

Article

Ecuador: A State of Violence—Live Broadcast of Terror

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Abstract: This article examines the audiovisual representation of violence during the armed takeover of the Ecuadorian television channel TC Television on 9 January 2024, an unprecedented event in the country's recent media history. Employing a film analysis methodology, the study deconstructs the live broadcast by segmenting it into visual sequences and analyzing elements such as narrative content, shot composition, camera movement, sound design, and editing techniques. The interpretive phase includes narratological, iconic, and psychoanalytic readings. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the study explores the emotional impact of the broadcast on viewers, focusing on responses such as fear, anxiety, identification, projection, and the activation of psychological defense mechanisms. It also reflects on the broader sociocultural consequences of such representations of violence in public media. The article concludes by emphasizing the need for public investment in inclusive and high-quality education as a structural response to youth vulnerability, school dropout, and the risk of recruitment by organized criminal groups in Ecuador.

Keywords: media terrorism; film analysis; state of violence; social upheaval; organized crime



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1. Introduction

The fragility of the state in addressing violence against the press is a critical issue when discussing the vulnerabilities of contemporary journalism, particularly in the Latin American region. This fragility is manifested in the state's inability to confront violence and ensure appropriate conditions for professional practice. It highlights the absence of robust security policies and, simultaneously, the growing influence of organized crime across various social spheres, including mass media (González, 2018).

Waisbord (2002) states that violence against the press reflects the state's failure to fulfill its mission of monopolizing the legitimate use of force and its inability to hold those responsible for attacks accountable. In this regard, violence against journalists implicates the state, whether through action, omission, or collusion. Research on this topic consistently points to state failure and an unresolved debt to journalism. In Latin America, for instance, multiple forms and degrees of state violence have been documented, including the violation of freedom of expression. In many cases, this results in the suppression or partial censorship of discourse due to fear of retaliation (Gómez Rodríguez & Rodelo, 2020).

The persistence of violence in the Latin American region is not directly tied to the establishment of democracy but rather to the state's capacity to uniformly enforce the rule of law across its entire territory (O'Donnell, 1993). Within this context, violence emerges

as a consequence of the structural erosion of the state, with severe outcomes, including the murder of numerous journalists. According to data from the Committee to Protect Journalists ([Comité para la Protección de Periodistas, 2024](#)), a total of 103 journalists were killed worldwide in 2024, of whom 76 were in Palestinian territories. This staggering figure represents one of the highest annual death tolls for journalists in recent history and underscores the extreme dangers faced by media professionals operating in conflict zones. The disproportionate number of casualties in Palestine not only reflects the intensity of the ongoing violence in the region but also raises urgent concerns regarding the protection of journalists under international humanitarian law. The systematic targeting or incidental killing of media workers compromises the public's right to information, silences critical voices, and erodes democratic accountability. These events call for stronger international mechanisms to guarantee the safety of journalists and to hold perpetrators of violence against the press accountable.

Before facing direct violence, journalists in the region have endured structural violence deeply embedded in journalistic practices and routines, normalized to the extent of becoming imperceptible. This refers to the precarious working conditions and vulnerability of media workers, as well as the clientelistic co-optation they have experienced for decades. It is important to note that these precarious conditions and vulnerabilities vary per data from the economic, political, social, and cultural contexts of each country, and even according to subnational characteristics. Nevertheless, there is consensus that journalistic work has been adversely affected by economic and political crises in the region, undermining citizens' right to be well-informed ([Becerra & Mastrini, 2017](#); [Huerta-Wong & Gómez García, 2013](#); [Media Ownership Monitor, 2019](#); [Trejo, 2010](#)).

Reports from non-governmental organizations, labor unions, and researchers ([Del Palacio, 2018](#); [Espino Sánchez, 2016](#); [Márquez-Ramírez & Hughes, 2017](#); [Sindicato de Prensa de Buenos Aires, 2019](#)) have, for years, highlighted the precarious labor conditions of journalists. These conditions, considered part of the structural violence they face, should also be understood as facilitators of other forms of violence, forming the initial framework in the landscape of violence that emerges. In insecure environments, journalists have lacked access to training and protective measures to confront attacks and intimidation. Low wages have fostered co-optation by de facto or established powers, and the absence of managerial support has hindered journalists' ability to protect themselves before being targeted.

Moreover, widespread violence in some countries of the region, coupled with specific threats and attacks against journalists, has deteriorated the quality of journalistic information and created "silence zones" where topics related to security and organized crime are deliberately avoided. This is particularly critical in a region marked by the influence of organized crime, which, aware of the power of the media and the volatility of information, enforces silence to serve its own interests. Therefore, it is essential to understand the nature of political regimes at both national and local levels, the developmental cycles of organized crime in the territory, and the structure of media markets, along with journalists' precarious integration within them, to fully comprehend the dynamics of violence against journalists.

The current tragedy in Ecuador cannot be understood without considering its national context. The country is facing a well-documented crisis of insecurity and violence. As mentioned by [Schedler \(2015\)](#), there is an ongoing "economic civil war" in which numerous criminal groups clash with one another and against the state. In this complex scenario, it is difficult to clearly distinguish between the conflicting parties. The expansion of criminal enterprises into various sectors of the economy has entangled a wide range of social actors in money laundering operations linked to drug trafficking, often including the involvement of politicians at all levels of government.

Attacks against journalists are not merely threats to the individual integrity of social actors; they also represent direct assaults on the democratic health of a society. These attacks have severe consequences for citizens, who depend on media organizations to exercise their fundamental human right to freedom of expression, an essential component of a democratic society. Journalists have a social responsibility to inform the population about significant events so that citizens can make well-founded decisions based on a balanced and truthful perspective of current affairs, thereby enabling them to exercise their political rights. In this sense, access to accurate information is a fundamental right for all (Garcés & Andino Veloz, 2020).

However, the practice of journalism is constrained by both the market and the state. In market dynamics, media outlets are subject to the interests of private companies that serve as advertisers and to their ability to attract readers who consume their content. When media organizations are unable to sustain themselves financially, their viability is jeopardized. On the other hand, when the state funds media outlets, they tend to become spokespersons for the political class in power, undermining their independence and credibility.

Journalists, particularly in regions like Veracruz, work under precarious conditions, receive low pay, and are pressured to produce content that serves the interests of media owners. This may include discrediting opposition or sitting politicians, or praising those currently in power (Del Palacio, 2018).

The state is no longer the only relevant actor; criminal entities have emerged with a vested interest in controlling information related to law enforcement. Drug traffickers have adopted state-like tactics, both through clientelistic practices and the use of extreme violence. Journalists are the primary victims of this violence. It is evident that, without a shift in the country's political situation, neither the lives of journalists nor those of citizens can be safeguarded in a state where judicial institutions are dysfunctional. Addressing violence against journalists in a structural manner requires both a transformation of the political regime and a reconstruction of the media market. These are medium- to long-term tasks in which various civil organizations are already actively engaged. There is, however, a growing intolerance toward corruption and violence in recent years, sparking hope that this new cultural shift may lead to effective national transformation (Olvera, 2018).

As outlined by UNESCO's report on global trends in freedom of expression (UNESCO, 2024), journalist safety is of paramount importance for peace and democracy. Between 2012 and 2016, an average of two journalists lost their lives each week while performing their duties. Journalists are often compelled to work in high-risk zones, such as areas of military conflict or political tension. The pursuit of truth, exposure of corruption, and reporting on social conflicts can provoke retaliation, harassment, violence, and, tragically, death.

Journalistic work often entails the difficult task of uncovering the hidden interests of powerful groups—whether economic, political, criminal, or financial—who strive to keep their activities concealed (del Palacio Montiel et al., 2020). These groups, whose irregularities negatively impact society, bring both short- and long-term consequences, including direct threats to the lives of journalists. This climate of fear fosters self-censorship and inhibits the dissemination of crucial information, ultimately perpetuating the impunity of those who operate in secrecy. Such unethical dynamics undermine the foundations of democracy by restricting access to truth and impeding the honest presentation of facts (Jervis, 2019).

In recent years, the press has shed light on specific cases of organized criminal activity across various sectors in Ecuador. The country has been significantly affected by drug trafficking-related crimes, including human trafficking, arms and chemical precursor smuggling, money laundering, terrorism, and contract killings (Levoyer, 2019). This situation stems from several factors: Ecuador's strategically located yet poorly controlled

borders, the erosion of judicial institutions, the infiltration of organized crime, the unresolved internal conflict in Colombia, and weaknesses in foreign policy, security, intelligence, and defense (Rivera, 2012). These vulnerabilities have facilitated the entry of criminal actors from neighboring Colombia and Peru into Ecuadorian territory, alongside the rise in domestic organized crime groups.

Adding to these security deficiencies is the critical social aspect of Latin America, one of the most unequal regions in the world. High poverty rates and disparities in access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and housing persist. Weak states and corrupt political actors perpetuate structures of inequality and lack the capacity to implement resource redistribution policies that promote a fairer society. In Ecuador's case, the country's political and social history has been shaped by a fragile democratic model, a political culture tainted by corruption, widespread institutional instability, a complacent private sector, a financial system that has caused social shocks at critical moments, and a state that has often been ineffective or used as a tool for social coercion. These factors have hindered the development of sustainable and alternative forms of progress (CEPAL, 2016).

This article links journalistic work to what Beck (2009a) terms the "risk society", a phase of modern societal development characterized by heightened reflexivity and the prominence of social, political, economic, and industrial risks. These risks increasingly evade traditional control and protection mechanisms. Unlike earlier periods, risk in the modern age is generated by human decisions rather than occurring spontaneously or from natural origins.

We are thus witnessing a phase of self-security crisis within society, where uncertainty becomes the fundamental way of experiencing life. De Sousa Santos (2020) argues that, since the 1980s, the state of crisis has become permanent due to the advance of neoliberalism, which has led to budget cuts to state functions, a reduction in public services, and a sustained impact on the social sphere. As reported by De Sousa Santos (2020), this situation has prevented the exploration of the structural causes of capitalist inequality, thereby hindering the capacity to prevent material conditions of vulnerability in the face of disasters and various crises, which exacerbate the already existing risks.

The media have played a role in reproducing these social structures but also possess the potential to be agents of change. Journalism has documented these social phenomena, and promoting the profession's development requires critical reflection on how journalism has been practiced and an analysis of these issues. Traditionally, journalism's role has been to provide information on facts and events to facilitate public deliberation, following the classical principles of public opinion. However, this function has been limited at times by restricted access to public discourse for marginalized groups and by the media owners' connections to economic, financial, and political powers. These connections have resulted in monopolies over both the agenda and the means of information production (Garcés & Andino Veloz, 2020).

Throughout the history of each country, there have been instances where the limitations of the press were evident as well as moments when it played a significant role in exposing irregular actions, deficiencies in public systems, and environmental, economic, or organized criminal networks. However, such work has continually exposed journalists to various risks, underscoring the need to analyze the logic of journalistic work within media industries and to propose critical measures to strengthen the profession.

In Ecuador, since the return to democracy and over the past three decades, journalism has been considered a relatively safe profession. The need to develop protocols, guidelines, or procedures to address risk situations had never been raised, either at an institutional or individual level (Jervis, 2019).

While Ecuador's history includes periods where journalism was considered a relatively safe profession, efforts by the press to expose irregularities, deficiencies in public systems, environmental damage, and organized criminal networks have also been recognized. However, the country was not previously featured in violence statistics related to attacks on freedom of expression or the rights to communication and information. This contrasted with the situation in Colombia, where violence against journalists was an accepted reality. As indicated [Garcés and Andino Veloz \(2020\)](#), the shift in perception within Ecuador began when crimes against journalists and media personnel were linked to political and corruption-related schemes.

One of the earliest cases signaling this change was the murder of Carlos Navarrete, former director of the newspaper *El Telégrafo*, in February 2008. His death occurred amid a dispute over control of the newspaper, which had been seized by the Deposit Guarantee Agency ([RSF, 2008](#)). Shortly thereafter, the murder of César Rodríguez Coronel, vice president of news at Radio Sucre, in June of the same year further reinforced this shift in perception.

Additional emblematic cases, including the murder of Jorge Santana Carbonell in 2010 and Fausto Valdiviezo in 2013, highlighted the growing risks faced by journalists in Ecuador. Investigations into these crimes have proposed various theories, ranging from political vendettas to personal disputes ([Plan V, 2017](#)). These incidents demonstrated the possibility that journalistic work could be tied to criminal activities, positioning Ecuador within the broader regional and global trend of violence against journalists.

Another event that remains etched in the collective memory of Ecuadorians occurred in 2018. Three workers from the newspaper *El Comercio* were kidnapped and later murdered by the Oliver Sinisterra Front, a narco-dissident group linked to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia ([Bailón Valencia, 2024](#)).

This incident exposed the state's inability to guarantee security in conflict zones and highlighted the absence of protective policies for journalists operating in such high-risk areas. The final report from the Special Monitoring Team on the case revealed significant state weaknesses and a lack of coordination in safeguarding journalists, as well as the negligence that prevented the safe rescue of the kidnapped media workers.

UNESCO, in its report *Intensified Attacks, New Defenses*, highlighted the alarming global increase in violence against journalists, reporting that 42 journalists were killed in conflict zones in 2024 alone, 18 of them in Palestine, which registered the highest number of fatalities. Other countries such as Ukraine, Colombia, Iraq, Lebanon, Myanmar, and Sudan also recorded multiple journalist deaths, reflecting the intensifying risks faced by media professionals in areas of armed conflict and political instability. Notably, over 60% of journalist killings occurred in countries experiencing active conflict—marking the highest proportion in more than a decade. For the second consecutive year, conflict zones have emerged as the most lethal environments for journalists and media workers. In total, at least 68 journalists were killed while carrying out their professional duties ([UNESCO, 2024](#)).

As threats multiply and diversify, the risks faced by journalists increase, particularly as their investigative work often places them in direct contact with dangerous situations. Journalism, viewed as one of the main adversaries of criminal organizations, continues to face escalating challenges. In Ecuador, for instance, local cases of organized crime, such as illegal mining, have emerged. In 2018, a team of journalists exposed the involvement of thousands of miners and the significant environmental damage caused by this activity in an area where authorities were notably absent. To ensure their safety, the journalists had to rely on irregular groups for protection.

These are just some examples of how Ecuadorian journalism has been forced to confront high-risk situations while documenting parallel realities of violence, insecurity,

and organized crime. New conflicts over resources continue to arise in the country, with struggles for control over territories and natural resources, as well as the operation zones of criminal networks, becoming a recurring theme in journalistic coverage. In these cases, criminal groups' control over certain areas and the state's inability to reclaim authority in those regions have been particularly evident (Garcés & Andino Veloz, 2020).

Illicit activities vary across regions but share the use of violent and coercive methods, underscoring the state's difficulty in maintaining its monopoly on violence. These activities also involve local populations who economically benefit from illegal enterprises due to the state's inability to meet their basic needs.

Journalistic coverage has been essential in exposing these illegal activities, including gold exploitation, the theft and trafficking of fuel siphoned from state pipelines, and coca cultivation along the Colombian border for drug production. In modern industrial society, the relationship with natural resources has been predominantly hierarchical. However, irregular groups have sometimes exploited these resources more efficiently than governments and corporations, resulting in environmental, security, and even genetic risks (Bonachera, 2018).

It is important to note that illegal activities often serve as a survival strategy for populations in search of subsistence resources, driven by unresolved issues such as poverty, unemployment, and limited opportunities for upward social mobility in border and rural areas. This highlights the vulnerability of these populations as a key factor in their susceptibility to recruitment by organized crime groups.

Violence against journalists in Ecuador has increased significantly in recent years. As observed by Fundamedios (2017), a total of 2382 attacks on journalists were recorded between 2008 and 2018. This trend becomes evident when analyzing annual data, particularly the period from 2008 to 2013, during which the number of attacks rose from 22 to 174.

This increase coincided with the intensification of stigmatizing rhetoric against the press, particularly under the administration of former President Rafael Correa. During his tenure, the preparation and approval of the Communications Law sparked criticism for allegedly violating communication rights.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights documented the abuses resulting from the implementation of this law in its annual report. It noted that numerous sanctions were imposed on media outlets in ways that conflicted with international standards on freedom of expression. The report highlighted the use of the right to rectification and reply as a tool to restrict the dissemination of content deemed unfavorable to the government, thereby imposing an official narrative on media organizations, journalists, and cartoonists throughout the country (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2019).

In 2014, Fundamedios recorded 283 attacks against journalists, a number that rose to 499 the following year and remained consistently high. The organization also reported that during the years of heightened violence, over 80% of these attacks originated from the state and its officials (Fundamedios, 2017).

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression have expressed strong condemnation and concern regarding violence against the press, particularly in the context of protests. More than a hundred attacks against journalists, photographers, cameramen, and media outlets have been documented, including threats, harassment, physical assaults, and raids on media offices, all of which severely impact freedom of expression (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2019).

Political violence against the press has become ingrained within certain groups and social organizations, fueled by the use of violent rhetoric and its normalization within societal structures. One notable form of aggression involves obstructing access to information through threats or attacks on journalists attempting to report on what these groups

describe as a “media blockade” imposed by the authorities and mainstream media to conceal their reality.

In accordance with [Garcés and Andino Veloz \(2020\)](#), any government that centralizes power and frames the press as an enemy fosters violence, creating a national climate that hinders democratic debate. Given the evolving nature of these threats, journalists face increasing risks and greater difficulty in adequately preparing to confront them.

In line with international standards, it is the state’s responsibility to establish mechanisms and strategies that translate into concrete actions to protect journalists. In Ecuador, an important step has been taken with the formation of the Interinstitutional Committee for the Protection of Journalists and Media Workers. This committee aims to coordinate efforts among various state institutions and civil society organizations to develop agreements, protocols, and mechanisms that prevent and protect journalists and media workers who may face risks to their lives, personal integrity, freedom, and security while carrying out their professional duties ([GK, 2020](#)).

Despite these efforts, many journalists believe that the formal measures implemented by the government are largely ineffective and fail to result in practical policies. The protection of journalists must be a state policy that transcends changes in government; however, there has yet to be an institutionalized initiative to guarantee this protection. Journalists also emphasize that media organizations should take the first step by establishing common policies and protocols for coverage teams operating in conflict zones and high-risk situations.

In the Ecuadorian context, and in alignment with Ulrich [Beck’s \(2009b\)](#) theory of the risk society, it is essential to recognize that state institutions often lack the structural and operational capacity to effectively manage the complexity of contemporary social risks. These risks—whether derived from organized crime, institutional corruption, or systemic inequality—are not merely residual outcomes of governance failures but are increasingly produced and reproduced by the very institutions tasked with mitigating them. Beck argues that modern societies are no longer primarily defined by the distribution of wealth but by the distribution of risks, which tend to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations. In Ecuador, the inability of the state to respond adequately to the overlapping crises of insecurity, poverty, and social fragmentation reflects this shift. Therefore, there is an urgent need to adopt a critical perspective on official state narratives that often obscure or understate institutional responsibility in the generation and escalation of these risks.

This perspective does not aim to undermine the legitimacy of the state per se but rather to advocate for an accountable, reflexive, and structurally responsive governance model—one that recognizes the asymmetrical impact of risk on marginalized communities. Structural reforms must be aimed at reducing territorial inequalities and strengthening institutional resilience in the face of organized violence, criminal economies, and socio-political disenchantment. Without the implementation of concrete, multidimensional policies that address these interconnected phenomena, Ecuador risks further entrenchment in a governance model where fear, insecurity, and inequality become normalized components of public life. In this scenario, the state ceases to be a guarantor of rights and instead becomes a symbolic actor in a landscape dominated by uncertainty, power vacuums, and reactive policy-making.

The Case of TC Television

The takeover of the Ecuadorian television channel TC Television by the criminal group Los Tiguerones on 9 January 2024 was a terrorist act that deeply impacted Ecuadorian society. At 2:18 PM, a group of armed, masked individuals stormed the channel during a live news broadcast. For over an hour, the attackers maintained control of the station,

carrying out violent attacks against employees and engaging in acts of terror (GK, 2024; Primicias, 2024).

The intruders entered the news set, pushing and assaulting journalists, technical staff, and other employees. They demanded that technicians activate the microphones to broadcast their message. One of the attackers pointed a gun at the head of a presenter, ordering him to request that the police withdraw from the scene (El Universo, 2024).

During the broadcast, gunshots and explosions could be heard, causing panic among workers and viewers. The live transmission showed at least eight masked individuals armed with weapons entering the set, where they shoved and restrained journalists, technical staff, and other employees. The attackers forced them to sit on the floor, making hand gestures toward the cameras and displaying their weapons. They demanded that the technicians activate the microphones, threatening them with firearms and declaring that their presence on-air was a warning that no one should defy the mafias (El Comercio, 2024).

The attackers later brought José Luis Calderón, one of the presenters, in front of the camera, pointing multiple weapons at his head and forcing him to ask the police to leave. During this time, the attackers brandished grenades and explosives, even placing an object resembling dynamite in the presenter's pocket. At one point, a sound caused the attackers to grow anxious, presumably believing the police were approaching. The broadcast continued in darkness, with gunshots and explosions heard in the background (La Hora, 2024).

At 2:39 PM, the National Police reported that specialized units had arrived at the station to handle the emergency. Videos circulating on social media showed channel employees pleading for the police to withdraw to ensure their safety. At 3:19 PM, an hour after the attack began, the police confirmed they were evacuating personnel from the station to assess the situation and restore order. Half an hour later, they announced the arrest of 13 individuals, including minors. The detainees were charged with terrorism in connection with the attack. For over an hour, the station's broadcast continued to show scenes of violence against employees, with the sounds of gunfire and explosions echoing throughout the transmission (Expreso, 2024).

Thousands of Ecuadorians witnessed the live broadcast of the attack, during which the assailants moved back and forth across the set, issuing threats, assaulting individuals, and pointing weapons at presenters, cameramen, technicians, and other staff members. This event was an unprecedented episode viewed by stunned audiences. Jhonny Murillo, a sound technician at the channel, recounted that the attackers had clear instructions to take control of the technical areas to broadcast their message. However, he explained, "I locked my booth, curled up in a fetal position behind the control desk to avoid being found" (Los Angeles Times, 2024).

Shortly afterward, the attackers broke down the door and forced another technician to activate the live audio. However, due to nerves and confusion, the technician mistakenly played "the tension-filled soundtrack used for crime reports, as though a dramatic play was being scored live. I remained hidden, trying not to breathe loudly", Murillo recounted. He described how one of the masked assailants contacted someone referred to as La Firma to ask if they were being seen and heard, which heightened the attacker's frustration and rage. Moments later, the police arrived (BBC, 2024).

During the attack, repeated physical violence was inflicted on Bellido, another employee, who was brutally beaten on his face and body with punches, kicks, and threats at gunpoint. "Physical wounds heal quickly, but the mental trauma—the images of those armed attackers pointing their weapons at us and using us as human shields—will linger for a long time. It haunts the mind and prevents sleep", the journalist stated (CNN, 2024).

In response, President Daniel Noboa took the unprecedented step of declaring the existence of an internal armed conflict in Ecuador, noting that the incident was part of a larger terrorist strategy previously used in Colombia in the 1980s. This strategy included taking over a television station, a tactic employed by narcoterrorists. “Although Ecuador had been a nation of peace and stability, criminal organizations were allowed entry due to drug trafficking”, stated journalists from TC ([Página 12, 2024](#)). The attack on TC Television was a narcoterrorism act designed to spread fear throughout Ecuadorian society. The violence and brutality left many employees physically and emotionally wounded, generating deep concern both in Ecuador and across Latin America ([El País, 2024](#); [El Mundo, 2024](#)).

This event underscored the urgent need to strengthen security measures and the fight against organized crime in Ecuador and the region as a whole. Ecuadorian society must unite to confront this threat and work collectively to eradicate drug trafficking and terrorism. As emphasized by journalists who survived the incident, this tragic experience should serve as a warning for all of Latin America. They expressed hope that the actions undertaken by the government and other institutions would bolster the system and lead to the elimination of violence and insecurity.

Significant changes are needed in Ecuador’s constitution, legal framework, and prison and justice systems. The country requires urgent reforms to prevent the facilitation of criminal activities that have plagued it in the past. Only through determination and unity can Ecuador rewrite this chapter in its history ([BBC, 2024](#)).

2. Materials and Methods

This research sets out the following objectives: (a) analyze how terror was projected during the attack on the TC Television channel on 9 January 2024, (b) examine how the image of TC Television was constructed as a victim of the attack, (c) explore the emotional impact and sensationalist narrative in the live broadcast.

The stages of video analysis were adapted based on commonalities found in the works of various scholars who have studied this analytical methodology. The research primarily draws on the works of [Casetti and Di Chio \(1991\)](#) and [Bordwell and Thompson \(1995\)](#) for their comprehensive and detailed approaches to analytical processes. These studies are further supported by contributions from other researchers, including [Zunzunegui \(1989\)](#), [Aumont and Marie \(1993\)](#), [Carmona \(2000\)](#), [González-Requena and Ortiz-de-Zárate \(1995\)](#), [Aguaded and Pérez Rodríguez \(1995\)](#), [Rodríguez López and Aguaded \(2013\)](#), [Martí-Perelló and Vallhonrat \(2000\)](#), [Correa et al. \(2001\)](#), and [Pérez-Gauli \(2000\)](#).

The video analysis methodology emphasizes models influenced by structuralist theory. [Aumont and Marie \(1993\)](#), for instance, view video as a text that must be analyzed in two phases: segmentation and description. [Casetti and Di Chio \(1991\)](#) expand on this approach by introducing sub-stages for the main tasks of decomposition and recomposition. [Bordwell and Thompson \(1995\)](#) focus their methodological model on the concept of style, from which technical categories such as editing, cinematography, and *mise-en-scène* are derived.

Similarly, [Aguaded and Pérez Rodríguez \(1995\)](#) develop an analytical template that incorporates both objective and subjective readings of video content, a method also employed by [Pérez-Gauli \(2000\)](#). [Martí-Perelló and Vallhonrat \(2000\)](#) propose an analysis template based on modular components, aligning with the framework suggested by [González-Requena and Ortiz-de-Zárate \(1995\)](#).

Historically, video analysis has focused on three primary aspects: image and sound, narrative, and the communicative process. These aspects correspond to three key analytical approaches: formal, narrative, and contextual. The proposed analysis employs these axes to study the video in question.

Predominant theories on video analysis have largely centered on fictional works, limiting their applicability to non-fictional content. These theories emphasize formal and narrative aspects while neglecting the analysis of the social processes involved in the storytelling of real events and the interaction with individuals embedded in specific social and cultural contexts.

Given the nature of the video, it is essential to adapt the analytical approach by emphasizing the production context, including ethical considerations and participatory mechanisms. Bordwell et al. (2003) have extensively theorized on video analysis, though from a fiction-centered perspective. Their work emphasizes that the production of meaning is neither independent of its economic system nor separate from the techniques used to create the material. Furthermore, they argue that meaning production evolves within historical contexts, undergoing real changes over time.

This assertion underscores the importance of incorporating contextual parameters in video analysis. These parameters include the examination of production conditions, reflections on the socio-economic and political situation, and the integration of elements such as genre, authorial stylistic features, the star system, and videographic movements, among others. Additionally, the analysis should account for the reception of the film and its positioning within a specific model of representation.

The chosen method for videographic analysis primarily follows the guidelines presented by Vanoye and Goliot-Lété (2009) though adapted to the documentary nature of the videos. New sections have been introduced to focus on analyzing the social processes involved in video production. The proposed phases for video analysis are as follows:

Descriptive Phase: The decoupage method involves breaking down a film into individual shots or sequences to facilitate detailed analysis. Aumont and Marie (1993) provide a framework for commonly used parameters in analytical decoupages, emphasizing that each decoupage should be tailored to the specific characteristics of the audiovisual piece. In this study, a simplified version of the integral decoupage has been applied, as the objective is not to delve deeply into technical, narrative, or stylistic details, but rather to extract elements for social analysis. Documentary content is segmented by sequences, with attention paid to elements such as narrative content, the number and types of shots, camera movements, sound design, and editing.

Interpretative Phase: This phase involves multiple layers of analysis. First, a narratological analysis examines the narrative structures and resources employed in the video. An iconic analysis assesses the visual and auditory components, while a psychoanalytic analysis explores the video's impact on the viewer, including emotional and psychological effects.

3. Results

To conduct a thorough videographic analysis, it is crucial to have a comprehensive understanding of the visual, auditory, and expressive elements of the documentary piece. The decoupage technique is used to analyze the constituent elements of each sequence separately and to extract common stylistic features across the entire film. Once these components have been identified and described, they are categorized within the three analytical frameworks: narrative, iconic, and psychoanalytic.

3.1. Descriptive Phase

This phase involves breaking down the video into sequences or shots for detailed analysis. Aumont and Marie (1993) offer a guide on this technique, highlighting key parameters commonly used in decoupage analysis. For this study, the video was segmented into sequences, each analyzed with a focus on the following elements:

Regarding the narrative content of the sequence, it is observed that events unfold normally during the TC news broadcast, with the presenters introducing a news segment. During this action, unintelligible voices begin to be heard in the background, shouting from outside the main set. In response, two events occur that mark the beginning of the tragedy:

- The presenters glance toward the exit of the set, reacting to the distant screams.
- The control operator fails to transition to the news clip on time, leaving a prolonged shot on-air before the next clip begins without audio.

Upon returning from the conclusion of the news segment, viewers are met with an empty set and a sepulchral silence, a stark contrast to the usual activity of a prestigious and high-quality newsroom, leaving the audience in shock. It was an extraordinary, unexpected moment that already foreshadowed the worst.

The set remains empty for at least two minutes, heightening the sense of bewilderment among viewers. After this period, a masked individual appears on camera, holding a revolver. The live, on-air appearance of an armed intruder instilled terror, panic, and anxiety among the audience. Some viewers began crying and screaming, creating social unrest and a sense of distress that led many to lose touch with reality, even believing that the nation-state was being overtaken by criminals.

A second and third masked individual enter the frame, carrying a shotgun and a submachine gun, respectively. Witnessing how a group of criminals seized control of the news set, asserting absolute dominance over it, the channel, and the entire situation, plunged us as Ecuadorians into profound fear and concern. We feared they might go to the extreme of murdering the journalists live on air, leading many to believe that the state was under the control of criminals and mafias. At that moment, it seemed as though all we could do was wait for the worst.

Immediately afterward, one by one, masked criminals dressed in black begin to enter the news set. The channel's staff become hostages and victims of this violent intrusion. The attackers use force, beating, kicking, shouting at, insulting, and mocking the workers, demonstrating their absolute control and showing the audience that they are the ones dominating the situation.

The men, now in full control of the set, begin displaying various hand signs to the camera, symbolizing the gang they represent. They also take advantage of the shot to showcase their weapons, which have now increased in number, including a machete, grenades, and what appear to be improvised explosives resembling homemade dynamite.

Locked inside his control booth, the channel's sound technician prevented the armed, masked intruders from broadcasting their message live, as they clearly intended to communicate directly with the audience. Meanwhile, another technician raised the volume of an ominous melody, which accompanied the assault, provoking frustration and anger among the perpetrators. The transmission continued for about 20 min until tactical police units subdued the attackers and brought the unprecedented episode to an end.

The sound technician later recounted to various international media outlets ([El País, 2024](#); [El Mundo, 2024](#)) that the attackers had clear instructions and sought to control the technical areas to broadcast their message. Shortly after, they managed to activate the live audio, but due to nerves and confusion they inadvertently played a constant tension-filled soundtrack, creating a dramatic atmosphere throughout the assault. During the attack, the technician was repeatedly beaten by several masked assailants, who pointed weapons at him and used him as a human shield. While physical wounds may heal, the psychological trauma and vivid memories of the assault continue to haunt the staff members.

3.2. Interpretative Phase

To analyze the fear, terror, insecurity, and anxiety evoked by the video in the audience from a psychoanalytic perspective, the specific psychological effects on viewers are examined. The analysis applies the following concepts:

- Identification: Viewers identified with the victims in the video, experiencing their fear and anxiety as if they were their own. Identification with the perpetrators could also create an inner conflict and a sense of guilt.
- Projection: Viewers projected their own fears and insecurities onto the live broadcast, feeling as though they themselves could be in danger in a similar situation.
- Defense Mechanisms: Faced with overwhelming emotions such as fear and anxiety, individuals employed defense mechanisms like denial or rationalization to mitigate their distress.
- Social and Cultural Impact: The perception that criminals had taken control of the country reflected broader fears regarding national security and social stability in Ecuador at that time.

In this context, the analysis reveals how the live broadcast of terror influenced the audience's emotions and perceptions, altering both their emotional state and their sense of reality. This highlights how the real-time takeover of TC Television by criminal groups distorted the collective perception and generated a phenomenon of "social delirium", indicating that the video's impact extended beyond individual responses to affect the broader societal perception in Ecuador. The live transmission served as a tool for the criminal group to manipulate public opinion and create narratives that shaped the societal understanding of reality.

The analysis of the events surrounding the takeover of TC Television by the criminal group "Los Tiguerones" uncovers a series of shocking and troubling incidents that profoundly affected Ecuadorian society. The violence and terror unleashed during the attack created widespread fear and anxiety in Ecuadorian households, leaving a deep emotional impact on the population.

The attackers' violent entry into the television set—pushing, beating journalists and technical staff, and pointing weapons at the presenters live on air—demonstrated an extreme level of brutality and disregard for human life. The use of explosives and firearms during the assault intensified the atmosphere of terror and chaos, which was broadcast live to viewers across the country, profoundly affecting and traumatizing those who witnessed the event on their screens (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Assaultants take over the television channel.

The work routine collapsed amidst gunfire and chaos, thrusting employees into a state of profound terror. One of the reporters on-site alerted the staff to the presence of the intruders. In fear for their lives, the workers sought refuge in the men's restroom, where they found both the producer and a presenter. In a tense atmosphere of silence and fear, they contacted ECU-911, unsure of what the outcome would be (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Empty, silent news set.

The situation escalated when the intruders discovered their hiding place and forcefully removed them from the restroom. One of the attackers struck a cameraman and dragged another into the studio, where other hostages were being held. The attackers demanded a live broadcast announcement but provided no specific message. The arrival of police units at the scene intensified the attackers' violence as they vandalized the studio in their search for an escape route (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Several armed and masked men enter the foreground.

Eventually, the intruders decided to leave the studio, using the employees as human shields. The workers, visibly terrified, were positioned at the front with weapons pointed at their heads. Fortunately, a tactical police intervention secured their release. However, the traumatic experience left profound emotional repercussions for the employees and all others present during the incident (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. Armed assailants physically assault the news staff live on air.

The detention of minors as perpetrators of the incident, the issuance of a red alert by Interpol for the capture of the alleged mastermind behind the attack, the government's declaration of internal armed conflict, and the identification of terrorist groups highlight the severity of the situation and the urgent need for measures to ensure national security and stability. The takeover of TC Television by the criminal group "Los Tiguerones" was an unjustifiable act of violence that had a profound impact on Ecuadorian society. Civil society has condemned the event and called for collective efforts to prevent future acts of violence and to guarantee the safety of all citizens (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. The attackers deliver a nationwide message of terror to Ecuador.

The audiovisual analysis of the armed takeover of TC Television reveals a highly structured narrative of symbolic violence that transcends the raw documentation of a criminal event. The video sequences—systematically examined through decoupage and interpretive lenses—expose how the live broadcast functioned not only as an accidental transmission of violence but as a performative act orchestrated to disrupt public perception, sow fear, and undermine state authority.

From the moment the presenters hesitate and shift their gaze off-camera, to the appearance of armed, masked individuals occupying the set and displaying weapons, the event is configured as a rupture in the routine symbolic order of broadcast journalism. The intentional use of camera framing, ambient sound (or its absence), and the deliberate staging of hostages signals a communication strategy that transforms the set into a space of dominance. Rather than merely filming chaos, the attackers utilized the media infrastructure to produce a national message of terror.

The visual grammar of the broadcast—empty spaces, close-ups on weapons, improvised soundtracks, and the forced stillness of the victims—triggered intense emotional reactions among viewers, including fear, helplessness, and a sense of collective vulnerability. The psychoanalytic reading of the footage suggests the activation of unconscious defense mechanisms in the audience, including projection, denial, and identification with both victims and aggressors. The immediate public reception, amplified by social media and global news outlets, magnified the symbolic impact of the attack far beyond its material scope.

Furthermore, the fact that minors were involved as perpetrators, combined with the government's declaration of internal armed conflict and Interpol's red alert, reframed the incident as a moment of national rupture. The live transmission thus became a powerful visual archive of Ecuador's security crisis and a contested symbol in the political discourse that followed.

These results confirm that the TC Television attack cannot be interpreted solely as a criminal act; it must be analyzed as a media event with performative, emotional, and political dimensions. Its live nature intensified its effect on public consciousness, revealing the role of television not only as a channel of information but also as a battlefield of meanings in contexts marked by insecurity and institutional fragility.

The audiovisual analysis of the live transmission of the armed takeover of TC Television reveals a disturbing and unprecedented instance of symbolic violence in Ecuadorian media history. Far from being an incidental recording of a criminal act, the broadcast became a choreographed spectacle of intimidation. The camera captured not only an act of physical aggression but a media performance meticulously directed by the perpetrators, who turned the television set into a stage of terror—consciously exploiting the codes of audiovisual language to construct a narrative of dominance, chaos, and institutional breakdown.

From a technical perspective, the transmission consisted exclusively of wide shots (long shots), as the cameraman, threatened and intimidated, had no possibility of varying angles, zooming, or reframing. The composition remained static throughout the majority of the transmission, offering a fixed view of the news set. The spatial limitation to a single closed environment—the main studio—intensified the sense of confinement and vulnerability.

The duration of the assault on air was approximately 20 min, although the emotional and psychological tension extended far beyond. During that time, the visual content was relatively limited in variety but deeply intense in its emotional and symbolic load. A maximum of six individuals appeared on screen, of whom at least four were armed, masked attackers. The presence of journalists or technical staff was minimal, and their behavior reflected shock, fear, and total submission.

The attackers paced across the set deliberately, gesturing toward the camera, brandishing their weapons—pistols, shotguns, a machete, and what appeared to be improvised explosives—and making hand signs associated with their criminal organization. These signs were repeated in different directions and directed straight into the lens, transforming the camera from an observer into an involuntary messenger of their symbolism. At least three different individuals took turns positioning themselves at the center of the frame, controlling the field of vision and orchestrating their presence for maximum visual impact.

The narrative arc of the broadcast followed a sequence of growing tension, beginning with the unexpected silence and the absence of presenters, followed by the sudden appearance of the masked intruders. The absence of sound for a few seconds after a news clip and the visible confusion on set produced a moment of disruption that alerted the viewers to an irregular situation. This rupture in the broadcasting rhythm—normally ordered and scripted—signaled to the audience that something had gone terribly wrong.

Once the assailants took control of the set, their gestures and positioning suggested not improvisation but a calculated performative strategy. The use of threats, posturing,

symbolic signs, and the imposition of silence on the journalists functioned as visual rhetoric of domination. These actions did not require a verbal message—the silence, broken only by aggressive movements and hostile gestures, was in itself a form of communication designed to project power.

The aggressions against staff members—slaps, shoves, and visible intimidation—were not only acts of physical violence but also part of a deliberate symbolic display, broadcast in real time to a national audience. By forcing journalists to remain passive in front of the cameras, the attackers subverted the traditional power of the media and used the platform to impose their own narrative: one in which the state was absent, the press was powerless, and criminal power reigned.

From the audience's perspective, the visual economy of the broadcast—despite being minimal in its technical complexity—achieved a maximum effect in emotional terms. The absence of editing, the fixed camera, the lack of commentary, and the rawness of the images made the broadcast difficult to assimilate. Viewers were not guided through the narrative; they were left to confront a reality that was unfolding live, without filters or explanations.

Psychologically, this created a moment of collective vulnerability and interpretive shock. Audiences were exposed to a type of media content that defied conventional expectations of journalism. The normal contract between viewer and broadcaster—based on trust, order, and professionalism—was broken. In its place emerged a chaotic, hostile, and violent scene that viewers were forced to interpret in real time, without narrative anchors.

The psychoanalytic reading of these scenes suggests the activation of mechanisms of identification with the victims, projection of fear, and defensive denial. Many viewers, according to testimonies collected post-event, experienced the assault as a personal threat. Some feared that the journalists would be executed on live television; others interpreted the broadcast as evidence of the total collapse of state control. This was not only a physical takeover of a media institution—it was a symbolic act of domination over the public imagination.

Ultimately, the representation of violence in this broadcast reveals an underlying strategic logic. The attackers did not just seize a television set—they hijacked the narrative. They used the live transmission as a medium to declare a form of narco-sovereignty, one that challenged state legitimacy and sought to communicate, through fear and spectacle, a message of territorial and discursive control. The fixed gaze of the camera became a conduit for the performative enactment of chaos.

In this sense, the results of this study point to the importance of analyzing acts of violence not only as criminal occurrences but also as semiotic events—as moments in which meaning is produced, contested, and distributed through media. The TC Television case is a prime example of how visual language, gesture, space, and silence can be used to construct a mediated representation of terror that transcends the moment and enters the collective memory of a society.

4. Discussion

Violence against the press in Ecuador is a highly significant issue that exposes the fragility of the state and the growing influence of organized crime in society. This problem reflects the state's inability to ensure the safety of journalists and hold those responsible for attacks accountable, thereby endangering both freedom of expression and the practice of journalism in the country ([El País, 2024](#); [Los Angeles Times, 2024](#)).

In Latin America, the persistence of violence against the press is closely tied to social and economic inequality, as well as the absence of strong and effective institutions to enforce the rule of law. Organized criminal groups that have infiltrated various sectors of society have contributed to a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists, making

it increasingly difficult for them to report independently and truthfully (RSF, 2024; GK, 2024; Primicias, 2023, 2024).

To address these challenges, it is essential to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law in Ecuador. This involves ensuring the safety of journalists and holding perpetrators of attacks accountable. Additionally, promoting transparency and accountability within media organizations is crucial to prevent undue influence from economic and political interests on the information that is disseminated.

It is essential to foster an environment where journalists can work safely and without fear of retaliation. Achieving this requires the implementation of effective protection policies and measures as well as strengthening cooperation between the state, civil society, and media organizations to combat violence against the press.

Ultimately, safeguarding press freedom and the practice of journalism is fundamental to the development of a democratic and just society in Ecuador. Only through a firm commitment to freedom of expression and the protection of journalists can a safer and more prosperous future for all Ecuadorians be built. The fight against violence directed at journalists is a collective responsibility that demands concrete, coordinated actions to ensure a secure and free environment for press work. It is the duty of all members of society to protect freedom of expression and ensure that journalists can perform their duties without fear of reprisals.

The case of TC Television reveals a deeply troubling and complex reality in Ecuador, where insecurity, criminal violence, and widespread fear have permeated the daily lives of citizens. This security crisis not only affects the physical and emotional well-being of individuals but also has serious repercussions for the country's social, economic, and political stability (France 24, 2024; RTVE, 2024).

One of the most alarming aspects is the violence against the press and the lack of protection for journalists, which poses a severe threat to freedom of expression and the right to information. This situation highlights the vulnerability of communication professionals and the urgent need to strengthen protection mechanisms and ensure a secure environment for journalistic practice. The case of TC Television drew global media attention, underscoring the gravity of the situation (El Mundo, 2024; La Nación, 2024; BBC, 2024).

5. Conclusions

The armed takeover of TC Television, broadcast live on 9 January 2024, constitutes a paradigmatic case of how violence can be represented and instrumentalized through audiovisual media. This article set out to analyze the event not only as a journalistic crisis or security breach but primarily as a media spectacle in which symbolic violence was carefully constructed through technical and narrative devices. The live transmission became more than a record of a criminal act—it was a performative event that disrupted the expectations of a routine broadcast and revealed the vulnerability of the media as both institution and discourse.

The methodological approach, based on film analysis and enhanced by narratological, psychoanalytic, and iconic readings, allowed for the deconstruction of the broadcast in terms of its structure, esthetics, and emotional resonance. Key moments—such as the initial disruption of the set, the silent frames, the appearance of armed and hooded figures, the use of symbols and visual codes, and the ambient manipulation of sound—were not accidental but formed part of an emergent grammar of terror. These visual cues contributed to a heightened state of psychological destabilization in viewers, many of whom interpreted the broadcast not only as a criminal attack but as a representation of national collapse.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the broadcast triggered projection and identification mechanisms in the audience. Viewers identified with the victims, internalized their

fear and powerlessness, and in some cases projected their own anxieties onto the event. The result was a mass-mediated experience of trauma, amplified by the immediacy and realism of live television. This aligns with the notion of mediatized conflict (Cottle, 2006), in which the struggle for visibility and control of narrative becomes a central dimension of power in contemporary conflicts. In this case, the perpetrators used the camera as a weapon and the broadcast as a battlefield.

Moreover, the attack redefined the newsroom space as a contested territory—not just physically invaded but symbolically transformed into a space of public humiliation for state institutions. The forced participation of journalists and technicians as hostages, the imposition of gestures and signs before the camera, and the demand for a live message—albeit incoherent—reveal a deliberate strategy to interrupt, appropriate, and manipulate the media's communicative function.

This study also highlights the weakness of media institutions in contexts of high insecurity. The lack of internal protection protocols, the improvisation in crisis management, and the absence of coordinated response mechanisms exposed not only the vulnerability of journalists but also the risks associated with the real-time nature of live broadcasting. In this sense, the event calls for urgent reflection on the ethical and operational responsibilities of media organizations in high-risk scenarios.

This case urges the academic field to revisit the relationship between media and violence from a more integrated and critical perspective. The transmission of violence cannot be reduced to an ethical or moral dilemma; it must be understood as a socio-semiotic act that produces meanings, affects public consciousness, and reshapes collective imaginaries. The TC Television broadcast was not merely an unfortunate byproduct of live journalism—it was a moment of symbolic rupture that demands interpretive tools beyond those offered by conventional media theory.

In light of the theoretical framework discussed in this study, it is imperative to interpret this phenomenon through the lens of media and conflict studies. As scholars such as Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) and Cottle (2006) argue, the media are not merely passive observers or conveyors of conflict but active arenas where power is contested and narratives are constructed. The live armed occupation of TC Television is a striking example of how media spaces can be deliberately targeted and appropriated as instruments of symbolic violence. In this case, the attackers sought to dominate not only a physical space but also the narrative space—using live broadcast as a performative tool to send a message of fear, control, and political defiance.

The theoretical concept of mediatized conflict is particularly relevant here. Cottle (2006) asserts that in modern conflicts, the struggle over representation becomes central: controlling what is seen, heard, and believed can be as strategically significant as controlling territory. The assailants' demand to activate microphones, their symbolic gestures before the cameras, and their display of weaponry reflect a calculated use of media visibility as a tool of psychological warfare. Similarly, the notion of peace journalism introduced by Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) emphasizes the media's responsibility not to amplify fear or polarization but to contextualize violence, give voice to peace-building actors, and promote informed public discourse. The Ecuadorian case challenges this ideal by exposing how criminal actors exploit the vulnerabilities of mainstream journalism for performative violence.

This event also reveals the crisis of institutional legitimacy and the erosion of state sovereignty in public perception. When criminal organizations are able to commandeer national media in real-time, it not only compromises the safety of journalists but also undermines public trust in the state's capacity to govern and protect. Therefore, the TC Television attack should not be seen in isolation but rather as a media-mediated act of

narcoterrorism with broader implications for democratic governance, the securitization of journalism, and the militarization of information flows.

Incorporating media and conflict theory into the analysis of this case enhances our understanding of the strategic logic behind such attacks. It also underscores the urgent need for a dual approach: on one hand, fortifying legal and institutional frameworks to protect the press, and, on the other, fostering critical media literacy that equips citizens to interpret and resist narratives of fear. Ultimately, this theoretical lens affirms that safeguarding media integrity is not only a matter of journalistic ethics but a foundational pillar of democratic resilience in contexts of organized violence.

This research reaffirms the importance of studying media not only as channels of information but as arenas where social conflict, fear, and symbolic power are actively negotiated. Understanding how violence is constructed, estheticized, and consumed through media representations is essential for defending the integrity of journalism, protecting democratic deliberation, and building civic resilience in the face of organized terror.

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