

Chávez's Assault on the Media

One of the central aims of Hugo Chávez's authoritarian project in Venezuela has been to bring key segments of the country's news media under his sway and suppress alternative, critical viewpoints. Venezuela has traditionally enjoyed a notable degree of media pluralism, but over the course of the Chávez era, a multifaceted official campaign has eroded basic journalistic freedoms. Television and radio outlets have been intimidated, harassed, and wrested away from independent management by the government or forces working with its blessing. During the past 10 years, a raft of local radio enterprises—especially outside the major cities—have been pushed into the hands of Chávez supporters, mostly through buyouts. Of the major enterprises driven off the media landscape, RCTV (Radio Caracas Television) remains the most prominent example. Its broadcasting license was not renewed, and the station was forced to close down its operations, handing over its production equipment and the roughly 60 transmitters it controlled nationwide. The government seized RCTV's Channel 2 frequency after the station's license expired, and began using it to air the state-run Televisora Venezolana Social (TVes). Today, Globovisión is the only privately owned, opposition-oriented television station in operation, but its reach is limited to a portion of the country. Following the February 2009 referendum, some pro-government forces have started calls for shutting down Globovisión. Chávez has also used the vast resources at his disposal to reward media organizations that toe the government line. In a 2007 study of four leading daily newspapers, Andrés Bello University researcher Andrés Cañizalez found that papers loyal to Chávez received nearly 12 times more government advertising than their competitors. The Chávez administration has employed state funds and advertising to create a host of print, television, and radio outlets that adhere to government editorial lines and challenge dissenting voices.