

# The Promise of Rural Journalism in Guatemala's Fragile Democracy

“Fourteen years after the signing of peace accords between the government and guerilla groups, Guatemala remains among the most unequal and violent societies in the world. The inequities that fueled the conflict linger in the *departamentos*, where the indigenous Maya are concentrated. The rural journalists who report on drug trafficking, organized crime, vigilante justice, and corruption are marginalized, isolated, and threatened. Despite these challenges, Guatemala's major media are beginning to open doors to indigenous and rural journalists, who provide news from beyond the capital. These rural journalists are enhancing the national media and empowering rural communities. I compare this to the opening of U.S. media to African-Americans, Latinos, and other minorities in the wake of the civil rights movement in the 1970s. These *empirico*—or on-the-job trained—journalists are also beginning to coalesce in a professional association, just as the digital revolution is transforming the country. Guatemala's rural journalists need consistent safety and capacity-building training as they become viable actors in their country's young and fragile democracy.”



—María Martin, July 25, 2010

# The Promise of Rural Journalism in Guatemala's Fragile Democracy



MS. MARIA MARTIN  
REAGAN-FASCELL DEMOCRACY FELLOW  
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY



*The views expressed in this presentation represent the analysis and opinions of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.*

# The Promise of Rural Journalism: Presentation Outline



- Covering Natural Disasters—Only One Risk
- **Guatemala's History**
- **Guatemala's Present: Violence and Impunity**
- Current State of Journalism: Progress and Setbacks
- The Promise of Rural Journalism: Opportunities & Recommendations



# Natural Disasters: Ever Present Dangers





**Volcanoes**  
**Earthquakes**  
**Landslides**  
**Hurricanes**  
**Tropical Storms**  
**Drought**  
**Floods**  
**Sink Holes**



**February 2009 Landslide**

# Guatemala in Perspective



# 1.5 Million Guatemalans Live in U.S.



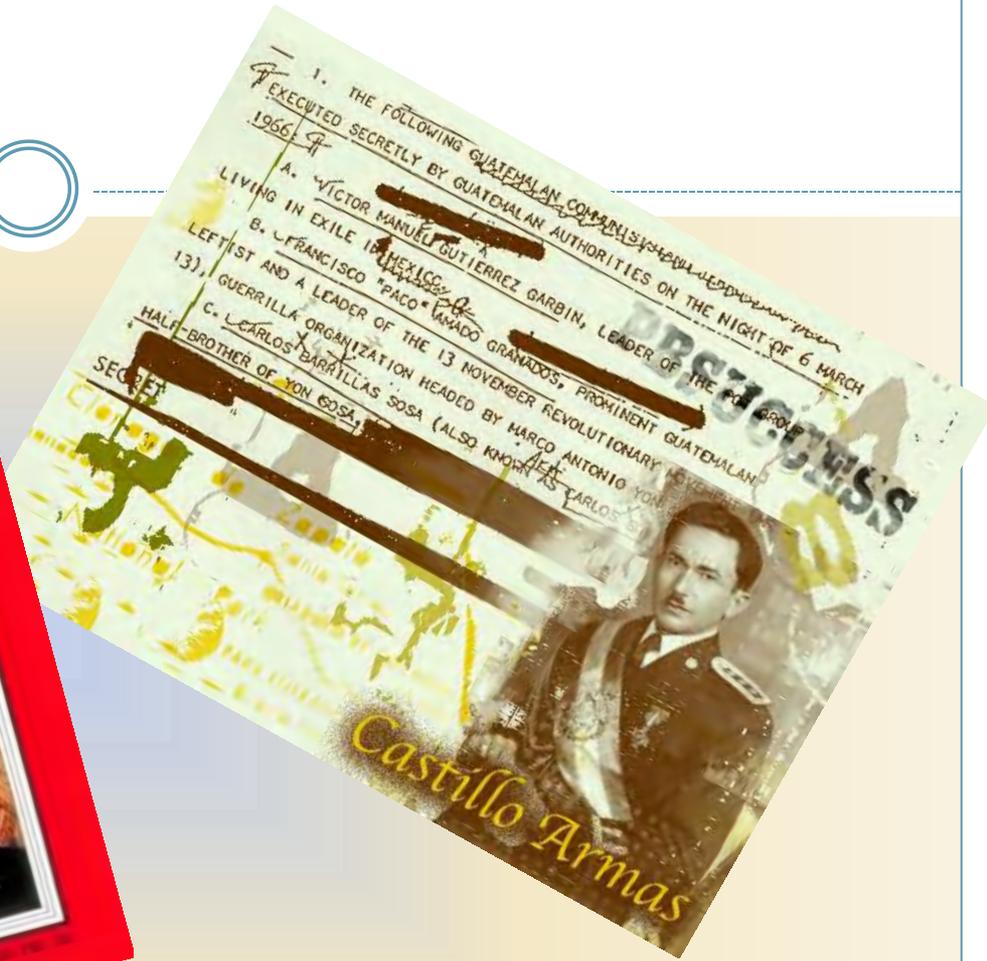
# 500 Years of Marginalization



# 20<sup>th</sup> Century Milestones



- **1944–1954:** “Ten Years of Spring”
- **1954:** U.S.-backed overthrow of democratically-elected Arbenz government
- **1960–1996:** Guatemalan Civil War
- **1986:** First civilian elections since 1951
- **1996:** Signing of peace accords between government and guerilla groups



# Widows March During the War



# U.N.-Sponsored Historical Clarification Commission



- **1960–1996** Guatemalan Civil War:
  - **200,000** dead or disappeared
  - **83%** of victims indigenous Maya
  - **93%** of human rights abuses carried out by government forces



## Top 10 Countries for Intentional Homicide in World



# Violence and Impunity

# Violence in Guatemala



- **Murder:** 2,904 in 2000; 4,237 in 2003; 5,885 in 2006; 6,292 in 2009 (National Civil Police)
- **Femicide:** 3,800 women and girls murdered since 2000 (Center for Gender & Refugee Studies)
- **Impunity:** 2% of homicides end in convictions
- **Vigilante Lynchings:** 22 killed and 96 injured in 2008; 42 killed and 211 injured in 2009 (IPS)

# Guatemala

Incidence of Poverty -2000



## Incidence of Poverty



Data from "Poverty in Guatemala:  
A Worldbank Poverty Assessment -2003

# Poverty and Inequality



- Population living on less than \$2 per day:  
(Busso, Cicowiez, and Gasparini's *Ethnicity and the Millennium Development Goals*, 2005)
  - Descendants of Europeans: 21%
  - "Other:" 50%
- Percent of *rural population in poverty*: **74.5**  
(Rural Poverty Portal, 2000)

# Current State of Rural Journalism



# Topics Covered by Rural Journalists: Corruption



- Guatemala ranked 84 of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index
- 80% of businesses regard corruption as a major constraint; highest rate among 53 countries polled (UN Office on Drugs and Crime's *Crime and Development in Central America: Caught in the Crossfire*, May 2007)

# Topics Covered by Rural Journalists: Organized Crime



- International drug traffickers like Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel
- Organized crime syndicates composed of well-placed, corrupt Guatemalans
- Youth gangs such as the notorious *Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13)*
- Transnational syndicates such as *Los Zetas*, composed of former Mexican and Guatemalan military and security elements

# Topics Covered by Rural Journalists: Drug Trafficking



- Guatemala GDP is \$38 billion; retail value of cocaine flow to US in 2004 was \$50 billion
- 88% of cocaine headed for U.S. passes through Central America (*Crime and Development in Central America*)
- Mexican cartel violence spilling across borders
- Most activity takes place in rural areas, posing dangers to those reporting drug activity

# Changing Dynamics

- A freer and more independent press in Central America over past few years



# Press Freedom



- Guatemala is 106 of 175 countries, with score of 29.50 (Reporters Without Borders' *World Press Freedom Index 2009*)
- Freedom House's *Freedom in the World 2010*:
  - "Partly Free" (1=most free; 7=least free)
  - Political Rights: 4 (declined from 3 in 2009)
  - Civil Liberties: 4

# Rural Media



- Radio most prevalent media
- Newspapers only reach small portion of rural population
- 29.4% illiteracy (U.S. Dept. of State)—highest in Central and South America
- **Most “read” newspaper is tabloid *Nuestro Diario***
- Growing number of locally owned cable television stations

# Obstacles Faced by Rural Journalists



- Isolation
- Marginalization
- Lack of training
- Lack of strong professional associations
- No solidarity with national press corps
- Underutilized by capital media

# Journalist Network Guatedigital Blog



## RED GUATEDIGITAL

Periodistas Digitales guatemaltecos



[PAGINA PRINCIPAL](#)

[QUIENES SOMOS](#)

[MISIÓN](#)

[NUESTROS MIEMBROS](#)

ENVIA TU COMENTARIO AQUI

[redguatedigital@gmail.com](mailto:redguatedigital@gmail.com)

SHARE IT

[Share this on Facebook](#)

[Tweet this](#)

This has been shared 6 times.

[Get this for your site](#)

OTROS BLOGS DE LA RED

[COBAN NOTICIOSO](#)

[NOTICIAS LA ESFINGE](#)

[NOTICIAS QUICHE](#)

[PARROQUIA DE AGUACATAN](#)

[GRACIAS VIDA](#)

MARTES 22 DE JUNIO DE 2010

### ELECTA NUEVA JUNTA DIRECTIVA DE GUATEDIGITAL.

POR. ÁNGEL MARTÍN TAX.  
Miembro fundador de Guatedigital y APC-AV.

Con mucha satisfacción se llevo a cabo la reunión de Guatedigital en la ciudad Capital, esperamos que los demás miembros puedan conformar



2010 FIFA WORLD CUP SOUTH AFRICA™

	2 vs 2	
Nigeria		Korea Republic
	0 vs 2	
Greece		Argentina

Malouda faces up to France's

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Matches
								Time Zone: GMT-0400
	vs							2010-06-23 10:00
	vs							2010-06-23 10:00
	vs							2010-06-23 14:30
	vs							2010-06-23 14:30

@HongLei [How to add it](#)

DEJA TU COMENTARIO

18 Jun 10, 20:15  
**José Bernardino:** Hola, gusto saludarlos y me alegra saber del esfuerzo que han hecho para fortalecer esta red. Lamento mucho no haber

# Promising Developments



- Digital training to harness new technologies
  - Expanding internet and cell phone usage
- Increased coverage of rural departments by capital media
- Rural and departmental journalists organizing
- **Prospect of legalizing “pirate” community radio stations**
- More media diversity

# Transnational Journalism



- Connect rural Guatemalans with diaspora communities
- Establish two-way information exchange
- Gives rural journalists an international forum for their work without censorship
- Potential for citizen journalism and engagement

# Recommendations Regarding the Safety of Journalists



- Further training in safety skills
- Explore fine line b/n self-censorship and what can be reported without endangering lives
- Bolster organizational capacity of existing journalist networks and list-servs
- Develop strategy for quicker emergency **responses from int'l organizations**
- **Greater sensitivity from int'l organizations to unique situation of rural journalists at risk**

# Upcoming 2011 General Elections



- More than 50 candidates, activists, and their relatives murdered during 2007 general elections
- Test for press freedom and journalist safety
- Journalists need training in electoral reporting!

# National Education Campaign



- Inform the public of the role of independent media in an open society
- Collaborate with national media outlets (Guatelevision, *El Periodico*, others)
- Audience: everyone, especially political class and media owners

# Recommendations for the Democracy Promotion Community



- Don't neglect Latin America, our former "backyard"
- Beware of fallacy that Latin America has risen out of poverty
- Commit long-term resources necessary for systemic change

# Recommendations for the Media Assistance Community



- Build upon past and current efforts—**don't re-**create the wheel!
- Collaborate
- **Don't let outside needs drive projects; Focus on** needs of in-country journalists
- Think outside the box—consider other models to accomplish long-term systemic change

# Current State of Rural Journalism



# Thank You!



In Latin America, because of the fragility of **democracy, there's a burden for the** independent press to have a substantial role in the balance of power equation.

—Gustavo Gorriti, investigative journalist

The full participation of the highland-dwelling indigenous people of Guatemala will be necessary before there is any sort of democracy or true freedom of the press.

—[www.pressreference.com](http://www.pressreference.com)

**This presentation is dedicated to the memory of Eduardo Maaz Bols and at least sixteen other journalists killed in Guatemala since 1992.**

