

SUBNATIONAL DEMOCRACY AND JOURNALIST
REPRESSION: INCREASED VIOLENCE AGAINST
JOURNALISTS IN DEMOCRATIC MEXICO

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
May, 2023

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Date of Degree: MAY, 2023

Title of Study: SUBNATIONAL DEMOCRACY AND JOURNALIST REPRESSION:
INCREASED VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS IN
DEMOCRATIC MEXICO

Major Field: POLITICAL SCIENCE

Abstract: Existing theories of democracy and repression expect higher repression in unconsolidated democracies like Mexico. This project examines whether executive constraint, executive competition, or both, or neither matters in reducing journalist repression. I theorize that increased political competition at the local level created an open environment for journalists in Mexico and that opening made journalists more active in covering critical news. As this critical media role also challenges the authority, and the local authorities are still not constrained sufficiently, local-level governments use repression against threatening journalists. The study expects that increasing competitiveness should have a large and positive relationship with journalist repression at low levels of executive constraint. Conversely, when the executive constraint is high, the effect of competition on repression should be smaller. By employing a comparative case study of the Mexican states, the study partially finds support for the theory. The findings show that most killings are concentrated in high executive constraint and high competition, and more competition leads to more killings given the same amount of constraints. No killings in low constraints, regardless of competitiveness. Finally, No killing in the low constraint states, and all the killings in the high competition. Competition does appear to be a driver of journalist repression, while constraints in the form of divided government do not appear to restrain repression. This surprising result may be partially explained by the high level of organized crime in some Mexican states, as additional data analyzed here suggests. The study also seems to support the “More Murder in the Middle” (e.g., Fein, 1995) hypothesis. I also studied four case studies to complement the major findings. Protection not being assigned or withdrawn before the killing, questionable practice of investigation, or cases being buried implies the state government’s involvement in the killings and that executive constraints are not enough to protect journalists. The study suggests that executive constraints matter more than the executive competition in reducing violence against journalists in newly democratized countries. The study also suggests that political competition without sufficient constraints in higher but unconsolidated democracies is dangerous for the safety of journalists.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Existing theories on the relationship between regime type and repression agree that democracies reduce state repression (Davenport, 1999; Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; De Mesquita et al., 2005; Regan & Henderson, 2002; Rummel, 1997; Zanger, 2000). Specifically, Davenport and Armstrong (2004) find that democracy starts to limit state repressiveness when it reaches a threshold of certain democracy scores (a Polity score of eight out of ten). Mexico became a democracy in 2000 and started to hold to a Polity score of eight, but its repression level increased from three to four after the democratic transition (Marshall & Gurr, 2020a; Gibney et al., 2022). Therefore, the case of Mexico is somewhat puzzling because it does not conform to existing literature expectations.

A review of Amnesty International Human Rights Reports suggests that Mexico started to repress some new groups of people after its democratic transition. The new groups involve migrants, human rights defenders, women, and journalists. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) data, violence against journalists became a more concerning issue in Mexico after it became a democracy (Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), n.d.). Therefore, I ask why Mexico started targeting journalists after it transitioned to democracy. To answer the central question, this study examines how democratic characteristics in Mexico affect journalist repression, assesses how variations in political institutions influence journalist killings, and investigates what changes in authority characteristics led to increased violence against journalists.

Existing literature explored how democracy, its level, and its aspects affect journalists' repression and expects that unconsolidated democracies may have higher journalist repression. This study tests the "more murder in the middle theory" (e.g., Fein, 1995) in a typical case and sees whether executive constraints and competitiveness affect the repression of journalists and how it might affect the relationship. I theorize that increased political competition at the local level created an open environment for journalists and that opening made journalists more active in covering critical news. As this critical media role also poses a challenge to the authority, and the local authorities are still not constrained sufficiently and have incentives and opportunities to repress, local-level governments use repression against threatening journalists. More opportunity may come from structural and contextual impunity (e.g., president-governor co-partisanship), and contextual impunity (e.g., outsourcing the killings to the criminal groups).

In addition, the study expects that increasing competitiveness should have a large and positive relationship with journalist repression at low levels of executive constraint. Conversely, when the executive constraint is high, the effect of competition on repression should be smaller.

By employing a comparative case study of the Mexican states and using election data from National Electoral Institute (Mexico) and killed journalist data from Committees to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the study partially finds support for the theory. Drawing on Bartman (2018) and Holland and Rios (2017), this study maintains that killing by criminal groups and government officials has a pattern, and the journalists who cover crime or drugs are more likely to be targeted by rival criminal groups. After eliminating criminal groups related killings, this study provides some insights.

The findings show that most killings are concentrated in high executive constraint and high competition, and more competition leads to more killings given the same amount of constraints. Competition does appear to be a driver of journalist repression, while constraints in the form of divided government do not appear to restrain repression.

Another result is that there are no killings in low constraints states or unified governments, regardless of the state-level competitiveness. The finding is opposite to my theoretical expectation. It could be because unified governments have no incentive to kill, even with high competition. It aligns with the findings of Aguilar et al. (2014), who argue that local authorities lose the incentive to kill when they dominate the locality. This surprising result may be partially explained by the high level of organized crime in some Mexican states, as additional data analyzed here suggests.

The finding shows that no killing in the low constraint states and all the killings in the high competition suggest that high constraint may still not be high enough to moderate the effect of competition. The “high constraint” in the case of Mexico may not be high as a “consolidated democracy,” implying that most killings in the high-constraint states in the form of divided government are actually happening in the “middle” of a full democracy. It supports the “More Murder in the Middle” (e.g., Fein, 1995) hypothesis.

The result also shows that there is no effect of population on the killings. Most populous states have more killings than the less populous states. The new findings by controlling the population confirm that high constraints and high competitiveness have more killings than moderate constraints and high competition. Some killings can be attributed to criminal violence, though criminal violence also provides get away context for the authorities. It depends on the news beats covered by the journalists. I also studied four case studies to complement the major findings. Protection not being assigned or withdrawn before the killing, questionable practice of investigation, or cases being buried implies the state government’s involvement in the killings and that executive constraints are not enough to protect journalists, while killings are driven by competition.

The contribution of this study is threefold. Contrary to the conventional study (e.g., Davenport, 2007), this research found that competition increases repression, not decreases it. Two, the existing studies (e.g., Carey & Gohdes, 2021) find that decentralization of power in new

democracies carries risks for journalists, whether I state specifically that competition without sufficient constraints is dangerous for the safety of journalists. Three, scholars maintain that democracies can be dangerous for journalists (e.g., Asal et al. 2018,) but this research shows that uneven democracies with insufficient constraints are dangerous for the safety of journalists.

The outline of the thesis is as follows: first, I discuss the case selection of Mexico as a case and then provide a brief political and media history of Mexico. Second, I review the existing relevant literature and provide a theory and a method section. Third, I analyze the data and complement them with case studies. Finally, I summarize the findings and limitations in the conclusion section.

The case of Mexico

Mexico is a case that shares many characteristics with other states where journalists are highly repressed. It shares the characteristic of higher journalist repression in an uneven democratic setting with Brazil, India, and the Philippines. The democracy score of these countries is around 8 after 2000 (Marshall & Gurr, 2020a). Mexico also shares the feature of vast geography and federalism with India, Russia, Brazil, and Pakistan.

I plan to use a deductive approach for my study because the theoretical expectations of my theory are derived from the existing literature, and the existing research findings are generalizable to the Mexican case. Also, this study investigates how changes in authority characteristics at the local-level affect journalist repression.

I take Mexico as an autocracy during the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) rule based on the argument of Magaloni (2006). Magaloni (2006) treated Mexico as a hegemonic party autocracy during the PRI rule (1929-2000) and argued that most autocracies hold elections, and hegemonic party autocracies allow elites to form parties and have seats in the parliament. In Mexico's case of authority patterns, I follow the Polity Project's definition and measurement of democracy and autocracy (Marshall & Gurr, 2020b).

Polity5 Project provides separate autocracy and democracy scores depending on the presence of distinctive political features. Institutionalized democracy involves political competition, executive recruitment, and constraints on the chief executive. On the other hand, autocracies involve restriction or suppression of political participation, selection of a chief executive, and high executive independence. The project also provides a combined Polity Score ranging from strongly democratic (+10) to strongly autocratic (-10).

First, Executive recruitment in Mexico after 2000 is a competitive election because the recruitment is regulated, open, and elective. In Mexico, from 2000 till now, the designational or transitional form of regulation (1975-1999) of chief executive recruitment became regulated (2000-2018) ((Marshall & Gurr, 2020b)). The competitiveness of executive recruitment in

Mexico was selection (1975-1993), dual or transitional (1997-1999), and became a competitive election in 2000 ((Marshall & Gurr, 2020b)). The openness of executive recruitment in Mexico has been open since 1975 till 2018 ((Marshall & Gurr, 2020b)).

Second, Polity5 considers the independence of the executive by the number of constraints on the chief executive's decision-making process by any institutions or accountability groups. The constraints on the chief executive in Mexico over time were slight to moderate limitation (1975-1987), intermediate between slight-moderate and substantial limitations (1988-1996), substantial limitations (1997-1998), and intermediate category between substantial limitations on executive authority to executive parity or subordination (1999-2018) (Marshall & Gurr, 2020b).

Third, the Polity5 dataset also considers political competition and opposition by how the public generally impacts the political system. The competitiveness of participation in Mexico was suppressed (1975-1976), factional (1977-1995, 1999), and transitional (1997-1998, 2000-2018) but not competitive (Marshall & Gurr, 2020b).

Overall, Mexico transitioned to a moderate or uneven democracy after 2000, but not a consolidated one due to its not competitive political competition, not the subordination of the executive, but it has openness and competitiveness of executive recruitment.

A Brief Political History of Mexico

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was founded in 1929 to create a revolutionary family from the victorious but isolated military and political revolutionaries and to be the legacy of the principles of the revolution (Esteva, 2010). PRI maintained hegemony through its organization, which shares powers with competing groups, the control and clientelist distribution of state resources, the use of election fraud, and political repression (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2020). The party organization incorporated vital sectors such as labor, agriculture, and professionals and coopted a wide range of interests but restricted competition and opposition through exclusion, fraud, and violence (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2020).

During the 1980s, the PRI hegemony declined, and democratization started because of economic insecurity, a lack of party integrity and legitimacy, and an opening for opposition through institutional reforms (Vanden & Prevost, 2018). The party designed the institutional and economic reforms to allow opposition, attract foreign investment, and decentralize power to cover the economic crisis (Vanden & Prevost, 2018). The reforms include increasing the legislature size, equal access to funds and media, decreasing the minimum threshold for party registration, independent electoral institute, and the federal electoral tribunal (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2020).

After transitioning to democracy in 2000, Mexico has seen four different presidents from three different parties. The people of Mexico have seen two presidents from National Action Party (PAN), Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderon (2006-2012), one president from PRI, Enrique Pena (2012-2018), and the last one from National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), Lopez Obrador (2018-current).

Authority characteristics differ markedly in Mexico before and after its transition to democracy. Before the transition, the presidential candidate got selected from a single party, Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), through party membership, and the president enjoyed substantial decision-making power, e.g., removal of the governors or mayors (Marshall & Gurr, 2020b, Vanden & Prevost 2002). During its rule, PRI suppressed political participation by

controlling every election and maintained state control through cooption and/or repression (Silva et al., 2002).

After 1982, two presidential administrations, Salinas's (1988-1994) and Zedillo's (1994-2000), led some political and electoral reforms, e.g., neutral electoral officials, party representation, and election funding, due to a part of economic liberalization and a project to increase legitimacy (Silva et al., 2002).

But National Action Party (PAN) candidate Vincente Fox win the election in 2000 because of the economic setbacks in the Zedillo administration, people's frustration toward PRI, and the independent Federal Electoral Institute (Silva et al., 2002). However, the president after the democratic transition were still more potent than any institutions or accountability groups, and competing political groups with parochial interests prevail over general interests, though institutionalized rules were available for an open, competitive election and institutionalized constraints increased on the executive after the transition, (Marshall & Gurr, 2020b).

Mexico is a federal state with thirty-one States, one federal district, Mexico City, and 2450 municipalities. The President is the head executive of the country, the governor is the head of every state, and municipal presidents run the municipalities. Mexico has a Senate (128 seats) and Chamber of Deputies (500 seats) at its federal level and a state congress at its state level. The electoral system in Mexico is mixed and combines majoritarian and proportional representation. The term of the president's office is six years with no reelection. The senator's term is six years and may reelect for up to two consecutive terms. The chamber of deputies elected for three years with reelection prospects for up to four terms. The mayor's term is three years with two terms of reelection.

Media in Mexico before and after the transition

The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) governments' one-party rule (1929-2000) coopted the media mainly by providing various benefits (Lawson, 2002). Still, during the 1990s, independent and electronic media emerged from public demand, competitive market, and new journalistic manner and practices (Lawson, 2002). Finally, the political liberalization reforms of 1996-1997 created a relatively open environment for the media to function (Lawson, 2002).

According to the Amnesty International reports, the targets of the state repression during Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) rule were primarily political activists and opponents, but after the democratization, the state-sponsored violence and politically-motivated criminal charges started to increase against journalists (Amnesty International reports 1976-2018). The government authorities often fail to investigate these crimes and are sometimes complicit with organized criminal groups in journalist repression (Amnesty International reports, 1976-2018).

Evidence shows that elected officials and government employees are the perpetrators of journalist repression. According to organization Article 19, public officials perpetrated more than half of the 507 incidents of violence against journalists in 2017, and they criticized, filed lawsuits, and surveilled the journalists and their families in 2018 (Iesue et al., 2021). Also, Article 19 shows that 274 out of 664 documented attacks (online threats, arbitrary criminal charges, seven murders, and harassment) in 2021 were linked to Government officials (Lakhani, 2022). Deutsche Welle (DW) documented 397 violence against journalists in 2015 and 544 in 2018, where state actors were involved in half of these reports (Tenz, 2019). Mexican Constitution and Media Law provide press freedom, and that is why restrictive laws and executions of the law, e.g., lawsuits, imprisonment, or rulings, are not generally seen in practice; instead, government reactions are mostly threats and attacks on journalists (Reporters Without Borders (RSF), 2022).

Journalists who cover corruption, politics, links between politics and crime, shootings, accidents, disasters, and migration are more likely to be targeted by officials, e.g., immigration officials and the national guard. (Lakhani, 2022). Annabel Hernandez, an investigative reporter,

disclosed a ‘higher-level’ corruption, which was never published, received a death threat and fled Mexico (Tenz, 2019).

People charged with journalist repression enjoy impunity and support from the government. They are usually not convicted, and the cases get stuck in the initial investigation (Human Rights Watch, 2022). President Lopez Obrador, on the contrary, victimized the ‘critical’ and ‘hostile’ journalist in his daily morning news (Human Rights Watch, 2022). The President and government officials blame independent media for promoting the opposition’s agenda, propagating ‘fake news, and being biased (RSF, 2022). Government-operated protection mechanisms are often inadequate to protect journalists because of their significant flaws, and journalists get killed before receiving the protection (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Regime type and journalist repression literature examine whether democracy is dangerous for journalists' safety and investigates the role or effect of democracy in reducing repression. Existing research on regime type and repression agrees that democracies reduce repression at different levels and to varying degrees (Davenport & Inman, 2012). Democracies pacify repression through norms and institutions (Davenport, 1999; Gurr, 1986; Rummel, 1997). They describe the role of democratic norms in reducing the level of state repression. Rummel (1997) maintains that norms such as negotiation, bargaining, and compromise are significant in minimizing societal violence, whereas Gurr (1986) emphasizes the significance of compromise and cooperation, participation, and responsiveness. On the other hand, some other scholars point out the role of institutions such as elections in ensuring accountability (Davenport, 1999; Regan & Henderson, 2002; Zanger, 2000) or as a way to promote better human rights practices (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; De Mesquita et al. 2005).

However, studies on regime type, regime type duration, and/or journalist repression maintain that democracies are dangerous for journalists as most journalists are killed in democracies (Asal et al., 2018; Carey & Gohdes, 2021; Solis 2021). Scholars find that journalists are more likely to get killed in democracies than in autocracies because democracies create opportunities for journalists by opening the political environment more to cover more risky news, which gets them killed (Asal et al., 2018). Also, democracies experience more journalist killing than other regimes, and local authorities target journalists in areas with newly inducted elections, high corruption culture,

and less visible journalists becoming threatening (Carey & Gohdes, 2021). In addition, Solis (2021) finds that regime duration in the case of autocracy and anocracy reduces violence against journalists, but electoral democracy age or duration does not. As regime duration increases, journalists learn about the regime type and are less likely to cover risky news beats (Solis, 2021).

Which level or type or aspects of democracy matters in reducing the repression? Some research highlighted how the level, type, or aspects of democracy affect repression and which aspects are more likely to reduce repression than others.

Which level of democracy matters in reducing repression? Three models of regime type and repression argue over the levels of political regimes in reducing state repression. According to the linear model, autocracies are more repressive, hybrid regimes are in the middle, and democracies are the least repressive (e.g., Davenport, 1999; Gurr, 1986; Rummel, 1997; Zanger, 2000). The non-linear threshold model contends that democracies must pass a certain threshold to be less repressive; below that level, regime types do not affect repression, and above the level, democracy has a negative relationship with political violence (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004; De Mesquita et al., 2005). The inverted U model asserts that repression is less likely when full democracy and full autocracy are present, and there is more repression in the middle of full democracy and full dictatorship (Fein, 1995; Regan & Henderson, 2002). The model is known as "More Murder in the Middle" (e.g., Fein, 1995).

Specific research on the journalist repression finds that uneven (Hughes et al., 2017), unconsolidated (Solis, 2021) or semi-democracy (Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021) are more likely to employ aggression toward journalists. The findings of Solis suggest that democracy duration does not decrease journalist killings, but the consolidation of democracy does, as "strengthening democratic institutions matter" in reducing the repression (2021, p.3). Hughes et al. (2017) define 'uneven democracy' as regimes with Polity score +6 to +9 and find that uneven democracies are more dangerous for the journalist's physical safety from being assassinated. "Vast majority" of

journalists are getting killed in semi-democracies, regimes “where electoral competition is combined with authoritarian practices (Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021, p. 1874).”

Which aspects of democracy reduce more repression than others? Research finds that some aspects of democracy are more important than others to limit state repressiveness. Scholars debate over the more effectiveness of elections (Richard & Gelleny, 2007), executive constraints (Davenport, 2004), political participation (Davenport, 2007) or the combinations of aspects of democracy (Davenport & Armstrong, 2004). Davenport (2004) finds that most combinations of repression are decreased when the executive constraint level is significant. De Mesquita et al. (2005) examine democracy aspects and threshold effects and finds that political competition is more significant than other dimensions in reducing human rights violations. Davenport (2007) finds competition/participation is more effective than executive constraints in limiting repression across conflict types and repressive strategies. Richards and Gelleny (2007) find lower-house national legislative elections increase human rights but presidential elections decrease it.

Research on the influence of subnational dynamics in journalist repression assess whether subnational dynamics are associated with journalists’ repression or why subnational dynamics matter in journalists’ repression and how subnational dynamics may contribute to journalist’s repression.

Some subnational states may remain authoritarian in national democracies (Giraudy, 2010). Local authorities use violence against journalists to deter them from exposing local malpractices such as corruption that might trigger ‘federal accountability’ at the local level (Hughes & Marquez-Ramirez, 2018). Also, local powerholders “manipulate elections, violate civil rights, engage in corruption, and capture local institutions” and want to confine “politics and scandal” at local level to prevent national intervention (Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021, p. 1876). The authorities kill critical journalists to limit opposition participation in politics and local flow of information (Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021).

In the Philippines, journalists get killed when they threaten the private interests of state powerholders by exposing ‘corrupt deals’ or help mobilize opposition electorate (Aguilar et al., 2014). In the same manner, Carey and Gohdes emphasizes the role of local elections, that bring power and prestige,

in the killings of journalists, because local elected authorities kill invisible journalists to manipulate the scandalous flow of information (2021).

State governments target journalists for “political purposes” and the conclusion based on the finding that dangerous states for journalists are not dangerous for general populations from the risk of criminal violence (Bartman, 2018, p. 1099). Brambila asserts that states with internal conflict, social violence, gross human rights practices, high economic inequality and low democratic development prone to employ violence against journalists in Mexico than the states that lack the factors.

How do socio-economic and political factors influence journalist repression in the context of Mexico and cross-nationally and how the factors contribute to the violence? Previous cross-national research and research on Mexican context discussed or debated over structural factors that might associated with journalist repression. For example, corruption may increase (Bjrnkov & Freytag, 2016) or decrease (Hughes & Marquez-Ramirez, 2018) repression against journalists. Journalists are getting killed in the mid-range press freedom countries with corrupt practices (Bjrnkov & Freytag, 2016). On the other hand, Hughes & Marquez-Ramirez (2018) find that corruption creates clientelist relationship between authorities and journalists and thus, authorities refrain from perpetrating violence against them. Studies also find that Criminal violence (Holland & Rios, 2017; Hughes & Marquez-Ramirez, 2018; Hughes et al., 2017), Human rights violations (Brambila, 2017; Carey et al., 2021; Gohdes & Carey, 2017; Hughes & Marquez-Ramirez, 2018), normative aspirations (Hughes & Marquez-Ramirez, 2018), Social violence (Brambila, 2017), internal conflict (Brambila, 2017), low democratic development (corruption, impunity and rule of law) (Brambila, 2017) and economic inequality (Brambila, 2017; Hughes et al., 2017) are associated with violence against journalists.

In sum, existing literature investigates why and how different regime types, specifically democracy, reduce or provide violent context for journalists and how subnational politics inside a democracy can be a lethal context for journalists’ repression. The studies, specifically, discuss the role of democracy, the relative effectiveness of the components of democracy, and the impact of

the level and stages of democracy in reducing repression or specifically on journalist repression. Finally, the studies discuss why socio-economic and political factors are influence journalist repression, and how. Some theories (e.g., Hughes et al., 2017) expect uneven democracies such as Mexico to have higher journalist repression. This study will test the existing theories and provide additional evidence for those theories. Specifically, it will test “more murder in the middle” (e.g., Fein, 1995), break it down and look at the difference in political competition and executive constraints, and see whether political competition and executive constraints matter in reducing journalist repression.

CHAPTER III

THEORY

Scholars maintain that media liberalization and the rise of new kinds of media happened around the democratic transition in Mexico. They describe the media as “independent and inclusive” (Lawson, 2002), “consolidated” (Gamiz & Toledo, 2022), “independent and alternative” (Harlow & Salaverria, 2016), and “hybrid” (Hughes et al, 2017). Lawson argues that the journalistic professionalism and market competition after economic liberalization transformed the press into an independent and inclusive media, where both media opening and democratization in Mexico were "interacting and mutually reinforcing" (2002, p. 6). The political market from multiparty elections and the market opening further helped the media to consolidate, and Mexico witnessed increased political competition and the emergence of new media, such as online content, streaming, and socio-digital platforms (Gamiz & Toledo, 2022). In the context of Latin America, Harlow and Salaverria (2016) find that these independent media challenge mainstream media and act as an alternative by attracting excluded audiences using innovative and digital technologies. Hughes described the media in democratic Mexico as a hybrid because of the coexistence of civic, market-driven, and authoritarian journalism (2007).

How democratic characteristics or political institutions affect media criticalness toward political authorities. Scholars maintain that the presence or absence of opposition in the legislature (Salazar, 2019), strong opposition in the legislature (Kellam & Stein, 2016), or executive constraints (Whitten-Woodring & Van Belle, 2017) affect media’s ability to criticize governments or elites. The author indicates that media criticism grew when the opposition

parties' parliamentary seats increased in the local congress (Salazar, 2019). Opposition parties provide support and tactical resources (e.g., public denouncement, demonstrations) to the press, which increases the political cost of the authorities repressing journalists (Salazar, 2019).

Moreover, Kellam and Stein (2016) argue that Latin American presidents silence their media critics when the legislature fails to counterbalance and oversight presidential action toward media. Strong opposition in the legislative configuration can ensure executive accountability by checks and balances to maintain a horizontal accountability mechanism and by defending critical media through information revelation (Kellam & Stein, 2016). In addition, Whitten-Woodring and Van Belle (2015) find that countries are more likely to have media freedom if their executive constraints level increases, whereas media freedom is defined as the ability to criticize powerful elites.

Why do governments repress critical media? Scholars maintain that governments repress journalists when they try to consolidate power or when they face threats to their power (VonDoepp & Young, 2013), to "influence the flow of information to avoid accountability for illegal or very unpopular actions," or to manipulate the public debate, hide unpleasant stories, or elevate already worsened security (Gohdes & Carey 2017, p.160), to deny or reframe lethal violence (Carey et al., 2021), or to cover up corrupt deals (Bjornskov & Freytag, 2016). Though media may become critical from citizens' demand for investigative journalism or journalists cover challenging news due to normative aspirations (Solis, 2021), I only consider the changes in democratic characteristics that may lead to journalists' critical coverage.

Governments harass journalists to control the flow of information to derail the coordination of mobilization, undermine popular support for their political foes, protect against elite defection, and extend power by violating established rules of the game (VonDoepp & Young, 2013). Journalist killing foreshadows increasing human rights violations regardless of the perpetrators of the killing, and the killing indicates authorities' willingness to employ broader repression in the future (Gohdes & Carey, 2017, p.160).

Additionally, the government's use of escalated violence against violent dissent depends on the presence or absence of press freedom because they can deny or reframe using violence as justified in the absence of free media (Carey et al., 2021). Bjornskov and Freytag (2016) find that mid-range freedom of the press in countries with corrupt practices is dangerous for the journalist's safety. In full press freedom countries, murder is costly because of the better legal institutions and the greater availability of critical journalists, on the other hand, in countries with lower press freedom, journalists will not write about corruption (Bjornskov & Freytag, 2016).

Literature suggests that the level of executives matters in the violence against journalists because most of the journalists' repression takes place at the local level (e.g., Carey & Gohdes, 2021), and the level of repression also varies spatially (e.g., Bartman, 2018). Also, democracy at the central level cannot ensure journalists' safety alone, given the decentralization of power and resources to the local level.

Why do subnational executives attack journalists? Research suggests that local leaders (Carey & Gohdes, 2021), local powerholders (Aguilar et al., 2014), or local autocrats (Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021) kill local journalists to secure power and prestige and to ensure their political survival (Carey & Gohdes, 2021), to confine the flow of information locally to cover up the local scandal, deter national intervention, and limit the opposition's political participation (Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021) and in response to threats against their power or profits (Aguilar et al., 2014).

Carey and Gohdes (2021) argue that local elected leaders kill less visible journalists to curb the flow of information that might hamper their political career because democracies decentralize power to the local level but do not provide sufficient legal options to restrict press freedom (Carey & Gohdes, 2021). Variations in formal rules and actual practices in democracies may create "elected and de facto powerholders" in some territories, and the "informal rules and practices" can make them local autocrats with discretionary power that can be used to manipulate local institutions (Hughes & Vorobyeva 2021, p.1875).

In addition, Benedict Anderson differentiates the patterns of local and national killings, where local killings are perpetrated by local powerholders in response to threats against their power or profits (Aguilar et al., 2014). Local powerholders in the Philippines kill journalists who expose their misdeeds or promote their electoral opponents to mobilize the electorate (Aguilar et al., 2014). Because local journalists attract “federal accountability chains” by reporting on local-level misdeeds (Hughes and Marquez-Ramirez, 2018, p. 542).

Local executives may enjoy impunity from the structural factors of intergovernmental relations. Aguilar et al. (2014) suggest that local-level authorities in the Philippines are significant in affecting journalist murder cases because central state intervention is unlikely given their ties of alliances, patronage, and working arrangements with the local state. Giraudy (2010) also maintains that national presidents have strong incentives to protect the subnational executives by vetoing anti-regime legislative pieces and thwarting federal agencies of control. Local leaders also get impunity “by shielding local practices from federal oversight, nationalizing their political influence, and monopolizing links between local and national authorities (Hughes and Marquez-Ramirez, 2018, p.542).” Also, where state authorities enjoy high impunity by manipulating the judicial system, the cost of killing a journalist is low (Carey & Gohdes, 2021).

The criminal insecurity context in Mexico favors subnational executives to get away with severe repression against journalists using low-cost strategies. Studies find a connection between state authorities and criminal groups (Carey & Gohdes, 2021; Bartman, 2018; Gohdes & Carey, 2017). Governments have the motivation and resources to hide their connection to the killings, and most of the unconfirmed cases can be attributed to the government (Gohdes & Carey, 2017). They can simply detach themselves by manipulating the flow of information (Carey & Gohdes, 2021). It is an especially low-cost strategy if it is difficult to find out the perpetrator (Davenport, 2012) or outsource the killings (Carey et al., 2015). Authorities in Mexico can easily outsource the killing to criminal organizations and get away from the blame. Holland and Rios (2017) maintain that criminal organizations in Mexico maintain close relationships with the local

authorities to secure their business using lots of money. Even local authorities cooperate with criminal groups in journalist killings (Bartman, 2018).

Taken together, independent and new media arose in liberalizing Mexico. Media became critical due to changes in democratic characteristics such as political competition. Generally, governments repress critical media to manipulate the flow of information in their favor when they face threats to their power, employ greater human rights violence, hamstring the opposition, or design to increase power. In democracies, repression against journalists may arise due to local dynamics. Subnational executives employ violence against the threat to their power and political career. Killing in Mexico is low-cost because of the structural impunity and favorable criminal violence context. Therefore, subnational executives get incentives to kill journalists because of the high stake of not eliminating a threat (and enjoying power and prestige) and the low cost of killing a journalist.

This paper will test a theory of why and how improvements in democracy lead to increased violence against journalists in Mexico. I propose that a combination of increased election competition, increased political participation, and inadequate constraints on the local-level executive resulted in the increased repression of journalists. I argue that increased democracy, especially political competition at the local level, created an open environment for journalists and that opening made journalists more active in covering critical news. As this media role also poses a challenge to the authority, and the executive is still not constrained sufficiently and has incentives and opportunities to repress, local-level governments use repression against threatening journalists.

I expect to see a variation of repression across states. I posit that variations in the institutional check on executive and state-level executive competitiveness lead to variations in journalistic repression. I argue that subnational variation matters in assessing journalist repression for several reasons. One, state-level officials target journalists for political reasons (Bartman, 2018). Two, the killings of journalists differ in regions because “liberal regions may have

accountability mechanisms and the strong rule of law (Hughes & Vorobyeva, 2021, p. 1876.”

Three, institutional variation in democracies leads to variation in journalist killings as

“democracies vary by institutional strength (Solis, 2021, p.7).”

I theorize that executive constraint on the governors and state-level political competition affects the repression of journalists in electoral democracies. I expect that the degree to which and the way in which journalists are repressed in different States will vary depending on how constrained the executive is and how competitive the state is politically.

Marshall and Gurr (2020) define executive constraints on the governor as any accountability group’s institutional check on the executive. State governments are constrained or supported by the state legislature as it has the authority to budget, appoint, or information revelation. They are generally more concerned about local matters. Other constraints also matter, such as the judiciary. I discount judiciary as this study is a single case and compares states. I assume the judicial constraints would be more or less the same among the Mexican states.

I propose that if the majority of the state congress member is from the governor’s party, the government is unified, and if the majority of the state congress member is from the governor’s opposition party, the government is divided. I argue that divided governments are more constrained than unified ones because the state congress majority helps the governors to make unilateral decisions. Therefore, unified governments have low constraints, and divided governments have high constraints.

This study defines State-level political competition or executive competitiveness by the last gubernatorial election and uses Ballotpedia’s margin of victory to measure competitiveness. Ballotpedia defines margin of victory as “the difference between the share of votes cast for the winning candidate and the second-place candidate in an election” and considers competitiveness “races to be those with a MOV of less than 10 percent (Ballotpedia, n.d.)” Therefore, high competition is an election win with less than a 10 percent margin between the winner and the second position, and low competition is an election win with more than a 10 percent margin

between the winner and the second position. I expect to see fewer killings in states with less political competition. Aguilar et al. (2014) maintain that local strongholds in the Philippines lose the incentive to kill journalists in the absence of challengers and when they possess concentrated power.

Solis (2021) mentioned that there is no incentive to cover news in the lack of competition because the demand for news comes from political participation. According to Salazar (2019) and Kellam and Stein (2016), an incentive to critical news may also connect to the strength of opposition in the parliament, so political competitiveness may render higher killings, as authorities may have an incentive (power, prestige, and impunity) to kill them. Also, Aguilar et al. theorize that local strongholds lose the incentive to kill when they dominate the locality (2014). Based on the incentive and opportunity concepts, I theorize that high competition but low constraint is dangerous for the journalist’s safety because the authorities get a sweet spot of incentive and opportunity to kill. They get a higher level of opportunity from structural impunity (Aguilar et al., 2014).

Table 1: Combination of executive constraints and competitiveness and the predicted level of repression

High Constraint	Very low repression	Low repression
Low Constraint	Low repression	Very high repression
	Low Competition	High Competition

I expect that increasing competitiveness should have a large and positive relationship with journalist repression at low levels of executive constraint. Conversely, when the executive constraint is high, the effect of competition on repression should be smaller.

Hypotheses

1. Among high-constraint states, low competition leads to very low repression.
2. Among high-constraint states, high competition leads to low repression.
3. Among low-constraint states, low competition leads to low repression.
4. Among low-constraint states, high competition leads to high repression.

The study considers two alternative explanations that might affect the aforementioned theory. The first one is organized crime. Holland and Rios (2017) argue that criminal organizations employ violence toward journalists when rival organizations compete for market dominance in the same place. Rival organizations are more likely to leak information to the press when they inhabit might call attention to security forces, and rival groups attack journalists to deter news against them (Holland & Rios, 2017). The Implication of the organized crime explanation is that rival criminal groups kill journalists who cover crime or drug-related news. The second one is population per state. The argument is that the number of killings should be higher in those states where the total number of populations is higher.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

General Approach

I used a qualitative approach, in general, to test a theory in a typical case of unconsolidated democracy. A qualitative approach is best suited for my study because I sought to find the reasons behind the increased repression of journalists in a democracy. It helped me to understand and explain the complicated case as well. Creswell and Poth (2016) suggest applying a qualitative case study when the subject is a bit complex and needs a detailed understanding of the mechanism or linkage, which is challenging to get by any quantitative study.

Specific Method

The specific method is a comparative case study. Comparative case studies study two or more cases, and analyze and synthesize the similarities, differences, and trends to develop generalizable knowledge about causal questions (Goodrick, 2020). Therefore, it helped me compare the variation in executive constraint on the state governors and political competition at the state level and how they affect journalist repression. According to Creswell and Poth, a comparative case study involves three challenges: resource limitations (many studies reduce the value of the overall analysis of a single case), case selection, and cross-case analysis (2016). To address the challenges, I studied Mexico as a single case study, but it also involved cross-case analysis as I compared different Mexican states. The single case study of Mexico helped me gain variation by looking at Mexican states, while holding other key variables constant by keeping it within Mexico.

Unit and Time-frame of analysis

I looked at the office of the governors and the state congress and compared Mexican states. It helped me to find the variation in constraints and competition and their impact on the murders. I studied a period, which started from September 01, 2018, to August 31, 2021. I selected the period because I hope to get aligning president, federal, and state legislature members at the same time and also because it is a democratic period of study. However, I included the entire 2018 and 2021 to consider pre-and post-election phenomena. It is justified because most of the governors were at the same party to hold offices and elected before the selected period started.

Case selection

I selected four random cases from a pool of murdered journalists in the defined period (2018-2021) for my case study. The cases helped me understand whether executive constraints or political competition matter in the killing cases. The cases share similarities as they belong in the same socio-economic and political context, but differs in the level of executive constraints and political competition.

Data sources

The independent variables are executive constraint and executive competition, and the dependent variable is journalist repression. I collected the data of different elected offices to measure the level of Executive constraint and Political competition per state from the: National Election Institute, Mexico [Instituto Nacional Electoral] and the data about Journalist repression from the Committee to Protect Journalists. I defined the executive constraints on the governor by the state congress and operationalized by high constraints and low constraints states. If the state governor and the majority of the state congress members are from the same party, the state is a unified government and If the state governor and the majority of the state congress are from a different party, the state is a divided. I defined executive competitiveness by the results of last gubernatorial elections and measured by the margin of victory. I also define repression by the killing of journalists by state agents and outsource agents.

Data analysis procedure

I determined the level of executive constraints and political competition for each state and then explored the journalist cases in the CPJ data.

First step, determining the level of executive constraint at each state. Based on my theory, I collected data on the variation of executive constraints on the governors and state-level political competition in Mexico. Then I classified the data at the two levels of constraints, high and low and two levels of competition, high and low. To reiterate, if the margin of victory (MOV) is less than 10 percent, the state is a high competition state, and the MOV is more than 10 percent, it's a low competition states. Again, if the governor and the majority of state congress are from the same party, it's a unified government and the executive constraint is low. On the other hand, if the governor and the majority of state congress are from different party, it's a divided government, and thus, high constraint government.

Second step, finding Journalist Repression cases randomly in the selected period. After identifying the varying levels in each state, I looked at the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) data thoroughly to find Journalist repression in the specific period, 2018-2021. CPJ has comprehensive data on repression. It includes data on the type of murder, (suspected) perpetrator, coverage, and location. Also, it has data on the motive of repression and impunity. From the CPJ website, I selected the location as Mexico and the year as 2018-2021 and found many cases. Then I discount some cases because they do not fall between the defined period.

Third step, then I showed the similarities and differences of journalist killings by looking into the archival data. To do that, I also explored the reasons behind the killing of each journalist.

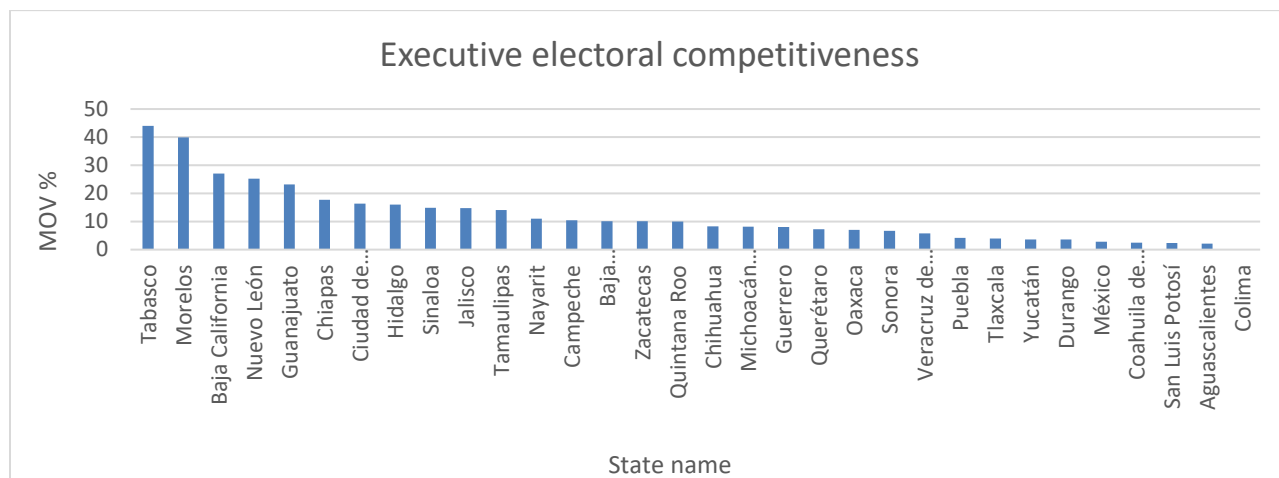
Specifically, I looked into what they were investigating on when they were killed, their coverage or critical reporting, their work location, who were they killed by. Also, was there any case opened or not, was there any court proceedings available or not, and was anyone brought to justice or not.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

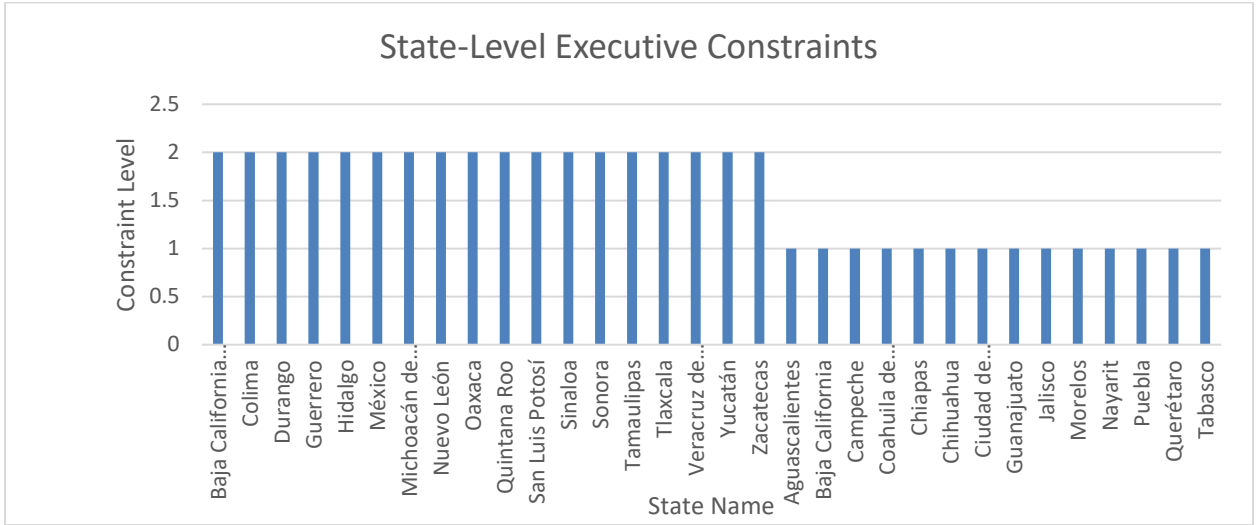
Figure 1 shows that 9 states are within 5% MOV, which is very competitive, and 17 states are less than 10% MOV. 17 out of 32 states in Mexico are competitive in the gubernatorial elections during 2018-2021. 10 states are within the 10% to 20% MOV range, which falls into moderate competition, and 4 states are more than 20% MOV or low competition.

Figure 1: Political Competition by a Margin of Victory (MOV)



Source: INE (Mexico); please see appendix for more information

Figure 2: State-level Executive Constraint [1: low constraint; 2: high constraint]



Source: INE (Mexico); please see appendix for more information

Figure 2 shows that 14 states have unified governments and face low levels of executive constraints. On the other hand, 17 states have divided governments and face high levels of executive constraints.

Table 2: Executive constraint level by state name

High const	Nuevo León, Hidalgo, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Baja California Sur, Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Sonora, Zacatecas, Veracruz, Colima, Durango, Mexico, San Luis Potosi, Tlaxcala, Yucatán,
Low const	Baja California, Morelos, Tabasco, Chiapas, Mexico City, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Nayarit, Campeche, Chihuahua, Querétaro, Aguascalientes, Coahuila, Puebla,

Source: INE (Mexico); please see appendix for more information

Table 3: Executive competitiveness by state name; % mean margin of victory;

Baja California, Morelos, Nuevo León, Tabasco, Baja California Sur, Campeche, Chiapas, Mexico City, Guanajuato, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Zacatecas	Aguascalientes, Coahuila, Colima, Durango, Chihuahua, Guerrero, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, Sonora, Veracruz, Mexico, Puebla, San Luis Potosi, Tlaxcala, Yucatán,
10%-more% MOV Low competitive	Less than 10% MOV High competitive

Source: INE (Mexico); please see appendix for more information

Table 4: Combination of executive constraint and competitiveness and the number of journalists killed

High constraint	Baja California Sur (1) ¹ , Nuevo León, Hidalgo, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas (1), Zacatecas, Killings=.33/state	Guerrero (3), Michoacán, Oaxaca (1), Quintana Roo (1), Sonora (3), Veracruz (5), Colima, Durango, Mexico (1), San Luis Potosi, Tlaxcala, Yucatán, Killings=1.67/state
Low constraint	Baja California, Campeche, Morelos, Tabasco (1), Chiapas (1), Mexico City, Guanajuato (1), Jalisco, Nayarit Killings=.33/state	Chihuahua, Queretaro, Aguascalientes, Coahuila, Puebla, Killings=0/state
	Low competition (10%-more% MOV)	High competition (less than 10% MOV)

Source: INE (Mexico) and Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); please see appendix for more information

The findings show that most killings are concentrated in the high executive constraint and highly competitive states. My theory expected most killings in low executive constraints and highly competitive states, but the findings contradict the expectation. The other three quadrants fulfill this study's theoretical expectation as high constraints, and high competition has more killings than the other two.

¹ The number of killings mentioned in the bracket of each state; Total killings per quadrant are calculated by dividing the total number of killings in those quadrants by the total number of states.

I considered the criminal context (Holland & Rios, 2017) as an explanation and also investigated how the criminal context influences the relationship between democracy characteristics and journalist repression. I find 16 states where criminal rival groups fight for dominance and 11 states with group dominance, and 3 states with no group dominance or rivalry (CRS, 2022). Journalists killed or missing in the time period (2018-2021), 8 out of 16 states were from rival states, whereas 3 out of the 16 states were from group dominance or non-existence states. Most of the killings (08 out of 10) are concentrated in the states where criminal groups fight for dominance, which gives credence to the finding of Holland and Rios (2017) that the criminal rivalry among criminal organizations may lead to journalist killings by the groups. This finding suggests that criminal rivalry is a favorable getaway context for state officials in Mexico because of its low cost of killing and a high chance of getting impunity, even without using political authority. This study does not ignore the killings by criminal groups but suggests state officials' connection to the killings and how changes in democracy may lead to journalist killings.

Table 5: Type of criminal groups and journalist killings

Dominant Criminal groups (and journalists killed)	Criminal rival groups (and journalists killed)	No dominance or rivalry (and journalists killed)
Sinaloa Cartel- Sinaloa, Durango Local Cartels- Puebla, Guerrero (2) ² , Hidalgo, Tlaxcala CJNG Cartel- Baja California Sur, Nayarit, Colima, Aguascalientes, Queretaro,	Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Guanajuato, Nuevo Leon, Mexico (1), Michoacán, Morelos, Oaxaca (1), Quintana Roo, San Louis Potosi, Sonora (2), Tamaulipas (1), Tabasco, Veracruz (3), Zacatecas,	Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatan,

Source: Beittel (2022)

Scholars find that the pattern of the killings by state agents and criminal groups is different in Mexico (Bartman, 2018; Holland & Rios, 2017), and it largely depends on the news beat a journalist cover. Journalists who cover drugs or crime in a rival state may be killed by criminal groups but journalists who do not cover drugs or crime but politics may be targeted by the state regardless of the killing agents. Still, I do not rule out the possibility of killing by criminal groups.

The study eliminates the killings perpetrated by criminal groups to explain the findings more accurately. I eliminated individual journalists with credible connections to the criminal violence against journalists that might not relate to the state authorities. Because journalists' professional work might affect their business or dominance of certain criminal organizations outside of state involvement (Holland & Rios, 2017). I went through the individual cases in CPJ

² The number of killings per state is given in the bracket beside the state name.

and eliminated the case if the journalists mostly covered crime and security, got multiple threats or attacks from the groups previously, or criminal gang members got arrested and/or convicted. I eliminated the following journalists: Rafael Murúa Manríquez (crime reporting, death threat, and convicted people), Mario Leonel Gómez Sánchez (crime reporting and alleged people arrested), Israel Vázquez Rangel (crime and security, organized crime), Pablo Morrugaes Parraguirre (crime news and criminal group warning after the killing), Francisco Romero Díaz (dangerous reporting), Ricardo Domínguez López (death threat, and crime, and security), Norma Sarabia (violent crime reporting), Jacinto Romero Flores (crime and security) and Julio Valdivia (crime and security).

Table 6: Combination of executive constraint and competitiveness and the number of journalists killed after eliminating the cases murdered by criminal groups

High constraint	Baja California Sur, Nuevo León, Hidalgo, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas (1) ³ , Zacatecas,	Guerrero (2), Michoacán, Oaxaca (1), Quintana Roo, Sonora (2), Veracruz (3), Colima, Durango, Mexico (1), San Luis Potosi, Tlaxcala, Yucatán,
	Killings=.17/state	Killings=.75/state
Low constraint	Baja California, Campeche, Morelos, Tabasco, Chiapas, Mexico City, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Nayarit,	Chihuahua, Queretaro, Aguascalientes, Coahuila, Puebla,
	Killings=0/state	Killings=0/state
	Low competition (10%-more% MOV)	High competition (less than 10% MOV)

Source: CPJ and INE (Mexico); please see appendix for more information

The findings are fivefold. One, most killings are concentrated in high executive constraint and high competition. The governments are divided but highly competitive in the quadrant. High competition contributes to higher killings, even with the high level of constraints. Also, given the same amount of executive constraints, more competition leads to more killings. Two, no killing in

³ The number of killings mentioned in the bracket of each state; Total killings per quadrant are calculated by dividing the total number of killings in those quadrants by the total number of states.

the low constraints states regardless of the competition level is opposite to my theoretical expectation. Three, no killings in the low-constrained states, and all of the killings in the high-constrained states. Four, there is no effect on the population in the killings. Five, some killings can be attributed to criminal groups.

This study also considered the effect of the population in the killings. It might be possible that a greater number of killings in a quadrant is due to the presence of a large number of states in that quadrant compared to other quadrants. To eliminate the effect of population and to better understand the findings, the study considers the total population per state in the killings of journalists. First, I calculate the total population per state, aggregate them in a group to the state they belong, and divide them by the number of states. Then I divide that group's total number of killings by the total number of population (million) per quadrant. The table shows that the new finding is similar to the previous one, where most killings were in the high constraints and high competition group. The new findings confirm that high constraint and high competitiveness have more killings than high constraints but low competition states.

Table 7: The effects of population on the killings

High constraint	Baja California Sur, Nuevo León, Hidalgo, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas (1) ⁴ , Zacatecas,	Guerrero (2), Michoacán, Oaxaca (1), Quintana Roo, Sonora (2), Veracruz (3), Colima, Durango, Mexico (1), San Luis Potosi, Tlaxcala, Yucatán,
	Total Killing=1 Total population=14.81 million Killing/population=.07	Total Killing=9 Total population=51.32 million Killing/population=.18
Low constraint	Baja California, Campeche, Morelos, Tabasco, Chiapas, Mexico City, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Nayarit,	Chihuahua, Queretaro, Aguascalientes, Coahuila, Puebla,
	Killings=0/state	Killings=0/state
	Low competition (10%-more% MOV)	High competition (less than 10% MOV)

Source: CPJ, INE (Mexico) and Population per state (INEGI-Mexico); please see appendix for more information

⁴ The number of killings mentioned in the bracket of each state; Total killings per quadrant are calculated by dividing the total number of killings in those quadrants by the total number of states. I did do any calculations on the low-constraint cases because there are no killings.

Four Cases of journalist killings

I study four cases in-depth to complement the major findings of this study by gaining a broader understanding of the causes, similarities, and differences among the cases based on the variation in state executive constraint and political competition. The study aims to show whether the killings are driven by political competition or whether the executive constraints fail to protect the journalists from getting killed.

The discussion of the cases is in the following. Four cases for studying in-depth:

Nevith Condés Jaramillo (Mexico)

Gustavo Sánchez Cabrera (Oaxaca)

Jorge Celestino Ruiz Vázquez (Veracruz)

Maria Elena Ferral Hernández (Veracruz)

Gustavo Sanchez Cabrera (Oaxaca) was an internet reporter who was shot dead on June 17, 2021 (CPJ). He was from a state where the PRI held the office of the Governor, but the MRN party members control the majority of the state congress. Nevith Condes Jaramillo (Mexico state) was a professional internet and camera operator and also a founder of El Observatorio del Sur. He was murdered on August 24, 2019. He was murdered in Mexico state, where the Governor of the state was from PRI, but the ruling MRN controlled the majority of state congress members.

The office of the Veracruz Governor is controlled by the ruling party MRN, whereas the opposition PAN party controls the state congress. Maria Elena Ferral Hernandez was a columnist or commentator, internet reporter, and print reporter and was shot dead on March 30, 2020. Jorge Celestino Ruiz Vazquez was a reporter for El Grafico, a print newspaper, and was shot dead on August 2, 2019.

Media type and Journalist's reputation may affect the killings across states. Condes used to publish news on the Facebook page and Youtube channel of his news website, El Observatorio del Sur. According to CPJ, he used to work as a radio host and reporter before starting his news website in 2015. Condes covered beats on local issues, crime, violence, and local authority

corruption. The Facebook page of his news website posted pictures of a bad-conditioned road, flood damage, and citizen complaints. He was the first to report a helicopter shooting by the state police officers, which was denied by the state authorities. Sanchez was a reporter for the Facebook-based news outlet Panorama Pacifico and covered crime and politics for the news outlet and his Facebook page Noticias Minuto a Minuto. Recently he covered flooding, protests, local killings, and corruption, according to CPJ.

Ruiz worked for a well-reputed and oldest newspaper, El Grafico, and covered general news, including local politics, crime, and violence. Ramos hosted a news and commentary show called 'Nuestra Region Hoy,' broadcast twice daily on Radio Oye 99.9, covering municipal elections and criticizing local politicians. Ferral was a reporter for a newspaper, El Diario de Xalapa, co-founded a local news website, El Quinto Poder, and also published columns on a Facebook page, La Polaca Totonaca. The journalists reported on local news, politics, and crime; the most recent reports involved crime and traffic accidents.

The cases show that media type and journalist reputation vary depending on the constraints and competitiveness. Oaxaca and Mexico state was very politically competitive during the period, and new forms of media rose because of the competitiveness. Condes and Sanchez both used the website and Facebook-based news page. They got killed for their professional work, implying that the new forms of media had an audience that created some sort of threat toward the perpetrator or had the power to activate national intervention at the local level. In addition, oppositional strength encouraged them to write critical news because of the competitive environment. On the other hand, Ferral and Ruiz both worked for the established media. The state in which they worked was less constrained but still competitive, therefore had a higher possibility of getting killed. Local and invisible journalists are more likely to get killed (Carey & Gohdes, 2021) because of the low cost associated with it.

Another common pattern is attack or threat before getting killed. Even some of them survived once or twice before getting killed finally. Condes and Sanchez were threatened by the

local authorities before getting killed. Condes received threats from municipal officials, whereas Sanchez reported a murder attempt by a mayor because of his critical reporting. On the other hand, Ruiz got attacked two times, where the attackers shot Ruiz's house and damaged his car before getting killed. Ferral also got an unspecified threat from an indirect source. The difference between the two types of cases is the nature of the threat. Condes and Sanchez got blatant threats from the state officials, but Ruiz and Ferral got indirect threats from the perpetrators.

Some initiatives or inaction suggest state involvement in the cases of journalist killings. That includes federal protective measures, investigation process, and lack of transparency in the criminal and court procedures.

The journalists were requested federal protection, and two of the federal protection withdrew by the state authorities from the journalist. The state government's behavior was questionable in the cases. Sanchez received some death threats before getting murdered. As he was enrolled in the protection program, he was supposed to receive police protection but did not receive any protection. Ruiz was supposed to get the protective measures and did not get them. Ferral was assigned a bodyguard and a GPS, but the state public security secretariat withdrew the bodyguard before she got killed.

The investigation and criminal justice procedure and lack of transparency are also questionable in the cases. Most of the time, they opened an investigation, but the case file did not open except for the case of Ruiz. In the case of Condes, the attorney general's office said that the attack's motive and the attacker's identity are unknown, and the office has opened an investigation. But according to CPJ, the head of the Federal Special Prosecutor for Attention to Crimes Committed against Freedom of Expression denied any ongoing investigation. The state prosecutor's offices announced a statement to open an investigation but did not publish any motive or lead behind the killing in the Sanchez case. The state prosecutor announced opening an investigation into the killing of Ferral. The state authorities also announced that they arrested some suspects but did not release any appropriate names.

However, Ruiz's case was treated differently than others. An investigation was opened, and a case file was opened. The state attorney general's office opened an investigation file, and state authorities opened a case file. According to Infobae, the journalist was murdered by the gunmen of the PAN mayor of Actopan, Paulino Dominguez. The former was convicted by the court and fled the area (Infobae, 2022). It was the only case the alleged perpetrator got convicted. The case has some implications regardless of the perpetrator of the journalist. If it is an opposition-ordered killing, it is because of the high-level political competition. In this case, the government was eager to solve the case when the executive had political benefits. Also, a court can deliver justice in Mexico if the state governments cooperate. If it is from the state government, it is because of the low cost from lack of constraints but having a competitive environment. The environment also suggests that it is comparatively easy for the state governments to blame the opposition and downplay opposition participation in the politics.

In sum, the questionable practice of investigation, lack of transparency and withdrew of federal protection before killings imply the state governments involvement in the killings. The study shows that executive constraints fail to protect journalists from getting killed.

The overall findings are that most killings are concentrated in high executive constraint and high competition, and more competition leads to more killings given the same amount of constraints. Competition does appear to be a driver of journalist repression, while constraints in the form of divided government do not appear to restrain repression.

Another result is that no killings in low constraints states or unified governments, regardless of the state-level competitiveness. The finding is opposite to my theoretical expectation. It could be because unified governments have no incentive to kill, even with high competition. It aligns with the findings of Aguilar et al. (2014), who argue that local authorities lose the incentive to kill when they dominate the locality. This surprising result may be partially explained by the high level of organized crime in some Mexican states, as additional data analyzed here suggests.

Another finding is that no killing in the low constraint states and all the killings in the high competition suggest that high constraint may still not be high enough to moderate the effect of competition. The “high constraint” in the case of Mexico may not be high as a “consolidated democracy,” implying that most killings in the high-constraint states in the form of divided government are actually happening in the “middle” of a full democracy. It supports the “More Murder in the Middle” (e.g. Fein, 1995) hypothesis.

Result shows that there is no effect of population on the killings. Most populous states have more killings than the less populous states. The new findings by controlling the population confirm that high constraints and high competitiveness have more killings than moderate constraints and high competition. Some killings can be attributed to criminal violence, though criminal violence also provides get away context for the authorities. It depends on the news beats covered by the journalists. I also studied four case studies to complement the major findings. Protection not being assigned or withdrawn before the killing, questionable practice of investigation, or cases being buried implies the state government’s involvement in the killings and that executive constraints are not enough to protect journalists, while killings are driven by competition.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The central question of this research is why violence against journalists increased in a democratic Mexico. To answer the question, this study investigates how democratic characteristics impact journalist killings in Mexico, examine how variation in political institutions lead to variations in journalist repression, and explore what changes in the authority characteristics drive increased violence against journalists.

Existing literature explored how democracy, its level, and its aspects affect journalists' repression and are expected to have a higher level of journalist repression in unconsolidated democracies such as Mexico. This study tests the causal mechanism of the existing theories in a typical case and examines whether executive constraints matter, or competition, both, or neither. I theorize that local authorities kill journalists in Mexico because they have the incentive (competition) and opportunity (lack of executive constraints) to do so. Competition comes from the rise of opposition, and the opportunity comes from a lack of substantive executive constraints, structurally by holding the office (e.g., president-governor co-partisanship) and contextually by outsourcing the killings and getting away because of the criminal context in Mexico.

By employing a comparative case study of the Mexican states and using election data from National Electoral Institute (Mexico) and killed journalists from Committees to Protect Journalists (CPJ) data, the study finds partial support for the theory. Drawing on Bartman (2018) and Holland and Rios (2017), this study maintains that killing by criminal groups and government officials has a pattern and the journalists who cover crime or drugs are more likely to be targeted

by rival criminal groups. After eliminating criminal groups related killings, this study provides some insights.

The findings show that most killings are concentrated in high executive constraint and high competition, and more competition leads to more killings given the same amount of constraints. Competition does appear to be a driver of journalist repression, while constraints in the form of divided government do not appear to restrain repression.

Another finding shows that no killings in low constraints states or unified governments, regardless of the state-level competitiveness. The finding is opposite to my theoretical expectation. It could be because unified governments have no incentive to kill, even with high competition. It aligns with the findings of Aguilar et al. (2014), who argue that local authorities lose the incentive to kill when they dominate the locality. This surprising result may be partially explained by the high level of organized crime in some Mexican states, as additional data analyzed here suggests.

Another result is that no killing in the low constraint states and all the killings in the high competition suggest that high constraint may still not be high enough to moderate the effect of competition. The “high constraint” in the case of Mexico may not be high as a “consolidated democracy,” implying that most killings in the high-constraint states in the form of divided government are actually happening in the “middle” of a full democracy. It supports the “More Murder in the Middle” (e.g. Fein, 1995) hypothesis.

Finding shows that there is no effect of population on the killings. Most populous states have more killings than the less populous states. The new findings by controlling the population confirm that high constraints and high competitiveness have more killings than moderate constraints and high competition. Some killings can be attributed to criminal violence, though criminal violence also provides get away context for the authorities. It depends on the news beats covered by the journalists. I also studied four case studies to complement the major findings. Protection not being assigned or withdrawn before the killing, questionable practice of

investigation, or cases being buried implies the state government's involvement in the killings and that executive constraints are not enough to protect journalists, while killings are driven by competition.

The contribution of this study is threefold. Contrary to the conventional study (e.g., Davenport, 2007), this research found that competition increases repression, not decreases it. Two, the existing studies (e.g., Carey & Gohdes, 2021) find that decentralization of power in new democracies carries risks for journalists whether I state specifically that competition without sufficient constraints is dangerous for the safety of journalists. Three, scholars maintain that democracies can be dangerous for journalists (e.g., Asal et al. 2018) but this research shows that uneven democracies with insufficient constraints are dangerous for the safety of journalists.

The policy implication of the research is that democracy supporters and advocacy groups should focus their resources on certain countries, especially the competitive middle countries. At the same time, media groups should collaborate with each other where viable opposition parties are absent. Also, the media should train their journalists with resources working in these countries.

The limitation of my study is the scarcity of quality data. I used the data from CPJ and some other newspapers. Data in regard to opposition party reaction, protests, and parliamentary initiative after a killing, especially at a strong level, would be beneficial. Also, I could not verify the information whether any case was opened or not, or whether the court accepted the murder case or not. It could be improved by getting enough primary sources or by studying more cases, which is also time-consuming. In addition, I could study more periods than three years (2018-2021). Extension of the periods might render different results. Finally, I could include more constraints on the governor, such as judicial constraints, though I expected the same level of judicial and other constraints in a single case. It might help with explaining whether it would limit state repressiveness toward journalists. The future direction of my study is to employ a quantitative analysis or comparative case study of other countries.

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APPENDICES

Table 8: States Name with Journalists Killed

State name	Journalists killed or missing
Guerrero	Alfredo Cardoso Echeverría; Pamela Montenegro;
Mexico	Nevith Condés Jaramillo
Oaxaca	Gustavo Sánchez Cabrera
Sonora	Jorge Miguel Armenta Ávalos; Jorge Molontzín;
Tamaulipas	Carlos Domínguez Rodríguez
Veracruz	Jorge Celestino Ruiz Vázquez; Leobardo Vázquez Atzin; Maria Elena Ferral Hernández;

Table 9: States Name with Journalists Killed by Criminal Groups

State name	Journalists killed or missing (Criminal groups)
Baja California Sur	Rafael Murúa Manríquez
Chiapas	Mario Leonel Gómez Sánchez
Guanajuato	Israel Vázquez Rangel
Guerrero	Pablo Morrugares Parraguirre;
Quintana Roo	Francisco Romero Díaz
Sonora	Ricardo Domínguez López;
Tabasco	Norma Sarabia;
Veracruz	Jacinto Romero Flores; Julio Valdivia

Table 10: State-level Governor party and the Majority Party of State Congress

State Name	Governor	State Congress
Aguascalientes	PAN ⁵	PAN
Baja California	MRN ⁶ (2019-2021)	MRN (2019-2021)
Baja California Sur	PAN	MRN
Campeche	PRI ⁷	PRI
Coahuila	PRI	PRI (2021-2023)
Colima	PRI	MRN
Chiapas	MRN	MRN
Chihuahua	PAN	PAN
Durango	PAN	MRN
Mexico City	MRN	MRN
Guanajuato	PAN	PAN
Guerrero	PRI	MRN
Hidalgo	PRI	MRN
Jalisco	MC ⁸	MC

⁵ PAN-National Action Party

⁶ MRN-National Regeneration Movement

⁷ PRI-Institutional Revolutionary Party

⁸ MC-Citizens' Movement

Mexico	PRI	MRN
Michoacán	PRD ⁹	MRN
Morelos	MRN	MRN
Nayarit	PAN	PAN
Nuevo León	IND ¹⁰	PAN
Oaxaca	PRI	MRN
Puebla	PAN/PRI (2018) MRN (2019)	MRN
Queretaro	PAN	PAN
Quintana Roo	PRD	MRN
San Luis Potosi	PRI	PAN-MRN
Sinaloa	PRI	MRN
Sonora	PRI	MRN
Tabasco	MRN (2019-2021)	MRN
Tamaulipas	PAN	MRN
Tlaxcala	PRI	MRN
Veracruz	MRN	PAN

⁹ PRD-Party of the Democratic Revolution

¹⁰ IND-Independent

Yucatán	PAN	PRI
Zacatecas	PRI	MRN

Table 11: Margin-of-Victory (MOV)

State	Election year	Governor Party	Margin of victory
Aguascalientes	2016	PAN	2.17
Baja California	2013/ NOV 2019	PAN/MRN	27
Baja California Sur	2015	PAN	10.09
Campeche	2015/JULY 2019	PRI	10.48
Coahuila de Zaragoza	2017	PRI	2.44
Colima	2015	PRI	0.17
Chiapas	2018	MRN	17.76
Chihuahua	2016	PAN	8.33
Ciudad de México	2018	MRN	16.41
Durango	2016	PAN	3.59
Guanajuato	2018	PAN	23.13
Guerrero	2015	PRI	8
Hidalgo	2016	PRI	16
Jalisco	2018	MC	14.8
México	2017	PRI	2.78
Michoacán de Ocampo	2015	PRD	8.21
Morelos	2018	MRN	39.88
Nayarit	2017	PAN	11
Nuevo León	2015	IND	25.29

Oaxaca	2016	PRI	7.07
Puebla	2019	MRN	4.22
Querétaro	2015	PAN	7.26
Quintana Roo	2016	PRD	9.99
San Luis Potosí	2015	PRI	2.31
Sinaloa	2016	PRI	14.88
Sonora	2015	PRI	6.72
Tabasco	2018	MRN	44
Tamaulipas	2016	PAN	14.12
Tlaxcala	2016	PRI	3.9
Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave	2018	MRN	5.79
Yucatán	2018	PAN	3.6
Zacatecas	2016	PRI	10.09

Table 12: Population in Mexico (by state)

Union of Mexico	2010	2020
	Total	Total
Population	112,336,538	126,014,024
Aguascalientes	1,184,996	1,425,607
Baja California	3,155,070	3,769,020
Baja California Sur	637,026	798,447
Campeche	822,441	928,363
Coahuila de Zaragoza	2,748,391	3,146,771
Colima	650,555	731,391
Chiapas	4,796,580	5,543,828
Chihuahua	3,406,465	3,741,869
Ciudad de México	8,851,080	9,209,944
Durango	1,632,934	1,832,650
Guanajuato	5,486,372	6,166,934
Guerrero	3,388,768	3,540,685
Hidalgo	2,665,018	3,082,841
Jalisco	7,350,682	8,348,151
México	15,175,862	16,992,418
Michoacán de Ocampo	4,351,037	4,748,846
Morelos	1,777,227	1,971,520
Nayarit	1,084,979	1,235,456
Nuevo León	4,653,458	5,784,442

Oaxaca	3,801,962	4,132,148
Puebla	5,779,829	6,583,278
Querétaro	1,827,937	2,368,467
Quintana Roo	1,325,578	1,857,985
San Luis Potosí	2,585,518	2,822,255
Sinaloa	2,767,761	3,026,943
Sonora	2,662,480	2,944,840
Tabasco	2,238,603	2,402,598
Tamaulipas	3,268,554	3,527,735
Tlaxcala	1,169,936	1,342,977
Veracruz de Ignacio de la Llave	7,643,194	8,062,579
Yucatán	1,955,577	2,320,898
Zacatecas	1,490,668	1,622,138

VITA

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