatened after publishing denunciations against Freddy Bernal's son in Táchira.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-periodista-fue-amenazado-luego-de-publicar-denuncias-contra-hijo-de-freddy-bernal-en-tachira/>

alcoholic beverages, and where the now plaintiff appears.”¹⁷⁶

Subsequently, on August 4th, the news media *La Prensa Táchira* reported that the 10th Court of 1st Instance in Control of Táchira state issued an arrest warrant against journalist Obeysser Prada for the alleged crime of “Author Promotion or Incitement to Hate.”¹⁷⁷ Because of this fact, the journalist told IPYS Venezuela that he did not know the reason behind the investigation taking place against him “in reality, I do not know what I am accused of, what is the specific crime for which the investigation is open, nor do I know what allegations the person who is denouncing me is putting forward.”¹⁷⁸

ROBERTO DENIZ (Monday, February 1st):

After the Twitter account of the pro-regime platform, *Lechuguinos* verbally attacked the journalist of the investigative portal *ArmandoInfo*, Roberto Deniz, in a tweet stating: “Get ready, you lowlife, I’m coming for you,” a series of accounts on the social network joined the attack with accusations and insults against the journalist.¹⁷⁹

LUISANA SUÁREZ (Thursday, February 25th):

SEBIN officers were at the house of journalist Luisana Suárez, part of the staff of the radio station *Class 98.7 FM*, located in Cojedes state,¹⁸⁰ to “talk” with Suárez about a publication she made on her Facebook profile,

in which she denounced the lack of contraceptives in the ambulatory of the Anzoátegui municipality in the region. Luisana Suárez was informed of this situation by her relatives and neighbors since she was not at her residence. On the other hand, the journalist informed that this would not be the first instance of state security forces visiting her residence “without apparent causes.”¹⁸¹

ROBERTO DENIZ (Monday, March 8th):

After journalist Roberto Deniz published a tweet in which he expressed that “(...) In August 2017, Saab told *El Tiempo de Bogotá* that he had nothing to do with food and CLAP. He also said that he barely knew Maduro from “protocolary” acts. How did he become the special humanitarian envoy so fast?”,¹⁸² several accounts on the social network Twitter, including that of the pro-government portal *Lechuguinos*, started a series of attacks against the journalist, calling him a “pest” and a “mercenary.”¹⁸³

MARINO ALVARADO (Thursday, March 11th):

The Vice-Minister of Anti-Blockade Policies, an entity attached to the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the regime of Nicolás Maduro, William Castillo, referred to the human rights advocate, Marino Alvarado, as a “pawn of the enemies of Veezuela [sic]...”,¹⁸⁴ after Alvarado expressed in his Twitter account his concern about the shortage and distribution of diesel in the country.¹⁸⁵

176 IPYS Venezuela. (May 28th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Periodista Obeysser Prada denunció ser víctima de una investigación judicial en Táchira.* [AlertaIPYSve | Journalist Obeysser Prada denounced being victim of a judicial investigation in Táchira.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-periodista-obeysser-prada-denuncio-ser-victima-de-una-investigacion-judicial-en-tachira/>

177 *La Prensa Táchira*. [@laprensatachira]. (August 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/LaPrensaTachira/status/1423004699448463366>

178 IPYS Venezuela. (August 12th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Tribunal de Táchira dictó orden de aprehensión contra periodista Obeysser Prada.* [AlertaIPYSve | Táchira Court issued arrest warrant against journalist Obeysser Prada.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-tribunal-de-tachira-dicto-orden-de-aprehension-contra-periodista-obeysser-prada/>

179 IPYS Venezuela. (February 8th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Periodista Roberto Deniz nuevamente atacado a través de Twitter.* [AlertaIPYSve | Journalist Roberto Deniz again attacked via Twitter.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-periodista-roberto-deniz-nuevamente-atacado-a-traves-de-twitter/>

180 SNTP Venezuela. [@sntpvenezuela]. (February 25th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/sntpvenezuela/status/1364967482268729358>

181 IPYS Venezuela. (July 22nd, 2021). *Balance IPYSve | Medio año de ataques y agresiones.* [Balance IPYSve | Half a year of attacks and aggressions.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/balance-ipysve-medio-ano-de-ataques-y-agresiones/>

182 Roberto Deniz. [@robertodeniz]. (March 8th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/robertodeniz/status/1369017847238778880>

183 IPYS Venezuela. [@ipysvenezuela]. (March 8th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ipysvenezuela/status/1369068158351515648>

184 Espacio Público. [@espaciopublico]. (March 11th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/espaciopublico/status/1370071770837958656>

185 Marino Alvarado. [@marinoalvarado]. (March 9th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/marinoalvarado/status/1369342120612540417>

ROBERTO DENIZ (Monday, March 15th):

After the journalist of the news portal *ArmandoInfo*, Roberto Deniz, questioned the scope of the campaign in favor of the Colombian businessman Alex Saab, promoted on social networks by representatives of the ruling party, several Twitter accounts aligned with the narratives of the Maduro regime, attacked the journalist with insults and false accusations, in addition to exposing his family on the platform.¹⁸⁶

RAYBER ALVARADO (Monday, March 15th):

Journalist Rayber Alvarado denounced having received threats through calls and text messages¹⁸⁷ allegedly from members of community councils and officials of the Vargas Police. According to the journalist's statements to IPYS Venezuela,¹⁸⁸ the attackers threatened him by forcing him to delete publications on his social networks in which he denounced irregular situations during the parliamentary elections held in December 2020.

On the other hand, he also stated that he received calls and messages from at least four alleged officials of the Vargas Police who also forced him, under threats, to delete publications in which Alvarado denounced "an extortion attempt of which he was a victim in a phantom police checkpoint of that entity." In both cases, the journalist agreed to delete the information for fear of reprisals.

MARIANELA BALBI AND IPYS VENEZUELA (Tuesday, March 16th):

IPYS Venezuela and its director Marianela Balbi were victims of discursive attacks by the pro-government platform *Lechuguinos*, who published a post on their website under the headline "RECOGNIZE THEM! Find out who is the hairy hand that finances the NGO IPYS to lie about Venezuela."¹⁸⁹ The article's authors spread false information about the NGO and the human rights activist, claiming that IPYS is a platform managed "by the gringos to discredit media outlets that are uncomfortable for them" and labeling Balbi as an extortionist.

SNTP VENEZUELA AND REPORTE YA (Wednesday, March 17th):

The Twitter account of the pro-government portal *Lechuguinos* attacked the National Union of Press Workers (SNTP) and *ReporteYa*,¹⁹⁰ pioneering network of citizen journalism and digital literacy in Venezuela, after both institutions defended the work of IPYS Venezuela and its director, Marianela Balbi, following the attacks and false information disseminated by *Lechuguinos* in a publication in which they described Balbi as an extortionist.

EL NACIONAL (Thursday, March 18th):

Several Twitter accounts sympathetic to the regime of Nicolás Maduro started a series of attacks against the newspaper *El Nacional*¹⁹¹ after this news outlet published an article¹⁹² on how the regime in Venezuela uses fake Twitter accounts to carry out campaigns in

186 IPYS Venezuela. [@ipysvenezuela]. (March 15th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ipysvenezuela/status/1371623781056266240>

187 Ray Alvarado. [@rayberdl18]. (March 15th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/rayberdl18/status/1371541190504501256>

188 IPYS Venezuela. (March 25th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Tres reporteros atacados y amenazados por funcionarios públicos en dos días.* [Alerta IPYSve | Three reporters attacked and threatened by public officials in two days.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-tres-reporteros-atacados-y-amenazados-por-funcionarios-publicos-en-dos-dias/>

189 Lechuguinos. (March 16th, 2021). ¡RECONÓCELOS! Sepa quién es la mano peluda que financia la ONG IPYS para mentir sobre Venezuela. [RECOGNIZE THEM! Find out who is the hairy hand that finances the NGO IPYS to lie about Venezuela.] <https://www.lechuguinos.com/mano-peluda-ong-ipys/>

190 IPYS Venezuela. (April 5th, 2021). *Balance IPYSve | Actores de la persecución discursiva.* [Balance IPYSve | Actors of the discursive prosecution.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/balance-ipysve-actores-de-la-persecucion-discursiva/>

191 IPYS Venezuela. (April 5th, 2021). *Balance IPYSve | Actores de la persecución discursiva.* [Balance IPYSve | Actors of the discursive prosecution.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/balance-ipysve-actores-de-la-persecucion-discursiva/>

192 El Nacional. (March 18th, 2021). *Financial Times: Maduro utiliza cuentas falsas de Twitter para ejercer presión en el caso Alex Saab.* [Financial Times: Maduro uses fake Twitter accounts to exert pressure in Alex Saab case.] <https://www.elnacional.com/venezuela/politica/financial-times-maduro-utiliza-cuentas-falsas-de-twitter-para-ejercer-presion-en-el-caso-alex-saab/>

favor of Alex Saab since the Colombian businessman got arrested in Cape Verde, in 2020.

ROBERTO DENIZ (Saturday, March 27th):

Journalist Roberto Deniz was attacked again on the social network Twitter, where a series of pro-government accounts promoted the hashtag *#DenizVendePatria* [*#Deniz-Traitor*], along with insulting messages and comments against the journalist. *Cazadores de Fake News* reported that this hashtag became Trending Topic number one in Venezuela, with 8,200 tweets.¹⁹³ As a response to this situation, Deniz expressed: “It seems that today the tweets of those who are campaigning in defense of “our diplomat Alex Saab” are better paid. Then Mr. Baltasar Garzón goes to the world media to talk about Mr. Saab’s rights (...).”¹⁹⁴

GREGORIA DÍAZ (Wednesday, April 14th):

María Fernanda Pérez, the coordinator of the pro-government portal *Ciudad Maracay*, harassed journalist Gregoria Díaz¹⁹⁵ for the publication of a report in the news media *Crónica Uno* on the lack of beds for patients with COVID-19 in the Central Hospital of Maracay, Aragua state.¹⁹⁶ Through her instant messaging service WhatsApp status, he called the journalist “bribed” and “miserable.”

On the other hand, the news media *Crónica Uno* denounced that as a result of the publication, accounts in the social network Twitter started a series of aggressions promoting the hashtag *#YoMeAnotoConFer* [*#IStand-*

WithFer],¹⁹⁷ accompanied by insulting messages towards Gregoria Díaz. Likewise, they denounced that an alleged blogger named Pablo Gúzman claimed to be responsible for this smear campaign against Díaz.

ARIANA AGREDA (Sunday, June 13th):

Journalist Ariana Agreda was the victim of a series of attacks by accounts on Twitter after she quoted information published on the GNB account. They reported on the arrest of a man allegedly involved in a robbery perpetrated on a passenger bus covering the Caracas - Carúpano route.¹⁹⁸

In an interview conducted by IPYS Venezuela, Agreda explained that the bus that appeared in the image, which he published accompanied the publication, belonged to a fumigation company. “The owners of the company demanded him to delete the informative tweet, alleging that the publication damaged the company’s image (...).”¹⁹⁹ After the start of the situation, insults and threats began against the journalist, who affirmed that she would not delete the information.

KARLA SALCEDO (Monday, July 12th):

A few days before her Instagram account got hacked, Karla Salcedo, journalist of the news media *Impacto Venezuela*, denounced that the pro-government journalist Luis Hugas, published in his stories on this same social network a photograph of Salcedo pointing her out as “the widow of Koki,”²⁰⁰ alias of Carlos Luis

193 Cazadores de Fake News. [@cazamosfakenews]. (March 28th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/cazamosfakenews/status/1376185094591942657>

194 Roberto Deniz. [robertodeniz]. (March 27th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/robertodeniz/status/1375930921522716677>

195 Espacio Público. (April 14th, 2021). *Coordinadora de Ciudad Maracay hostigó a corresponsal de Crónica Uno. [Coordinadora de Ciudad Maracay harassed Crónica Uno correspondent.]* <https://espaciopublico.org/coordinadora-de-ciudad-maracay-hostigo-a-corresponsal-de-cronica-uno/>

196 Díaz, G. (April 13th 2021). *En Aragua son insuficientes las camas para pacientes con coronavirus. [In Aragua there are not enough beds for patients with coronavirus.]* *Crónica Uno.* <https://cronica.uno/aragua-son-insuficientes-las-camas-para-pacientes-coronavirus/>

197 Crónica Uno. (April 15th 2021). *Medios de Comunicación, ONG y gremios rechazan campaña de descrédito contra la periodista Gregoria Díaz. [Media, NGOs and unions reject discrediting campaign against journalist Gregoria Díaz.]* <https://cronica.uno/medios-de-comunicacion-ong-y-gremios-rechazan-campana-de-descredito-contra-la-periodista-gregoria-diaz/>

198 Ariana Agreda. [ariana_agreda]. (June 11th, 2021). Twitter. https://twitter.com/ariana_agreda/status/1403508583229276162

199 Rodríguez, N. (June 18th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Periodista en Sucre recibió agresiones y amenazas tras difundir información oficial en redes sociales. [AlertaIPYSve | Journalist in Sucre received aggressions and threats after disseminating official information on social networks.]* <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-periodista-en-sucre-recibio-agresiones-y-amenazas-tras-difundir-informacion-oficial-en-redes-sociales/>

200 IPYS Venezuela. (July 19th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Periodista de Impacto Venezuela intimidada en su vivienda. [AlertaIPYSve | Impacto Venezuela journalist intimidated at her home.]* <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-periodista-de-impacto-venezuela-intimidada-en-su-vivienda/>

Revette, leader of one of the criminal gangs of Cota 905, in Caracas, Venezuela. State security forces officers also sought the latter after the clashes that started on July 7th.

ANA MARGARITA ÁLVAREZ

(Wednesday, August 4th):

A video went viral in which the citizen Ana Margarita Álvarez, a member of the *Agrupamientos Populares de Defensa Integral* (APDI, Popular Integral Defense Groupings), criticized Nicolás Maduro's administration,²⁰¹ assuring that she served only for the monthly benefit of the CLAP food box and that since she did not receive any type of payment for her work "Maduro had to be removed." As a reprisal for the publication, Álvarez was dismissed from her position.

In another video, the citizen appeared accompanied by First Lieutenant Mirta Chirinos, who assured that "she (Álvarez) is aware that she committed an offense. She is now going to behave like a militia woman who loves her country (...)." ²⁰²

IBÉYISE PACHECO (Friday, August 13th):

Journalist Ibéyise Pacheco was attacked on the social network Twitter by pro-government politician Antonio "El Potro" Álvarez after publishing a tweet assuring that Carlos Luis Revette, alias "El Koki," took refuge in the La Rinconada Racetrack under Álvarez's protection. "Do you know where El Koki took refuge when he fled from the Cota 905? Moreover, do you know who protected

him until he left the country, presumably to Colombia? El Potro Álvarez. May nobody be surprised by an agreed exit for Koki to alter Duque's government." ²⁰³

In response to this information, the pro-government leader attacked Pacheco with insults and misogynistic messages: "You have a couple of extra drinks today. I do not have the stomach to do you a favor if you are drunk and lacking sexual attention!!!" ²⁰⁴ expressed Álvarez. These attacks got back up by the portal *Lechuguinos*, who published a publication titled "ALWAYS DRUNK, NEVER UN-DRUNK! Crazy Ibéyise Pacheco raves about Koki and El Potro Álvarez stopped her in her tracks." ²⁰⁵

ROBERTO DENIZ, CARLA ANGOLA, ARMANDOINFO AND EVTVM MIAMI

(Friday, September 10th):

Journalists Roberto Deniz, Carla Angola, and the news media *ArmandoInfo* and *EVTVM Miami* were victims of verbal attacks by Pedro Carvajalino, host of the program *Zurda Conducta*, and Mario Silva, host of the program *La Hojilla*, both broadcasted by the state channel VTV. In addition, in chapter five of a series promoted by the regime of Nicolás Maduro, called "Alex Saab," broadcast on the YouTube platform, both Angola and Deniz were called "mercenaries." ²⁰⁶

On the other hand, they referred to *ArmandoInfo* as a "communicational extortion agency" due to the investigations published by the news portal, in which they revealed a series of acts of corruption by Saab related to the regime in Venezuela.

201 Impacto Venezuela. [@impactove]. (August 2nd, 2021). Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CSF6eG8HCEe/>

202 Espacio Público. (August 5th, 2021). *Intimidan a miliciana por criticar a Nicolás Maduro*. [Militia woman intimidated for criticizing Nicolás Maduro.] <https://espaciopublico.org/intimidan-a-miliciana-por-criticar-a-nicolas-maduro/>

203 Ibéyise Pacheco. [@ibepacheco]. (August 12th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ibepacheco/status/1425849459699748865>

204 IPYS Venezuela. (August 17th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Ibéyise Pacheco víctima de insultos y ataques misóginos a través de Twitter*. [Alerta IPYSve | Ibéyise Pacheco victim of insults and misogynistic attacks via Twitter.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-ibeyise-pacheco-victima-de-insultos-y-ataques-misoginios-a-traves-de-twitter/>

205 Lechuguinos. (13 de agosto de 2021). ¡SIEMPRE BORRACHA, NUNCA IN-BORRACHA! La loca Ibéyise Pacheco delira sobre el Koki y El Potro Álvarez la paró en seco. [ALWAYS DRUNK, NEVER UN-DRUNK! Crazy Ibéyise Pacheco raves about Koki and El Potro Álvarez stopped her in her tracks.] <https://www.lechuguinos.com/ibeyise-pacheco-delira-sobre-koky-potro-alvarez-la-paro-en-seco/>

206 Alex Saab. (June 18th, 2021). Alex Saab - La Serie 2da temporada Capítulo 5. [Alex Saab - The Series Season 2 Chapter 5] YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzlfk7doJtU&list=PL4w0Dkrr6v2478jQBE-1v8jVYapHBO31G&index=6>

ROBERTO DENIZ, SNTP AND IPYS VENEZUELA (Monday, September 20th):

After the pro-government portal, *Lechuguinos* disseminated on its Twitter account a publication from its website titled “Scandal! Bribed, and biased Roberto Deniz has accumulated 14 million dollars as a result of extortion,”²⁰⁷ several accounts on this platform began to insult and call Deniz an “extortionist.” Pedro Carvajalino joined this attack against the journalist, declaring, “the real truth is that your extortions are juicy, that is why you are so delirious with Ambassador Alex Saab! But you know one thing, the truth of Venezuela will prevail.”²⁰⁸

Additionally, the *Lechuguinos* account called *IPYS Venezuela* and the SNTP “scum” and “extortionists” after both institutions made statements in response to the continuous attacks against journalist Roberto Deniz.

In an interview for *Espacio Público*, Roberto Deniz denounced that a Twitter account (@JulioDenuncia) dedicated to harassing him repeatedly “is linked to the defense team of Álex Saab (...) They always attack me, stating that I am from the CIA and a mercenary, a trafficker. It is striking that the threats have reappeared when the extradition process is well underway.”²⁰⁹

ROBERTO DENIZ AND AMY TORRES (Tuesday, September 21st):

The Twitter account @Tem_HDP published an alleged conversation between the jour-

nalist of *Impacto Venezuela*, Amy Torres, and journalist Roberto Deniz, in which they allegedly promoted a protest that took place on Monday, September 20th,²¹⁰ by workers of the Salva Food company (owned by Alex Saab), in which they demanded working conditions.

Both journalists declared to *IPYS Venezuela* that the published conversations were false.²¹¹ However, it was the beginning of a new wave of attacks against journalist Deniz because different Twitter accounts with pro-regime tendencies called him a “bribed and biased” and a liar.

ROBERTO DENIZ AND EWALD SCHARFENBERG (Sunday, October 10th):

The Twitter account @Rayuela2021 published a montage of a conversation²¹² between journalists Roberto Deniz and Ewald Scharfenberg,²¹³ in which they claimed that both journalists were being financed and protected by their “boss in the USA.” Scharfenberg pointed out in a tweet that “the most sinister chavismo-madurismo continues to make montages to annihilate the reputation of @armandoinfo and its journalists (and perhaps as a prelude to a more tangible aggression)”²¹⁴ and also indicated that this action was a fabricated exchange.

ROBERTO DENIZ (Friday, October 15th):

Pedro Carvajalino published two videos dedicated to discrediting and discursively attacking journalist Roberto Deniz on his Twitter account. Among other things, Carvajalino

207 Lechuguinos. (September 20th, 2021). ¡Escándalo! Palangrista Roberto Deniz ha acumulado 14 millones de dólares producto de extorsión. [Scandal! Bribed, and biased Roberto Deniz has accumulated 14 million dollars as a result of extortion.] <https://www.lechuguinos.com/roberto-deniz-acumulado-14-millones-dolares-extorsion/>

208 IPYS Venezuela. [@ipysvenezuela]. (September 21st, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/ipysvenezuela/status/1440385836722257933>

209 Espacio Público. (September 21st, 2021). Portal oficialista Lechuguinos hostiga al periodista Roberto Deniz. [Pro-government portal Lechuguinos harasses journalist Roberto Deniz.] <https://espaciopublico.org/portal-oficialista-lechuguinos-hostiga-al-periodista-roberto-deniz/>

210 Amy Torres. [@amyytorres]. (September 20th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/amyytorres/status/1440027915559727117>

211 IPYS Venezuela. (October 14th, 2021). Alerta IPYSve | Continúa campaña de ataques contra Roberto Deniz en Twitter. [IPYSveAlert : Campaign of attacks against Roberto Deniz continues on Twitter.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-continua-campana-de-ataques-contra-roberto-deniz-en-twitter/>

212 Cazadores de Fake News. [@cazamosfakenews]. (October 15th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/cazamosfakenews/status/1449047232959766531>

213 Rayuela. [@rayuela2021]. (October 10th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/Rayuela2021/status/1447378298070310912>

214 Ewald Scharfenberg. [@ewalds6]. (October 11th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/Ewalds6/status/1447583324482977794>

called the journalist an “extortionist,” stating that “he has paid substantial amounts of money to take down web pages, to close Twitter accounts that question his shady and extortionist trajectory.”^{215 216}

This same day, lawyer Zair Mundaray informed his Twitter account that an arrest warrant was issued against journalist Roberto Deniz, who has been outside Venezuela since 2018, “for reporting on official corruption.” In addition, he was charged for the “supposed commission of the crime of Instigation to Hate.”²¹⁷

On the other hand, Deniz reported on his social networks that unidentified officers showed up at his parents’ house in Caracas, where his brother, sister-in-law, and two nieces were also present. “I alert and hold the Venezuelan authorities responsible for anything that may happen to them,”²¹⁸ wrote the journalist.

Hours after informing about the raid, Deniz expressed that “all today’s actions against my family, as well as this new judicial file, are preceded by a campaign of harassment in networks by people whom the government allows to act from impunity (...).”²¹⁹

ROBERTO DENIZ (Friday, December 10th):

The NGO *Espacio Público* reported that several pro-government Twitter accounts started a new campaign against journalist Roberto Deniz, in which they accused him of defamation and called for his arrest due to the series of investigations published in *ArmandoInfo*, in which they exposed corruption

schemes related to businessman Alex Saab, who has been linked to the regime of Nicolás Maduro. According to *Espacio Público*, “this campaign reached seventh place in trends in Venezuela with the hashtag *#DenizExtorsionador* [*#DenisExtorsonist*.]”²²⁰

OTHER CASES OF INFRINGEMENT OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ON THE INTERNET

ARMANDO INFO (Tuesday, February 9th):

Roberto Deniz and Joseph Poliszuk, co-editor, and founder of the investigative media *ArmandoInfo* denounced that Cloudflare informed them of having received a copyright claim for the report published on August 3rd, 2020, on the *ArmandoInfo* website. The publication was under the headline “The ‘yuppies’ strike back (and lose out),”²²¹ made in alliance with the media outlet *El País*, and mentioned Venezuelan businessman Axel Capriles Hernández.

According to the information provided by *IPYS Venezuela*, the notification sent by Cloudflare informed that the “original” URL of the report corresponded to a portal called *Primera Página*. Although the website showed that the publication took place on August 3rd, 2020, thanks to the Wayback Machine tool, “it was possible to verify that the report was published in *Primera Página* on February 9th.”²²²

215 Pedro Carvajalino. [pedrokonductaz]. (October 15th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/PedroKonductaz/status/1448955705566838785>

216 Pedro Carvajalino. [pedrokonductaz]. (October 15th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/PedroKonductaz/status/1448966161253736452>

217 Zair Mundaray. [mundarayzair]. (October 15th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/MundarayZair/status/1449076345233944578>

218 Roberto Deniz. [robertodeniz]. (October 15th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/robertodeniz/status/1449091410246963204>

219 Roberto Deniz. [robertodeniz]. (October 15th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/robertodeniz/status/1449146324193062914>

220 Espacio Público. (November 10th, 2021). *Roberto Deniz es hostigado por quinta vez en redes sociales en lo que va de año. [Roberto Deniz is harassed for the fifth time in social networks so far this year.]* <https://espaciopublico.org/roberto-deniz-es-hostigado-por-quinta-ataque-vez-por-redes-sociales-en-lo-que-va-de-año/>

221 Camhaji, E., Lafuente, J., and Deniz, R. (August 3th, 2021) *Los ‘yuppies’ contraatacan (y salen perdiendo). [The ‘yuppies’ strike back (and lose out).]* *ArmandoInfo*. <https://armando.info/los-yuppies-contraatacan-y-salen-perdiendo/>

222 IPYS Venezuela. (February 18th, 2021). *Alerta IPYSve | Nuevos ataques digitales contra Armando.info y Roberto Deniz. [IPYSve Alert | New digital attacks against Armando.info and Roberto Deniz.]* <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/alerta-ipysve-nuevos-ataques-digitales-contra-armando-info-y-roberto-deniz/>

However, this would not be the only time the investigative portal *ArmandoInfo* has been a victim of these practices that attempt to censor informative content. In an investigative report published on their website under the headline “They censor the press, deceive Google, and make money with it,”²²³ they reported that on Monday, July 5th, they received at least three notifications from the Google platform to indicate that they had deindexed three of their reports “due to a copyright complaint based on the DMCA.” The three journalistic works of *ArmandoInfo* would be related to the Odebrecht case.

ArmandoInfo was able to confirm that the websites claiming these copyrights “were dubious” because of their origin (Palestinian Territories and Panama) and “because they did not report the alleged original link.”

It is essential to mention that this practice of censoring content has been used in Venezuela since 2016, as explained in the report published by IPYS Venezuela, “*En la mira del algoritmo* [In the algorithm’s crosshair]” That year the Spanish company Eliminalia dedicated the use of questionable practices to help disappear content published on websites containing the name of its client, and requested the removal of articles published in *El Pitazo*, *Runrunes*, *El Estímulo*, *A TodoMomento*, and I. “In that year, the requests were mainly based on interpretations of the national legal framework, including the Venezuelan Constitution.”²²⁴

The report highlights other cases. One of them highlighted how the media outlet I, which reported that in October 2020, they

received emails requesting the removal of some of their articles and then a notification from their hosting provider about a plagiarism complaint based on DMCA; and the NGO *Acceso a La Justicia*, who received between December 2019 and March 2020 “two plagiarism complaints based on the DMCA.”

EL PITAZO (Wednesday, March 24th):

The news media *El Pitazo* received the third sanction on its Youtube channel (in three months), which meant the definitive closure of the channel. The video that motivated the third sanction was published on November 5th, 2019.²²⁵ It is essential to mention that *El Pitazo* is a media outlet victim of DDoS attacks and blocking its domains by the primary Internet providers in Venezuela.

The first sanction took place on January 25th for a video showing Nicolás Maduro talking about Carvativir as a treatment against COVID-19. The second sanction was reported less than ten days later, on February 3rd, for a news video showing a double suicide bombing in a Baghdad market.

El Pitazo alerted this situation to prevent this practice from becoming a pattern of complaints against media content and cause the permanent closure of its channels. Eventually, Youtube restored the channel on April 2nd, 2020, because in a second analysis, the platform confirmed that the media did not violate its Terms of Service.²²⁶

223 Marcano, P. (July 18th, 2021). *Censuran a la prensa, engañan a Google, y hacen plata con eso*. [They censor the press, deceive Google, and make money with it.] *ArmandoInfo*. <https://armando.info/censuran-a-la-prensa-enganan-a-google-y-hacen-plata-con-eso/>

224 IPYS Venezuela. (December 9th, 2021). *Reporte “En la mira del algoritmo”, de IPYS Venezuela, indaga en la moderación de contenidos*. [Report “En la mira del algoritmo”, by IPYS Venezuela, explores content moderation.] <https://ipysvenezuela.org/2021/12/09/reportes-en-la-mira-del-algoritmo-de-ipys-venezuela-indaga-en-la-moderacion-de-contenidos/>

225 El Pitazo. (March, 25th, 2021). *Comunicado: YouTube cerró canal de El Pitazo por video difundido en 2019*. [Press release: YouTube closed El Pitazo’s channel due to video broadcast in 2019.] <https://elpitazo.net/tecnologia/comunicado-youtube-cerro-canal-de-el-pitazo-por-video-difundido-en-2019/>

226 Batiz, C. (April 2nd, 2021). *Comunicado: YouTube restituyó el canal de El Pitazo*. [Press release: YouTube restored El Pitazo’s channel.] *El Pitazo*. <https://elpitazo.net/tecnologia/comunicado-youtube-restituyo-el-canal-de-el-pitazo/>

CHAPTER III:
**EVENTS THAT AFFECTED
INTERNET CONNECTIVITY**

POWER OUTAGES

In 2021, there were at least 20 power outages affecting Internet connectivity, documented by the *NetBlocks* observatory and *VE Sin Filtro*.

DATE	MOST AFFECTED STATES	RESPECTIVE AVERAGE % OF CONNECTIVITY
Monday, February 22nd ²²⁷	Zulia	32
Monday, March 29th ²²⁸	Barinas	14
Thursday, April 8th ²²⁹	National	90
Tuesday, May 4th ²³⁰	Táchira	41
Sunday, June 13th ²³¹	Táchira, Falcón, Barinas	47
Tuesday, June 29th ²³²	Táchira, Trujillo, Carabobo	70,76, 79
Wednesday, July 21st ²³³	Delta Amacuro, Táchira, La Guaira	58,59, 60
Monday, August 2nd ²³⁴	La Guaira, Distrito Capital, Zulia	60,71, 77
Thursday, August 19th ²³⁵	Apure, Trujillo, Barinas	45,86, 89
Sunday, September 12th ²³⁶	National	67
Monday, October 4th ²³⁷	Nueva Esparta, Táchira	35, 65
Thursday, October 14th ²³⁸	Apure, La Guaira, Barinas	47,58, 65
Tuesday, November 2nd ²³⁹	Mérida, Táchira, Aragua	75,82, 83
Tuesday, November 9th ²⁴⁰	Táchira, Guárico, Mérida	13,68, 69
Wednesday, November 10th ²⁴¹	Guárico, Miranda, Yaracuy	69,73, 80
Thursday, November 11th ²⁴²	Carabobo	84
Friday, December 10th ²⁴³	Táchira	76
Tuesday, December 14th ²⁴⁴	Táchira, Mérida	70, 87
Friday, December 17th ²⁴⁵	National	32
Wednesday, December 22nd ²⁴⁶	Táchira	69

227 Netblocks. [@netblocks]. (February 22nd, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/netblocks/status/1364032560616140803>

228 Netblocks. [@netblocks]. (March 29th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/netblocks/status/1376637880102162433>

229 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (April 8th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1380241505219194890>

230 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (May 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1389708004119957507>

231 Netblocks. [@netblocks]. (June 13th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/netblocks/status/1404253093840236553>

232 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (June 29th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1409981688218849280>

233 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (July 21st, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1417916327952592907>

234 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (August 2nd, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1422318405059850241>

235 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (August 19th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1428347534376767490>

236 Netblocks. [@netblocks]. (September 12th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/netblocks/status/1437198115803734018>

237 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (October 4th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1445116198392315904>

238 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (October 14th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1448685697158762498>

239 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (November 2nd, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1455667493587099648>

240 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (November 9th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1458236372410671111>

241 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (November 10th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1458538428560203785>

242 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (November 11th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1458917044380909568>

243 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (December 10th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1469486444376899584>

244 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (December 14th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1470844282215051269>

245 Netblocks. [@netblocks]. (December 17th, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/netblocks/status/1471770646451527683>

246 VE Sin Filtro. [@vesinfiltro]. (December 22nd, 2021). Twitter. <https://twitter.com/vesinfiltro/status/1473757811645591559>

FIBER OPTIC CUTS (REPORTED BY THE MAIN INTERNET PROVIDERS IN VENEZUELA)

Some of the primary Internet providers in Venezuela reported fiber-optic outages in different states of the national territory through their Twitter accounts. RedesAyuda documented, based on the information published by ISPs, a total of 79 fiber optic cuts that affected Internet access:²⁴⁷

CANTV	INTER	MOVILNET	MOVISTAR	NETUNO	TOTAL
29	10	3	2	35	79

247 RedesAyuda. (2021). Cortes de fibra que afectaron la conectividad a Internet en Venezuela durante 2021. [Fiber cuts that affected Internet connectivity in Venezuela during 2021.] <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1yo06Ceu4fAQ1l3kig6oCz7-URHlj6-WM?usp=sharing>

CHAPTER IV:
**OVERCOMING
CENSORSHIP**

THE DIGITAL RISK INTELLIGENCE PLATFORM:

The *Plataforma de Inteligencia En Riesgos Digitales* [Digital Risk Intelligence Platform], created by the organization *Asuntos Del Sur* (<https://riesgosdigitales.asuntosdelsur.org/>), brings together a series of micro-courses on security and digital rights. The platform aims to enable participants to develop skills “to respond to various digital risks, generate resilience strategies and incident response.”

In the specialty 1, “Digital Security for Organizations and Activists,” the journalist and director of *RedesAyuda*, Melanio Escobar, was in charge of teaching the micro-course “Security for Journalists,” in which he provided tools for journalists on digital security and device protection used in the profession.²⁴⁸

REDESAYUDA AND OBSERVATORIO PROBOX MEET WITH OAS SECRETARY GENERAL:

The journalist and director of *RedesAyuda*, Melanio Escobar, and the director of *Observatorio ProBox*, María Virginia Marín, met with the Secretary-General of the OAS, Luis Almagro, to present the findings of *RedesAyuda*’s report “*Voces Confinadas*” and give him an overview of the context in Venezuela regarding censorship and digital disinformation, as well as the attacks and persecution of press workers in the country. Almagro expressed in his social networks: “(...) They shared with me their report #VocesConfinadas that documents the serious violations to freedom of expression and restrictions to access to information on the internet in #Venezuela.”²⁴⁹

PARTNERSHIP WITH YUBICO:

Yubico is a company that manufactures physical security keys, which are devices that function as a 2-step verification method and increase the security of your users’ accounts by adding an extra barrier of protection, preventing unauthorized access to their accounts and devices.

Thanks to the “Yubico for freedom of expression” program, this company has donated security keys to more than 25 organizations in 10 different countries. This time, *RedesAyuda* joins these organizations, establishing an alliance with Yubico that will strengthen the training of journalists, activists, and human rights advocates on digital security issues and provide them with the physical and digital tools to be safer during the exercise of their work on the Internet.

REVIVE THE NEWS:

The *Revive La Noticia* [Revive the News] contest, promoted by *RedesAyuda*, in alliance with Free Press Unlimited and the European Union,²⁵⁰ aims to create networks to fight against censorship and give visibility to news relevant to Venezuelans but has fallen through the cracks due to censorship have not been able to reach a wider audience. On the other hand, the contest is also an opportunity to publicize new initiatives or projects and promote the creation of innovative products with creative narratives that allow participants to inform in new formats.

In this first edition of the *Revive La Noticia* contest, participants had to follow three steps in order to enter the competition:

248 Asuntos del Sur. (2021). *Seguridad para periodistas*. [Safety for journalists.] <https://riesgosdigitales.asuntosdelsur.org/cursos/seguridad-para-periodistas/>

249 Luis Almagro. [@almagro_OEA2015]. (September 16th, 2021). Twitter. https://twitter.com/Almagro_OEA2015/status/1438612441198432259

250 RedesAyuda. [@redesayuda]. (November 1st, 2021). Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVwQWIVjh9g/>

Choose a news item that may be censored or published in blocked media.

Communicate the news in an innovative format different from the original: Tik Tok, Reels, songs, infographics, podcasts, weeklies, flip charts, videos, audios, or any other format the contestant wishes.

Register by filling out a form.

RedesAyuda aims to continue carrying out this contest that allows us to continue making censored information visible by encouraging new ways of communicating despite the systematic censorship in the Venezuelan digital space.²⁵¹

251 RedesAyuda. [@redesayuda]. (December 15th, 2021). Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CXhrA9kNHwQ/>

CHAPTER V:
**APPS AND TOOLS TO
OVERCOME INTERNET
CENSORSHIP**

VPN:

A VPN, or virtual private network, is a tool that allows two or more devices to be securely connected through a virtual point-to-point connection. It makes it possible to bypass most forms of website restrictions by hiding the user's browsing from their ISP. Similarly, VPNs hide the user's IP address from the servers of the sites they visit, preventing them from being able to trace the users' original location of the connection.

Psiphon: <https://psiphon.news/humanoderecho>

TunnelBear: <https://www.tunnelbear.com>

RiseupVPN: <https://riseup.net/es/vpn>

TOR BROWSER:

Tor Browser is a web browser that is part of the Tor project, which focuses on preserving the privacy and anonymity of users on the Internet, as well as allowing them to evade blocks and censorship on the Internet. The connection and traffic of the browser is done through the Tor server network, distributed around the world, so the user's IP address is hidden from the server of the website being accessed and browsing is hidden from the user's ISP.

Tor Browser also has several features to block trackers, hide the device type and operating system from which the user connects, and delete cookies and browsing history when closing the application.

Tor Browser:
<https://www.torproject.org/download/>

CHANGE OF DNS SERVERS:

A Domain Name System (DNS) server is responsible for translating the domains associated with a website, for example: "redesayuda.org," to the IP address where the website is hosted, for example: "104.31.64.195."

Changing the DNS servers on our devices allows us to bypass DNS blocking imposed by ISPs.

Instructions for changing DNS servers:
<https://1.1.1.1/dns/#setup-instructions>

GOOGLE:

IPv4: primary "8.8.8.8" and secondary "8.8.4.4"

IPv6: primary "2001:4860:4860::8888" and secondary "2001:4860:4860::8844"

Intra (Android): <https://getintra.org/>

CLOUDFLARE:

IPv4: primary "1.1.1.1" and secondary "1.0.0.1"

IPv6: primary "2606:4700:4700::1111" and secondary "2606:4700:4700::1001"

1.1.1.1 (iOS and Android): <https://1.1.1.1/>

IBM:

IPv4: primary "9.9.9.9" and secondary "149.112.112.112"

IPv6: primary "2620:fe::fe" and secondary "2620:fe::9"

Quad9 Connect (Android): <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.quad9.aegis>

2-STEP VERIFICATION:

Internet censorship also manifests itself through hacks, which seek to steal access to users' accounts to prevent them from using them to share and spread information.

2-step verification adds an extra security layer to accounts on digital platforms, based on the "something you know and something you have" principle, in which what you know is your password and what you have, is your 2-step verification method. The accounts

will only request the 2-step verification once the password is entered correctly.

Authy: <https://authy.com/download/>

YubiKey: <https://www.yubico.com/store/>

OONI PROBE:

OONI Probe is a tool developed by the Open Observatory on Network Interference (OONI), created to document and measure Internet censorship by detecting and diagnosing website blocking, instant messaging applications, and online censorship circumvention tools.

The data collected by the application gets published in near real-time and is accessible through the OONI browser for independent third-party analysis.

OONI Probe: <https://ooni.org/install/all>

OONI Explorer: <https://explorer.ooni.org/>

THE AMNESIC INCOGNITO LIVE SYSTEM (TAILS):

Tails is a Debian-based Linux distribution focused on user privacy and anonymity. All Internet traffic you make through Tails is encrypted and routed through the Tor network, so it has the same privacy and anonymity features.

Also, once Tails is closed, all logs (including files) that have been created during the user's session will be deleted unless the user wishes to keep them by adjusting the settings.

TAILS: <https://tails.boum.org/install/>

DEFLECT:

Deflect is a free protection service for websites of civil society organizations and human rights advocates that allows, among other things, to protect against DDoS attacks.

Deflect: <https://deflect.ca/nonprofit>

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The digital ecosystem in Venezuela is heavily censored by the regime of Nicolás Maduro, who has adopted a series of practices aimed at monitoring, controlling, restricting, and criminalizing the exercise of human rights on the Internet, such as freedom of expression, access to information and freedom of the press.

Citizens in Venezuela have had to face intimidation and threats on digital platforms, and be victims of arbitrary arrests that end in charges such as “incitement to hatred” under fraudulent regulations such as the “Law Against Hate” and, subsequently, their deprivation of liberty.

Likewise, media outlets and journalists have had to overcome the blocking of their websites and constant discursive attacks by officials allied to the regime, being the main targets of insult and discredit campaigns. During the year 2021, 65 new cases were registered, representing a decrease of 42% concerning the data documented during the year 2020 (127). However, these data do not mean a decrease in the censorship implemented by Nicolás Maduro’s regime in Venezuela.

As for the newly registered blocking cases (14), these represent a 58% decrease compared to 2020. However, it is essential to mention that at least 68 domains corresponding to 59 websites were blocked throughout 2021, including active blocks from previous years. Meanwhile, cyber-attacks increased by 9% because media websites, civil society organizations, and journalists’ social media accounts continue to be victims of multiple hacking attempts (successful and unsuccessful) and DDoS attacks.

Other repressive practices of the State are to arrest, charge, and deprive dissidents of their freedom for “incitement to hatred” to criminalize freedom of expression. Although the cases of detentions and charges registered during 2021 (9) represented a decrease of 64%, the regime continues to advance in the creation of “legal” arguments aimed at deepening its control

and censorship on the Internet, including new discussions on the “Cyberspace Law” and a new update to the RESORTEME law to regulate social networks.

On the other hand, discursive attacks against the media and journalists on social networks were one of the most frequent practices during this year by the regime in Venezuela. A total of 27 cases of threats and harassment were registered, of which almost half were harassment campaigns and discrediting messages against Roberto Deniz, journalist of the media *ArmandoInfo*, which has disseminated a series of investigations on the businessman Alex Saab, linked to acts of corruption with the CLAP boxes and ally of the regime of Nicolás Maduro.

These cases showed how the government continued to censor civil society, media, and journalists in various Internet spaces. In addition to how the regime kept using tools such as the illegitimate “Law against Hate” to carry out arrests, as well as leading campaigns of attacks against journalists and human rights defenders, to restrict freedom of expression and promote self-censorship of those who dare to denounce arbitrariness and violations of fundamental rights through digital platforms.

Based on the cases registered in this report, RedesAyuda makes the following recommendations, demands, and suggestions:

1. Continue to disregard the “Law against Hate, for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance” due to its unconstitutionality and its arbitrary use to persecute civil society.
2. To reject the legislative package proposed by the regime of Nicolás Maduro, which includes the approval of a “Cyberspace Law” and a reform to the “Law of Social Responsibility in Radio and Television,” which would consist of the electronic media, considering that the Maduro administration could use such instruments to increase control over digital platforms and increase censorship in the country.

3. Reiterate the demand for guarantees for the development and exercise of digital rights in Venezuela, the creation of public policies for the improvement of the infrastructure of state and private Internet providers, and the promotion of a free Internet for the exercise of freedom of expression and access to information in digital media, without limitations or censorship.
4. Persist with the strengthening of partnerships between civil society and digital media to promote the use of tools for the evasion of online censorship and with the planning and execution of projects aimed at creating measures for the promotion and reconstruction of democracy on the Internet.
5. Continue informing despite censorship, defending and demanding guarantees for human and digital rights, and responsibly using social networks as a channel to inform and articulate citizenship. In RedesAyuda, we keep the conscious use of digital media for information and communication as one of our primary values.
6. Continue to promote free and open Internet access, in which Venezuelans can decide what content to access for information and use digital platforms to exercise the right to freedom of expression without any restrictions, censorship, or blockades. From RedesAyuda, we reiterate our commitment to the construction, promotion, and defense of safe and uncensored Internet access.



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