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Country Report - Guatemala

- Area: 108,890 sq km
- Population: 13,000,000
- Language: Spanish
- Head of state: Alvaro Colom, since January 2008

Amid an alarming overall level of violent crime, most murders of journalists continue to go unpunished. It is dangerous for the press to take too close an interest in corruption cases or the still visible traces of the civil war.

Five journalists have been murdered since 2007. The family of **Hugo Arce**, of the monthly magazine *¿Y Qué?*, who was found dead in a Guatemala City hotel room in early 2008, denies he killed himself. Beatings, kidnappings and murders of journalists are part of one of the continent's highest violent crime rates.

Telecentro reporter **Rolando Santis** was shot dead on 1 April 2008 as he returned to his TV station after covering an attack on a bus in which the driver was murdered. Guatemala, like neighbouring El Salvador and Honduras, is a bastion of violent youth gangs called "maras," with branches in Mexico and the United States. The authorities blamed organised crime for the Santis killing and arrested two alleged suspects aged 19 and 20.

TV journalist **Marco Antonio Estrada Orla**, of the privately-owned station *Telediario*, was shot dead on 5 June 2009 in the Chiquimula region, the country's most violent and a stronghold of drug traffickers. Murder cases are rarely solved.

The media dares not look too closely at official corruption or investigate matters linked to the 1960-96 civil war. Police protection offered to some journalists is not always reliable and journalist and press freedom activist **José Pélico**, of the NGO *Cerigua*, was threatened by gunmen near his home in October 2008 despite having a police escort. A new law on better access to public information took effect on 21 April 2009.