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Forum in Lima, Peru, examines press's role in Latin American political campaigns



Chris Wells, senior vice president/ international of The Freedom Forum

The Freedom Forum kicked off the first of its 2000 global media forums on "Press, Power & Politics" March 6-7 in Lima, featuring candidates and journalists discussing Peru's presidential campaign.

The Peru forum, held a month before elections in which President Alberto K. Fujimori sought an unprecedented third term, examined a range of issues: political coverage, fairness, media ownership and technology.

Along with sponsoring the two-day conference, The Freedom Forum opened a library in Lima for journalists and students. The library is the 14th in The Freedom Forum's global network and its second in South America.

In remarks before the ribbon-cutting, Alejandro Miro Quesada Garland, the 84-year-old director general of Lima's most prestigious daily newspaper, *El Comercio*, said the library's resources, which include

periodicals, reference works, CD-ROMs and Internet access, will help improve journalism, specifically investigative reporting.

Other forums on the news media's role in communicating information about campaigns will be held in London in June; Accra, Ghana, in September; and Jakarta, Indonesia, in November.



At the ribbon-cutting for the library in Lima are, from left, Chris Wells; Alejandro Miro Quesada Garland of *El Comercio*; Suzanne Bilello, director of The Freedom Forum Latin American Center; Guido Lombardi, president of the Press and Society Institute, where the library is housed; and Freedom Forum President Peter S. Prichard.

In covering presidential elections, media are democracy's watchdogs



Suzanne Bilello, director of The Freedom Forum Latin American Center



Joan Mower, director/African and Latin American programs of The Freedom Forum

The role of the press in the political process of Peru and other Latin American nations has become increasingly important as most of the region struggles to consolidate democratic transitions initiated over the last 20 years.

"In a society where government institutions are weak, the [press] is one of the [few] sources of accountability," said Diego Garcia-Sayan, head of the Andean Jurists Com-mission, a Lima-based think tank that monitors legal issues.

When the press doesn't fulfill its role, "This directly affects democracy, because the public needs to be informed" for democracy to function properly, Garcia-Sayan said. And the road to democracy has been less than smooth in many countries, raising concerns about media performance.

Peruvian President Alberto K. Fujimori, first elected in 1990, is seeking a constitutionally questionable third term this year. Buoyed by his ability to strangle terrorism and control hyperinflation, at press time Fujimori was the front-runner in a crowded field. If no candidate wins a majority of the vote on April 9, the top two finishers will square off in a runoff election in May or June.

Fujimori, who drew international condemnation when he suspended Peru's Congress and courts in 1992, has had a contentious relationship with the media, particularly the opposition press.

During a briefing March 6 at the U.S. Embassy in Lima, Ambassador John R. Hamilton told a Freedom Forum delegation that "the single most important problem with the playing field (for the presidential election) is the opposition's lack of access to the

broadcast media, TV in particular."

In February, the Carter Center in Atlanta and the National Democratic Institute of Washington, D.C., said Peru needed to take steps to meet international standards for fair elections. Television had been "openly hostile and biased" in its coverage of opposition candidates, denying them regular access and, in some cases, refusing to accept paid political advertisements, the groups said.

"Fujimori governs through television," said Alfredo Barnechea, a political analyst. As the incumbent, Fujimori has skillfully used television and its coverage of presidential events around the country, he said.

As in some other Latin American countries, in Peru the media sometimes have been accomplices in political power struggles, blurring the lines between political posturing and informing the public. Some shareholders in media companies, as well as former journalists, figure in the lists of candidates from different political parties vying for Peru's Congress.

Elsewhere in the region, the news media have played different roles as countries travel the sometimes-bumpy road toward a healthy democracy. At the Latin American Media Forum in Lima, journalists described difficulties in covering elections in three of Peru's neighboring countries: Ecuador, where the president was ousted in a coup earlier this year; Colombia, where civil war has taken a high toll among journalists and politicians; and Bolivia, where the Parliament ends up choosing the president.

Overall, the situation for journalists in Latin America is mixed. Santiago Canton, the Organization of American States' special rapporteur for freedom of expression, last summer cited "notable progress in ... protecting freedom of expression in comparison with decades past." At the same time, he cautioned that "freedom of expression is still under threat. ... Many countries have still not created climates suitable for the full and effective development and recognition of this right."



Peru: Media overview

- Peru, with a land mass of 496,225 square miles, occupies an area roughly the size of Alaska. It is South America's third-largest country in area and one of its most diverse, including a desert along the Pacific Ocean shore, the Andes Mountains and the Amazon basin.
- With 25 million residents, Peru also is South America's third-largest country in population. About a third of the Peruvian people live in the capital city of Lima, located on the Pacific Coast.
- Freedom House's 1999 survey on press freedom ranked Peru as a country where the news media are "not free." The U.S. Department of State agreed with this finding, stating that President Alberto K. Fujimori harasses journalists to the point of self-censorship. However, Fujimori insists that the news media in Peru are free.
- The Committee to Protect Journalists voted Fujimori as one of the world's "Top Ten Enemies of the Press" in 1999.
- Lima has 22 daily newspapers, 65 radio stations, nine television stations and three news channels on two cable systems.
- In Peru overall, there are 46 daily newspapers, 116 radio stations, and 31 television stations, according to the *Latin American Media Directory*.
- Only 10 newspapers devote appreciable space to government issues or politics.
- *El Comercio* has the largest daily circulation, estimated at up to 180,000. However, half of all newspaper readers in Peru prefer the tabloid press. Total daily circulation in Peru is nearly 1 million.
- All of the newspapers in Lima are privately owned, except for *El Peruano*.
- Approximately 95% of households in the Lima metro area have television sets.
- There are eight non-cable stations in Lima, seven of which are privately owned and operated.
- Peruvian government agencies create approximately 71% of advertising revenue for television stations. In addition, the government periodically will allow media outlets to meet their tax obligations by airing free advertisements for the government.

Sources: Latin American Media Directory, 1998; Library of Congress Country Studies, September 1992; Peru Election 2000: public education Web site, February 2000; U.S. Department of State, August 1999 and February 2000.

Fujimori says Peru's news media are free, shrugs off charges of manipulation

President Alberto K. Fujimori has been under fire from opposition candidates and democracy watchdogs for his alleged manipulation of the news media in Peru.

But the president shrugged off the criticism during an hourlong interview with a Freedom Forum delegation. Fujimori is running for a third consecutive term and faces opposition from at least eight candidates in the April 9 election.

Fujimori attracts a preponderance of television coverage, which he attributes to his role as president. "The press follows me because I have high activity," said the 61-year-old president, known as a hard-working public servant. He said he is different from past presidents, who preferred to stay in the presidential palace.

He said all media, print and electronic, were invited to cover him. "They can ask anything they want," he said.

Fujimori's campaign was aimed at the masses, who have access to television news. Opposition candidates have accused Fujimori of co-opting television news by threatening to withhold government advertising or by overlooking taxes. The Fujimori government also has been charged with intimidating journalists who are critical of his administration.

The print media and cable television can, and do, say anything they want about the president and his administration. But newspaper circulation, which is not divulged by the media companies, is small, and cable TV is affordable to only a fraction of the population of 25 million people.

Therefore, Fujimori's critics say, the president can point to the newspapers and cable television as examples of a free press at work while he maintains control of broadcast news.

The Carter Center in Atlanta recently said the presidential campaign has not been fair and that the election cannot be classified as democratic so long as opposition candidates are denied television coverage. The Carter Center recommended that television provide free air time for all candidates. Fujimori rejected that recommendation.

Fujimori said he had been an advocate of



The Freedom Forum's Charles L. Overby, left, questions President Alberto K. Fujimori about alleged manipulation of news media.

free speech and free expression since his days in college as a debater. "My concept of free expression, free way of thinking, is my own life," the one-time educator said.

Fujimori also said it was true that his administration had prosecuted journalists. But he said those journalists were related to terrorist groups. Fujimori's popularity is partly attributable to his virtual eradication of leftist terrorist organizations that once operated freely in Peru.

'Does free press exist or not?'

Excerpt of remarks by Jorge Santistevan, Peru's government ombudsman, at the Latin America Media Forum.

Does free press exist or not? Complaints received and investigated by the ombudsman's office suggest that the answer to this question cannot be a simple yes or no. The issue cannot even be evaluated with the criteria used in other times — military dictatorships, for example — when confiscation of newspapers, censorship, and imprisonment and deportation of journalists were the mechanisms used to restrict and even eliminate free press.

In fact, media in Peru nowadays have much more power than in other countries. The state suffers an

institutional weakness and society doesn't have strong institutions — such as political parties. This weakness of both sides of society closes opportunities for political discussion and for access to information about the public administration, both requirements for good government and for democracy.

In this context, media have a huge responsibility. The political reality depends on the media, including television programs. Public opinion depends on them for judgment and validation of the authorities. For the common citizen, things happen in Congress or in the Supreme Court only if they appear in the media. For the vast majority of people, this is the only way to be informed about the state and its officers, the only tool of citizen watchfulness.



Jorge Santistevan says Peru's media have power — and responsibility.

Candidates vow support for free press

Three candidates in Peru's presidential election pledged their support for a free press, with nuances of difference emerging from their responses to questions in the first televised debate of the campaign.

Lima Mayor Alberto Andrade, the candidate of the Somos Peru political group, said that if elected he "definitely" would not limit freedom of the press. However, he added that the news media "have to self-regulate, self-censor" if they are to be "really free."

Federico Salas, mayor of the provincial city of Huancavelica and running on the Avancemos ticket, said the press must investigate, report and publish, but it should be restricted from prying into "the intimacy of the individual and the intimacy of the family." When journalists probe the intimate details of a candidate's personal life, he said, they enter a field that is "not convenient for anybody."

Luis Castaneda Lossio, a lawyer and former government official who heads the National Solidarity Party ticket, said he favored "total and absolute freedom of the press." To suggest situations in which press freedom might be limited would be "extremely dangerous," he said, adding, "Who decides exactly where the line should be drawn?" At the same time, Castaneda said the press has a responsibility to exercise "self-control."

President Alberto K. Fujimori declined to appear with the opposition candidates in what was the first televised debate of the campaign.

The three debate participants lamented that with a few notable exceptions, the Peruvian press lacks the freedom or the inclination to communicate their parties' positions on key issues like poverty, unem-



Presidential candidates, from left, Luis Castaneda Lossio, Federico Salas and Alberto Andrade acknowledge the crowd of more than 350 people who were drawn to the first televised debate.

ployment, education and delivery of government services.

Salas said television especially had closed the door to opposition points of view, refusing even to carry political advertisements. "The process at this point in time in Peru is leading us not toward a free election but most probably toward a takeover of power on the part of the present official candidate," he said, referring to Fujimori.

Freedom of expression is "the support for all the rest of the freedoms which we might have in our country," Salas affirmed.

He praised the efforts of Peru's independent news media "at this very difficult time when freedom of the press is under such attack." But he said he would like to see journalism ethics "more widely applied" and more heavily emphasized in journalism education.

Castaneda likened press freedom to one's health — it isn't missed until too late. "It is indispensable," he said.

In a democracy, he said, the press has a

unique role, serving as "the communications channel between the people and the government" and monitoring government officials for "honesty and morality." The watchdog function is especially vital in places like Peru that lack an independent judiciary, he added.

While saluting "courageous" independent journalists, Castaneda lashed out at the tabloid press that he said was being manipulated by the government to attack the opposition. That is a perversion of press freedom, he noted.

Andrade called the attacks by "the yellow press" particularly injurious to the opposition candidates' standing with the poor, who read the sensationalistic headlines on the newsstands but cannot afford to buy a legitimate newspaper that might offer a fair and balanced political report.

"At this point in time we don't have a free press, with the exception of some media that are fighting to maintain their independence and to defend freedom of the press," Andrade said. "We know they are under pressure. We know they are being blackmailed in many cases."

The mayor of Peru's capital and largest city (population 8 million) quoted a Peruvian journalist as saying journalism "could be the noblest of professions or the vilest of trades. Let us here in Peru see to it that journalism is the noblest of professions."

"The process at this point in time in Peru is leading us not toward a free election but most probably toward a takeover of power [by Fujimori]."

— Federico Salas, presidential candidate, Avancemos Party

Peru's news executives assess government threats

The daily newspaper *El Comercio* provided a high-visibility example of a free press at work in early March when it published a story about a “factory” that allegedly forged more than a million signatures to help the political party Peru 2000 and its presidential candidate, incumbent Alberto K. Fujimori, get on the ballot.

Hugo Guerra, opinion editor of *El Comercio*, Peru's leading newspaper, said the newspaper didn't anticipate the turmoil the story created. The newspaper, he said, didn't have definite proof, but it had “enough leads to suggest that the story was true and viable, and worthy of publication.”



***El Comercio* Opinion Editor Hugo Guerra says radicals voiced displeasure about an exposé.**

He said the newspaper didn't work with any political parties, nor did the story go through government filters.

“We would have been negligent to have stayed silent,” Guerra said.

El Comercio has received negative reaction from “radical elements connected to the president, but not from the president himself,” he added. And it was attacked by radical segments of the press connected to the government. “They questioned the honor of our journalists,” he said.

El Comercio, which has operated out of the same building in downtown Lima since 1841, has a reputation of being independent and playing the news straight.

Guerra said the family-owned newspaper had provided equal coverage to Fujimori and his eight principal opponents in the campaign. “You can measure the space,” he said.

Eduardo Calmell del Solar Diaz, publisher of *Expresso*, a serious pro-government newspaper published as a tabloid, said the press was doing its job, even in the face of a mediocre campaign and a low level of discussion among the candidates.

Calmell del Solar said there was no such



***Expreso* Publisher Eduardo Calmell Del Solar Diaz says press freedom is alive and well in Peru.**

thing as a good press and a bad press in Peru. “No one can set up as a judge of that. That would be a principle of a dictatorship,” he said.

He said that although there were threats from the government, they were no danger to the press. “The struggle for journalism is correcting these threats,” he said.

He cited the example of a former owner, Baruch Ivcher, of Channel 2 in Lima, who was stripped of his citizenship and lost his station after Channel 2 aired stories critical of

Fujimori's intelligence service. He also referred to “journalists in the provinces,” apparently two reporters who were arrested and imprisoned for violating a law called “apologies for terrorism,” which Fujimori supported. The law prohibits support of terrorists.

Calmell de Solar blamed overzealous authorities in both instances. “It led to the conclusion that freedom of the press is under fire, but it's not true,” he said. “No one can say there is not freedom of the press today in Peru.”

He also said no Peruvian newspapers are neutral, and none are objective. “All take stands. Everyone backs someone. This is not bad,” he said, calling it the exercise of freedom.

“I prefer a country that has a press of every type instead of having a state-owned press,” the lawyer and former congressman said. Only readers can tell newspapers if they are right or wrong, he said.

Rolando Rodrich, editor of the Correo Newspaper Group, said government officials have the methods to make the press fall in line, but “conflict between the press and politicians is natural.”

Rodrich indicated that bribery had surfaced in the campaign. Some people offered money so they could disseminate negative information about a candidate, he said, or they offered money to silence a newspaper. But only those news organizations that lack the support of readers are so fragile that they can be controlled by political power, he said.

Rodrich agreed with Calmell del Solar that the press is free and that there were no restrictions on covering the campaign, but he cautioned that press freedom in Peru implies a responsibility. The press could not fight enemies of freedom without the support of readers, he said. “We have to earn (freedom). It is always a struggle to earn it.”

The fourth panelist, Santiago Pedraglio, a columnist with the business daily *Gestión*, lamented the lack of judicial independence. He said 70% to 75% of Peru's judges were “provisional,” which means they sit at the pleasure of the government.

Every time a journalist goes up against the government in court, the journalist loses, Pedraglio said.

“We have to earn (freedom). It is always a struggle to earn it.”

— **Rolando Rodrich**, editor, Correo Newspaper Group

Peru wonders why TV news shuns candidates

The question of the political season in Peru sounds like something that would be posed in a dictatorship, not a country with a duly elected president: Why aren't the eight principal candidates opposing President Alberto K. Fujimori in the April 9 election covered by television news?

Adolfo Fasanando, a correspondent for Channel 5, one of Peru's oldest networks, said the issue of political coverage at his station was closed. While making himself clear that he wasn't speaking for Channel 5 but only of his work in the province of San Martin, he said, "We are not providing any coverage."

Government critics and opposition candidates have accused Fujimori of indirectly controlling broadcast television by lavishing it with government advertising and by offering to forego taxes. By some counts, government advertising has increased 100% since 1997.

Of the four electronic journalists on a panel, Fasanando was the only one who worked at an over-the-air TV station. Two other panelists represented cable stations, which have covered all of the candidates in the campaign.

Gilberto Hume, news director for Channel N, a 24-hour cable news channel owned by the *El Comercio* group, showed disdain for non-cable television people. "Television journalists are not actually journalists," he said. The same staffs that produce entertainment for television programs produce the news, he said.

When Channel N began broadcasting eight months ago, it looked to broadcast tele-

vision for job candidates. "It was hard for us to get journalists from television because they weren't journalists," Hume said.

Cable television has a small viewership, about 300,000 hookups in a country with 25 million people. By comparison, there are 31 television stations in Peru, most of them affiliated with one of the big networks.

Government critics say Fujimori can afford to keep his hands off cable television and the print press, which has a relatively small readership, because he can reach the voters he needs and wants through television.

A third panelist, Blanca Rosales, is a moderator on Cable Canal de Noticias, which is owned by a pro-government daily newspaper, *Expreso*. Canal de Noticias offers a broad range of views on its political talk shows.

Rosales, a former editor in chief of the opposition newspaper *La Republica*, said that, by definition, "freedom of the press is a pillar of democracy. The less democracy, the less freedom of the press."



Clockwise from top left, Channel 5's Adolfo Fasanando, Cable Canal de Noticias' Blanca Rosales, Radio Programas del Peru's Paul Vargas and Channel N's Gilberto Hume discuss television and radio coverage of the presidential campaign.

Rosales said radio and television, which reach the majority of Peruvians, do not include all points of view. They are oriented toward distorting facts, hiding reality and closing campaign coverage, she said. She also questioned whether all 22 dailies in Lima were free to express all points of view.

The fourth panelist, Raul Vargas, news director of Radio Programas del Peru, said radio provides news, not opinion. His station, he said, is not for or against Fujimori. "We would lose credibility" if it were, he said.

While newspapers have "very few readers," radio has "extraordinary penetration possibilities," Vargas said.

He answered critics who have cited excessive coverage of Fujimori as evidence of a stacked campaign. "He makes news," Vargas said.

"It was hard for us to get journalists from television because they weren't journalists."

— Gilberto Hume, news director, Channel N

Journalism in Peru: judiciary of the weak

Press organizations are attempting to fill the void created by the absence of an independent judiciary in Peru, two of the country's leading journalists said.

"No one believes in the judiciary," which tends to support the government and the powerful while ignoring the weak, said Enrique Zileri, publisher of *Caretas* magazine and president of the Press Council of Peru. That was a major reason the council was established, he said.

"We considered that the readers would find more justice if they could go to an institution like [ours]," Zileri said.

The absence of a strong judicial system also has led Peruvian journalists to turn to press organizations for relief and support in the face of subtle and overt pressures to influence news reporting.



Press Council President Enrique Zileri says readers don't receive justice in the courts.



Press and Society Institute President Guido Lombardi says news media get constant pressure.



More than 400 people packed the meeting room and an adjacent room equipped with closed-circuit television for the Latin America Media Forum.

Expanding beyond its ombudsman's role, the press council now monitors free-press issues and assists in training of journalists.

Joining in such efforts is the Press and Society Institute in Lima, where The Freedom Forum opened a specialized library for journalists and journalism students. Guido Lombardi, president of the institute and political editor of Austral Television, said the pressures on Peru's news organizations were constant — and often related to drug trafficking.

Pressures also come from the government. Zileri said it would be a mistake to compare the situation under President Alberto K. Fujimori to the "open dictatorship" of the 1970s. "Nevertheless, in a much more sophisticated way, [the government] is exerting control," he said.

In fact, Zileri said press freedom in Peru was spiraling downward as the country entered a "quite peculiar" period in which its democratically elected leader was seeking to extend his tenure in office from 10 to 15 years.

Lombardi said he was more optimistic about the future of press freedom in Peru. With the Internet and other technological advancements, "it's much more difficult to close the channels of communication now," he said.

Press organizations can play a role in helping news media find ways to translate the complexities of public-policy issues and political processes into understandable prose, Lombardi said. He cited a recent poll that found 50% of Peruvians unaware that national elections would be held on April 9. A similar percentage did not believe voters could choose candidates from one party for president and from another party for Congress.

"So there is a great level of lack of information, not only regarding programs but [specifics of] how the electoral process will be carried out." This suggests, he said, that Peru's major news media are reaching well-educated audience but are "disconnected from the majority of the country that are more concerned about having an adequate income and feeding their families."

Lombardi said Austral Network had attempted to give people more information about the presidential candidates and their platforms by inviting 10 of them to be interviewed on his Channel 11 talk show for an hour each. Seven accepted. He said the notion that candidates for president have been denied access to the broadcast airwaves has been "generalized excessively."

"In a much more sophisticated way, [the government] is exerting control."

— Enrique Zileri, president, Press Council of Peru

Peruvian editor says journalism education lacks depth

Educators and news-media representatives spent time analyzing the state of journalism education in Peru before tackling some innovative ways to improve news reporting in the Andean nation.

Rosental Calmon Alves, Knight professor of journalism at the University of Texas and moderator of the roundtable discussion, said The Freedom Forum was willing to help establish a framework to improve training

with the proviso that the initiative become self-supporting and be sustained by Peruvian educators and journalists.

Alves said that whatever the Peruvians came up with could be a model for other countries.

Hugo Guerra, opinion editor of *El Comercio*, Peru's leading daily newspaper, characterized education at Peru's 30 journalism schools as technical. Graduates are good

at operating equipment, but they have no grounding in social and political thinking, ethics, or the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and press, he said.

"It's dangerous to have professional journalists who do not have the knowledge of what free press and free speech mean and how to defend it," Guerra said.

He also said training in democratic issues is vital. "For people my age

— in their 40s — democracy is not something natural." In 1985, for example, the first transfer of power from one democratically elected president of Peru to another in 40 years occurred when Alan Garcia Perez succeeded Fernando Belaunde Terry.

Throughout elementary and high school, students don't learn entrepreneurial thinking, Guerra said. And universities don't teach managerial or entrepreneurial skills in their communication programs. "Our perspective is to be dependent."

El Comercio spends about \$1,000 per staff journalist for training each year, he said.

Alves offered several training possibilities, including:

- A system of provincial training.
- An extensive postgraduate journalism course, but not leading to a degree.
- A master's degree program offered at a university.
- A consortium of universities to organize postgraduate training.
- In-house training, backed by news organizations, that would tap working journalists to help with the instruction.



University of Texas professor Rosental Calmon Alves, left, and The Freedom Forum's Felix Gutiérrez lead a roundtable discussion on journalism education.

Internet called resource for political reporting

Peruvian journalists got a glimpse of how their U.S. counterparts are using the Internet in covering campaign 2000.

At a technology roundtable, The Freedom Forum's Adam Clayton Powell III and online pioneer Bob Balkin provided a guided tour of some of the Web's hottest locations for political news and information.

Balkin, who helped found The Hotline electronic newsletter in 1987 and was its editor in chief until 1997, contrasted the development of the Internet as a political reporter's resource — from infancy in 1996 to a more mature presence in 2000.

Four years ago, he said, the presidential candidates posted press releases and speeches on the World Wide Web and offered e-mail messaging. But the sites were infrequently updated, perhaps once a month, he added.

This year the candidates have Internet directors and staff charged with giving the press and the public all manner of information that is constantly updated. Not incidentally, the sites also are soliciting financial contributions from supporters, Balkin said.

"If [the campaigns] don't update their sites daily, reporters will write stories that they are being neglected," he said.

Balkin, who now lives in Mexico City, suggested in answer to a question from a Peruvian journalist that Latin America's use of the technology in 2000 might be comparable to that of the United States four years ago.

Powell said that the Web means stories printed in *El Comercio* for Peruvian residents



Adam Clayton Powell III, right, and Bob Balkin prepare to demonstrate politics-related Web sites.

can find a global readership via the Web. An estimated 1 million Peruvians live in the United States, he said, and they can find more news from home by going to Peruvian news organizations' Web sites than from reading *The New York Times*. "This is an opportunity for *El Comercio*," he said.

Region's journalists on guard for fraud

Journalists examined the problems and possibilities of campaign coverage in three countries bordering Peru.

The problems differ dramatically — from the influence of drug traffickers and violence on the elections in Colombia, to the January 2000 coup in Ecuador that deposed the president, to the unusual electoral system in Bolivia through which its current president won with 22% of the popular vote.

In **Colombia**, journalists have managed to provide better coverage of elections despite the killing, kidnapping and exiling of many colleagues, said Maria Teresa Ronderos, columnist and senior editor of *La Nota* magazine.

"If you can do it in Colombia where it is so dangerous, you can do it anywhere," she said.

Bringing what she called "a message of hope and enthusiasm," she recounted how political reporters missed the influx of \$6 million worth of drug money into the 1994 elections. "We didn't see it," she said. "That gave us a collective sense of shame."

In response, the news media in 1998 employed a pool of accountants to track campaign funding. They delved deeper into the backgrounds of presidential aspirants and their platforms, formulating questions "more toward the interests of the people than to [the candidates'] own agendas."

In addition, news organizations tried to convince citizens of the value of voting. "Fear paralyzes people," Ronderos said. Voter turnout that had dwindled to between 40% and 50% rose to 60% for the 1998 presidential election won by Andres Pastrana.

The next elections, scheduled in October 2000, will be regional. Drug traffickers, paramilitaries and other illegal groups now have influence in more than 40% of Colombia's municipalities, Ronderos said. This means their power could be even greater than in recent years, she added.

Another challenge for Colombian journalists stems from the strong political affiliations of many media owners, Ronderos said. The journalists "have to be more creative, more ingenious, and have more sources so that the owners ... do not realize what [they are] doing." One hopeful factor: The new generation of journalists is more professional and less political, she said.

In **Ecuador**, the news media are planning coverage of the 2002 national elections against the backdrop of a military-supported coup that on Jan. 21 deposed the man elected president in 1998, Jamil Mahuad. In the overthrow, Vice President Gustavo Noboa was elevated to the presidency.

Television journalist Tania Tinoco de Hardeman said Ecuadorians traditionally express a great deal of confidence in the church, the military and the press — often in that order. The coup enhanced the military's standing, she said.

The press continues to be highly valued as well. The public looks to the news media to be vigilant in monitoring elections for fraud, Tinoco de Hardeman said.

Another panelist, Carlos Mesa Gilbert, said **Bolivia** is afflicted by "an excess of corruption" and by a peculiar system in which the Parliament ends up choosing the president.

In 1997, retired Gen. Hugo Banzer, who had headed a military regime that ruled Bolivia during the 1970s, was chosen by 70% of the members of Parliament after receiving just 22% of the popular vote — far short of the required majority.

For the press, that meant finding out how Banzer forged such a broad parliamentary coalition, said Mesa Gilbert, director general of the Periodistas Asociados de Television network.

As in Colombia and Ecuador, journalists in Bolivia are challenged to learn more about where campaign money is originating. The news media have investigated illegal contributions, he said, "but not with the success that one could expect."

Under Bolivia's constitution, a president cannot serve consecutive terms. Thus a new president will be chosen next year.

Panel moderator Gustavo Gorriti, a Peruvian journalist now working in Panama, said the press in Latin America generally had helped to stabilize the region's emerging democratic systems. "However, if we were to compare these achievements ... with the needs of Latin America, the need to struggle against corruption and to foster and promote democracy, obviously those achievements [seem] limited," Gorriti said.



La Nota's Maria Teresa Ronderos says Colombian journalists are doing their jobs well, despite the dangerous climate there.



Television journalist Tania Tinoco de Hardeman says Ecuadorians put a high value on the press — and on the military as well.



Bolivian TV network executive Carlos Mesa Gilbert says media investigations of illegal contributions have fallen short of expectations.



Political signs compete with newspapers for readers' attention, and with road signs for drivers' attention.



El Comercio journalists work in the same building where the newspaper began publishing in 1841.



U.S. Ambassador John R. Hamilton, left, fields a question from Freedom Forum Chairman Charles L. Overby prior to a dinner program.

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