

ECONOMIC MANIPULATION & SELF CENSORSHIP IN THE MEXICAN MEDIA



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**Does the Mexican government manipulate the media industry through advertising, staffing, and other incentives?
How does this encourage self censorship and threaten the democratic process?**

PREDICTION: Despite a surge in independent reporting, the government still exerts financial influence over the media industry which encourages outlets and journalists to self censor in order to benefit or avoid monetary ruin.

“It’s not logical to be a journalist here. I do it because I love it, that’s the only reason I have. If I were smart, I’d do something else.”

- Salomón Cruz Gallardo, then general secretary of a local journalist union

BACKGROUND:

- Freedom House has ranked Mexico’s press “not free” since 2011
- 565 attacks on journalists in Mexico between 2009 and 2011, with over 90% impunity in these cases
- Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) ruled Mexico continuously between 1929 - 2000 with a series of successful presidential candidates
- During this time, the PRI used their widespread economic and political influence to establish journalistic norms that encouraged outlets to report favorably towards them in order to receive financial benefit or avoid financial manipulation
- After the media opening in the late 1980s and 1990s, journalism began to be more independent, but the government continues to use its power and resources to gain favorable coverage from outlets

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

- Mexico is the second-largest entertainment and media market in all of Latin America
- Journalists are the fifth worst paid workers in all of Mexico, making a monthly average of 7,973 pesos or \$610 U.S. dollars
- Some smaller outlets now use crowd funding platforms to generate revenue
- Televisa, one of the largest television broadcast outlets, laid off about 20 percent of its employees in 2017
- Supreme Court changed the legal limit on fines related to libel suits; nearly thirty three percent of states have stringent criminal defamation laws.
- Historically, the Mexican government has been a primary investor in the media industry through advertising and media ownership

IMPORTANCE OF A FREE PRESS

- Freedom of expression and of information are both basic rights supported by the United Nations
- Organization of American States’ Declaration of Principles of Expression reaffirms the importance of freedom of the press for “the full and effective exercise of freedom of expression”
- Democratic process is founded upon the ability of people to both make their views known and listen to the views of others: the media is a primary apparatus that facilitates this exchange and when it becomes biased, that exchange is endangered

PROCESS

- Aggregate accounts of news coverage that did or did not result in government retaliation and connect it to existing research concerning self censorship

GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING

Internet advertising is projected to hit \$676 million by the end of 2018, up from \$559 million in 2013. While this can diversify client base and revenue, the Mexican government remains a primary investor in the market. From 2012 - 2018, President Peña Nieto spent nearly \$2 billion on official publicity, more than any of his predecessors. In 2016 alone, the federal government spent nearly \$500 million to advertising, almost double the amount originally budgeted. No legal or regulatory framework exist to oversee advertising spending, despite Nieto’s campaign promises.

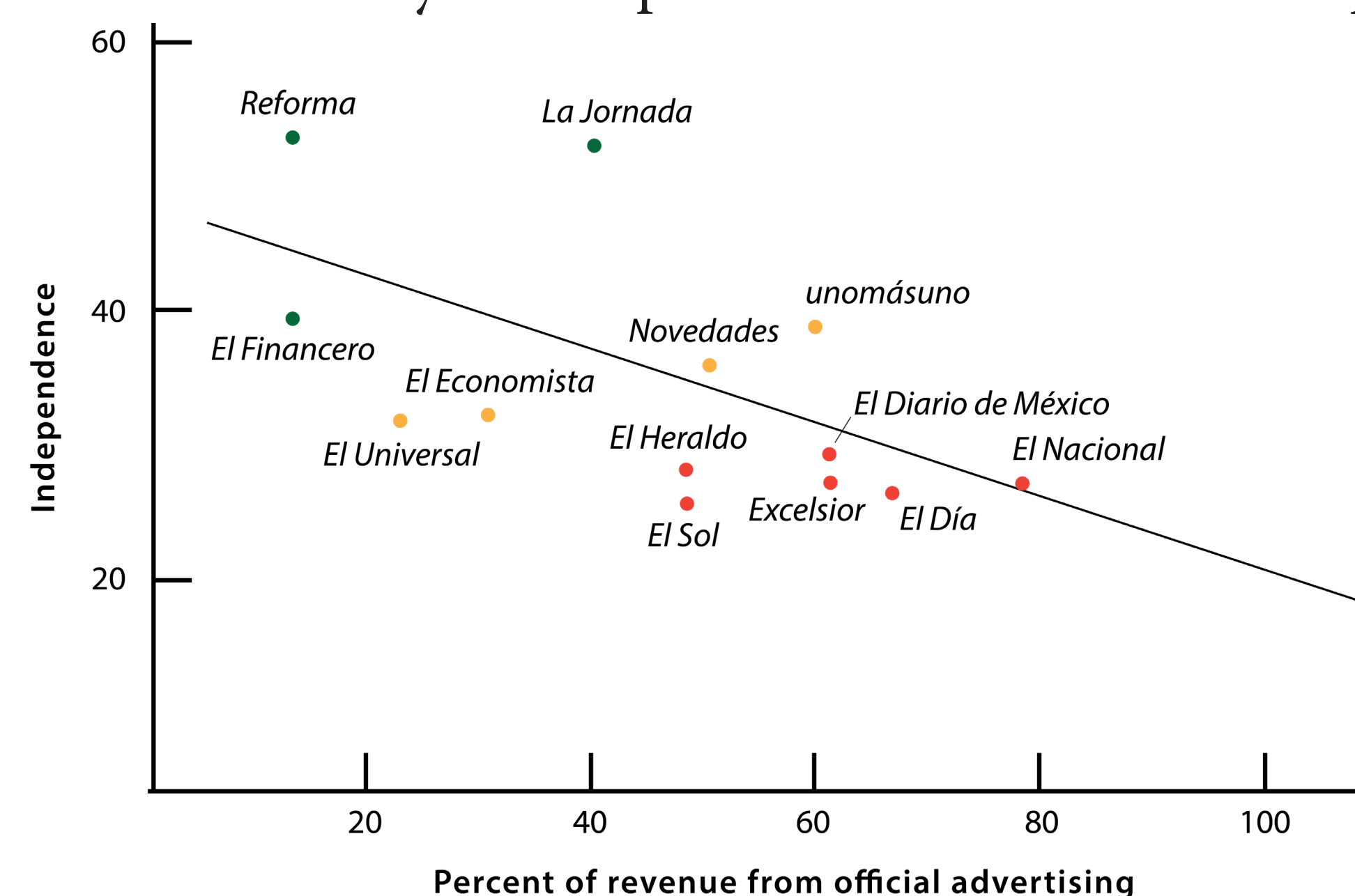
SELF CENSORSHIP

Self censorship continues to happen, both on the individual level and through newsroom policies because journalists and outlets are consistently attacked in retaliation to work that paints drug trafficking organizations, politicians, and government officials in a negative light. Coverage of certain topics or events can also lead government agencies to pull their advertising or refuse to pay debts, placing an outlet’s finances in jeopardy. Researchers from the University of Miami and Universidad Iberoamericana-Mexico City interviewed 378 journalists between 2013 and 2015 about their decisions to self-censor, and found that about 67% of journalists interviewed had self censored protectively.

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

Press independence has been growing since the media opening in the late 1980s - 1990s, but is still threatened by the freedom with which the government can allocate advertising money, considering it often favors outlets that provide it with favorable coverage. Though some outlets are committed to independent journalism and have benefited from the rise in internet advertising, many others have had not the same success, while others are content with the status quo.

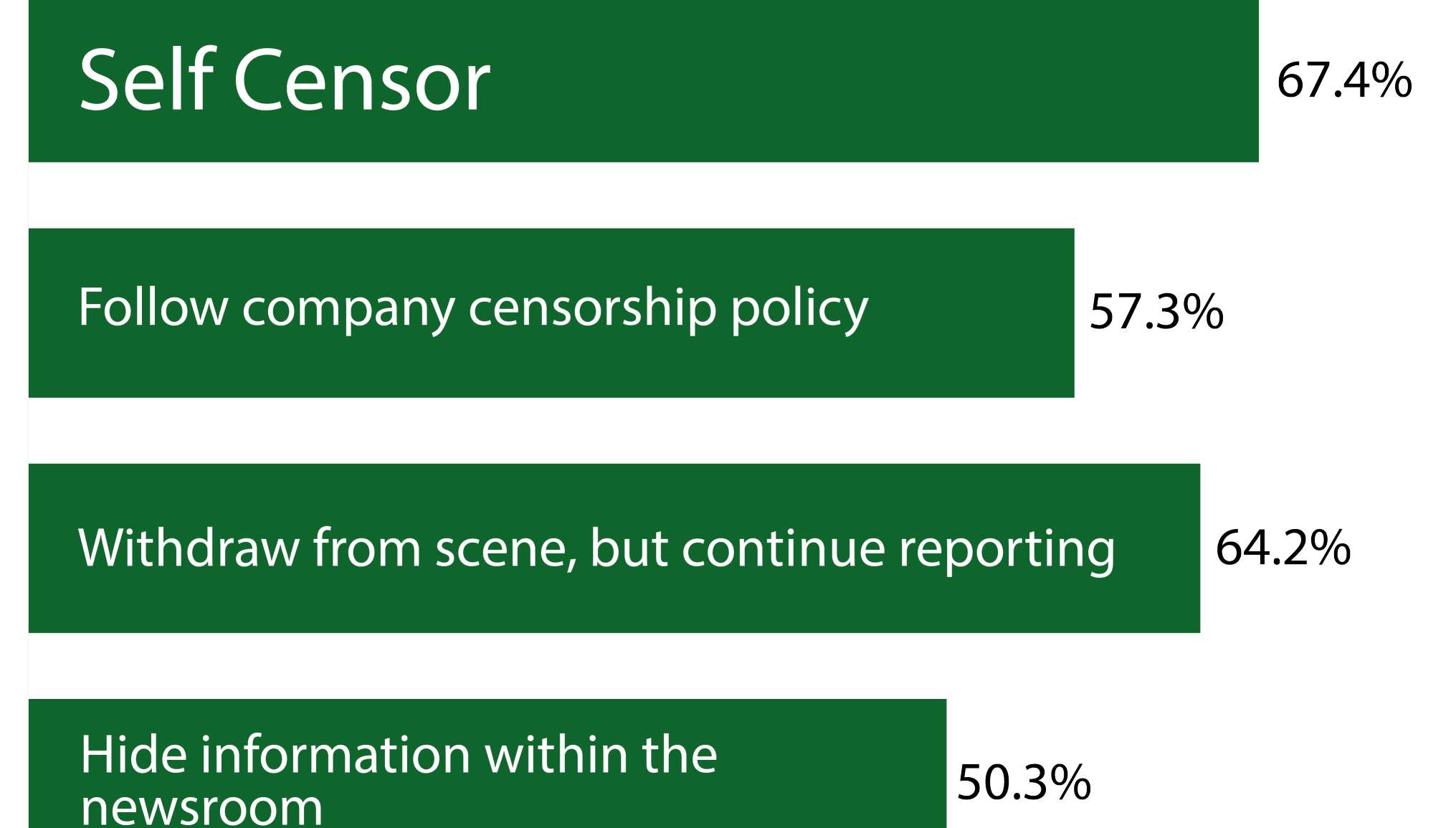
Financial Autonomy & Independence in Mexican Newspapers



Sources: Consultores Internacionales, 1995; Metromedia INRA; Chappell Lawson



Percentage of Respondents Who Engaged in Risk-Reduction Practices



Source: Hughes, Sallie, and Mireya Marquez-Ramirez. “Examining the Practices That Mexican Journalists Employ to Reduce Risk in a Context of Violence.”