

URUGUAY

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis

<p>STRENGTHS</p>	<p>For this period, Uruguay has strengthened its the level of support for democracy as a political regime, according to international barometers. It leads in the perception that freedom of expression is guaranteed (Chapultepec); it presents the highest level of trust on the part of citizens towards the Congress, political parties and the Judiciary as institutions of democracy (Latinobarómetro). Current regulations continue to guarantee the reservation of journalistic sources in lawsuits against media or journalists; conscientious objection and freedom of expression and, in practice, in the last ten years there has been no cases of enforced disappearance, aggravating threats, torture, murder or persecution of journalists.</p> <p>The parliamentary discussion of the draft for the new Media Law -presented by the incoming government in April 2020-, enabled the participation of different social organizations whose observations have made possible changes in very important aspects of the original document; this contributes to the strengthening of freedom of expression as a right: the assignment of frequencies, maintain conscientious objection as the rights of journalists and the rights of children, adolescents and persons with disabilities. While still under discussion, the process is a sign of the strength of democratic institutions. There are still concerns about the possible elimination of citizen participation bodies that were present in the current law; this could mean a loss of spaces for the representation of citizen interests.</p>
<p>WEAKNESSES</p>	<p>Its weaknesses are linked to access to official sources and the allocation of official advertising. The right of access to public information is guaranteed by law, but presents compliance difficulties in the practice. This tool is essential for investigative journalism and citizen monitoring of public policies, but the law has a fundamentally elitist character. On the other hand, there is a decrease in the national report of the levels of active transparency or public information available to the citizen. The allocation of official advertising continues to be a sensitive issue in the dynamics of the media system since discretionary allocation mechanisms do not prevent the government from rewarding or punishing the media based on their editorial line.</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p>	<p>For the strengthening of freedom of expression in the Uruguayan media system, it is important to secure the culture of transparency. Making effective the right of access to public information as one of the sources of investigative journalism and citizen participation in public policies, represents an opportunity for new sustainable business models to emerge, with alternative forms of financing to advertising, which contribute to the reduction of the dependence of the media on their sponsors.</p> <p>Media regulation remains on the political agenda as the draft of the new media law is still under parliamentary discussion; this can represent an opportunity for the incorporation of civil society, of academia, in the debate on the media.</p>

	<p>In relation to official propaganda, the approval that twenty percent of the total amount be allocated to the media of the interior makes it necessary to monitor the implementation of the law, in order to know if this measure represented –in practice– an opportunity to balance the asymmetries of access to the resources between the media of the interior and the capital.</p>
<p>THREATS</p>	<p>The main threat to freedom of expression in today's media system is the increasing precariousness of journalists' working conditions. Since the declaration of a health emergency in March 2020 to the present, there has been a considerable number of workers sent to collect unemployment insurance, a situation that in 2021 was also transferred to the public media where no more than 40 contracts were renewed in the national public channel, and 49 in the radios of the same condition.</p> <p>To the job insecurity you need to add the economic vulnerability of private media which are still in the process of transitioning from the traditional model to the digital, testing types of sustainable businesses (subscription, advertising, mixed) that do not finish crystallizing and keep them – mostly – dependent almost exclusively on advertising revenues.</p> <p>Job insecurity and the economic vulnerability of the media can translate into a threat to freedom of expression and the emergence of self-censorship scenarios.</p>

